

Using apostrophes to show possession

Possessive nouns usually indicate ownership, as in *Tim's hat* or *the lawyer's desk*. Frequently, however, ownership is only loosely implied: *the tree's roots*, *a day's work*. If you are not sure whether a noun is possessive, try turning it into an *of* phrase: *the roots of the tree*, *the work of a day*.

When to add -'s

1. If the noun does not end in -s, add -'s.

Roy managed to climb out on the driver's side.

Thank you for refunding the children's money.

2. If the noun is singular and ends in -s, add -'s.

Lois's sister spent last year in India.

Sophocles's plays are among my favorites.

NOTE: To avoid potentially awkward pronunciation, some writers use only the apostrophe with a singular noun ending in -s: *Sophocles'*.

When to add only an apostrophe

If the noun is plural and ends in -s, add only an apostrophe.

Both diplomats' briefcases were searched by guards.

Joint possession

To show joint possession, use -'s or (-s') with the last noun only; to show individual possession, make all nouns possessive.

Have you seen Joyce and Greg's new camper?

John's and Marie's expectations of marriage couldn't have been more different.

Joyce and Greg jointly own one camper. John and Marie individually have different expectations.

Compound nouns

If a noun is compound, use -'s (or -s') with the last element.

My father-in-law's sculpture won first place.

Use an apostrophe and -s to indicate that an indefinite pronoun is possessive. Indefinite pronouns refer to no specific person or thing: *everyone*, *someone*, *no one*, *something*.

Someone's raincoat has been left behind.

(continued)

Avoid common misuses of the apostrophe.

Do not use an apostrophe in the following situations.

WITH NOUNS THAT ARE NOT POSSESSIVE

- ▶ Some ^{outpatients}~~outpatient's~~ have special parking permits.
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IN THE POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS *ITS*, *WHOSE*, *HIS*, *HERS*, *OURS*, *YOURS*, AND *THEIRS*

- ▶ Each area has ^{its}~~it's~~ own conference room.
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It's means "it is." The possessive pronoun *its* contains no apostrophe despite the fact that it is possessive.

- ▶ This course was taught by a professional florist ^{whose}~~who's~~ technique was Japanese.
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Who's means "who is." The possessive pronoun is *whose*.