



Possession

In the English language, there are several ways to show possession: possession may be indicated by the use of a possessive pronoun, an apostrophe with a noun, or a prepositional phrase in the case of inanimate objects.

Possessive Pronouns

English pronouns demonstrate ownership through the possessive case. The transformation of pronouns into the possessive case (you→ your/yours; we→ our/ours; they→ their/theirs; it→ its; she→ hers) eliminates the need for an apostrophe. Don't use an ' or 's with possessive pronouns.

- **first-person singular (my, mine):** This is my hat. This hat is mine.
- **second-person singular (your, yours):** Your book is on the table. The book on the table is yours.
- **third-person singular (his, her, its, hers):** This is his/her/its finest quality. This brush is hers.
- **first-person plural (our, ours):** Our cat is timid. The pleasure is ours.
- **second-person plural (your, yours):** Give me your hand. Yours is a face I long to see.
- **third-person plural (their, theirs):** Their child is naughty. The mistake was theirs.
- **relative and interrogative (whose):** Shelly, whose voice is superb, won the contest. Whose coat is on the chair?

Note: There are two types of possessive pronouns shown in the chart. **Attributive possessive pronouns (my, your, his, her, its, our, their)** appear before a noun. **Nominal possessive pronouns (mine, yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs)** require a linking verb (is, was).

Apostrophe with Nouns

(see also Punctuation II: Apostrophes and Quotation Marks)

Singular nouns typically require the 's ending to demonstrate possession:

- Tim's tree house
- America's heartland
- Chris's lunchbox

Plural nouns ending in s require only an apostrophe:

- Parents' house
- Steelers' rookie quarterback

Plural nouns not ending in s require the 's ending:

- **Children's museum**
- **Women's rights**

If your sentence includes multiple nouns, the way in which you show possession depends on the meaning that you wish to convey. If you want to signal joint possession, use an apostrophe only with the last noun:

- **Mom and Dad's anniversary**

If you want to express separate possession, you will need an apostrophe after each noun:

- **Andy's, Beth's, and Val's computers**

Inanimate Objects

When referring to an attribute of an inanimate object, it is inappropriate to use the possessive endings. An inanimate object such as a chair or a window cannot own anything. The relationship must be indicated by using a prepositional phrase.

Therefore, we speak (and write) not about the chair's leg but about the leg of the chair.

The preposition "of" introduces a phrase that explains the relationship between the chair and the leg.

Note: An above example presented "America's heartland." In this case, the object has been personified and the 's ending is appropriate.