

# *What, Why, and How?*

**14**

## **GRAMMAR**

**Possessives**

# Possessives

## What are they?

To show ownership of things, people or concepts, we use possessives. The possessive form looks like this:

- The dog belonging to the boy shed hair on the floor.
- The talent of the singer is apparent after seeing her show.

**Connections**  
For additional  
apostrophe-related  
material, see  
“Contractions.”

But a simpler, more common and concise way, is to change the noun that does the possessing:

- The *boy's* dog shed hair on the floor.
- The *singer's* talent is apparent after seeing her show.

With a few exceptions, the following two rules cover nearly all you need to know about forming possessives:

1. To form the possessive of a noun, add apostrophe + s.
  - the books of the *student* → the *student's* books
  - the toys of the *girl* → the *girl's* toys
2. If the noun already ends in s, just add an apostrophe at the end of the word.
  - the books of the *students* → the *students'* books
  - the toys of the *girls* → the *girls'* toys

If a proper noun (a name) ends in -s, you may choose to add either apostrophe + s, or just the apostrophe alone, depending on whether you would pronounce the extra -s.

*Moses'* followers OR *Moses's* followers

Remember: Do not use -'s when you are simply showing the plural form:

**CORRECT:** Charbroiled eggplants are served here.

**INCORRECT:** Charbroiled eggplant's are served here.

# PRACTICE

## Exercise 1 – Possessives

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

Examples: Nancy liked the shape of the laptop.

*the laptop's shape*

Jo often borrowed the comb belonging to Nancy.

*Nancy's comb*

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1. Nancy was driving along with Jo in the car owned by Beth.
  2. The tires of the car screeched to a halt after a confession.
  3. Not even the defroster could fight the fog of the windows.
  4. The two avoided the snow by walking underneath the leaves of the trees.
  5. The hands of Jo were cold; warming them wasn't entirely out of the question.
  6. "The attitudes of people just aren't ready for this," Nancy said.
  7. The two looked to the snowflakes of the sky and saw white dusty stars floating by.
  8. "We should go home and sit before the heat of the fireplace," Jo said.
  9. "The mugs that belong to Beth should hold enough hot chocolate to warm us up."

## Other Forms of Possessives

**Joint Possession:** The following pairs of nouns show joint ownership; two or more people own the same thing.

the string belonging to Rich and Eddie ⇨ Rich and Eddie's duck

the children of Bob and Edward ⇨ Bob and Edward's children

Rule: Nouns showing joint ownership have apostrophe + s added to the noun nearest the thing possessed.

**Individual Possession:** The following pairs of nouns show individual ownership. (Rich and Eddie probably do not own the same socks, nor do Bob and Edward use the same toothbrush.)

the socks belonging to Rich and Eddie ⇨ Rich's and Eddie's socks

the toothbrushes of Bob and Edward ⇨ Bob's and Edward's toothbrush

Rule: Nouns showing individual ownership have apostrophe + s added to each noun.

### **When NOT to use apostrophe + s:**

Do not use 's to form possessive pronouns:

<u>Pronouns</u>	<u>Adjective Possessive Pronoun</u> (requires a subject to modify)	<u>Possessive Pronoun</u>
he	his	his
she	her	hers
it	its	n/a
we	our	ours
you	your	yours
they	their	theirs
I	my	mine

Which possessive pronouns belong in the following examples?

This is Kimberly's handbook. This is her handbook. The handbook is hers.

Those are Jessie's records. Those are \_\_\_\_\_ records. The records are \_\_\_\_\_.

That is Frank and Todd's car. That is \_\_\_\_\_ car. The car is \_\_\_\_\_.

The tall vase belongs to you. The tall one is \_\_\_\_\_ vase. The vase is \_\_\_\_\_.

## Exercise 2 – Possessives

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

Examples:

- The flavor of the coffee was unusual.    ⇨    the coffee's flavor
  - I live in the home of my parents.        ⇨    my parents' home
  - We went to the wedding of Joe and Kay.   ⇨    Joe and Kay's wedding
  - He ironed the clothes of Pete and May.   ⇨    Pete's and May's clothing.
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1. The combined losses of the North and South were the greatest in any American war.
2. The president took away some of the responsibilities of the chief-of-staff.
3. We loved the shoes of George and Sara.
4. She was insulted by the rude remarks of her sister-in-law.
5. I couldn't stand the behavior of Alan and Jennifer.
6. The information of the ambassador was mostly incorrect.
7. The voyages of Magellan and Columbus were controversial.
8. The novels of Fitzgerald and Nabokov are among the most admired in modern literature.
9. One of the most famous events in American history is the journey west of Lewis and Clark.
10. Don't forget the birthday of your mother-in-law.

# ANSWERS

## Possessives Answer Key

### Exercise 1 – Possessives

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

1. Nancy was driving along with Jo in the car owned by Beth.  
*Beth's car*
2. The tires of the car screeched to a halt after a confession.  
*The car's tires*
2. Not even the defroster could fight the fog of the windows.  
*the windows' fog*
3. The two avoided the snow by walking underneath the leaves of the trees.  
*the trees' leaves.*
4. The hands of Jo were cold; warming them wasn't entirely out of the question.  
*Jo's hands*
5. "The attitudes of people just aren't ready for this," Nancy said.  
*People's attitudes*
6. The two looked to the snowflakes of the sky and saw white dusty stars floating by.  
*the sky's snowflakes*
7. "We should go home and sit before the heat of the fireplace," Jo said.  
*the fireplace's heat*
8. "The mugs that belong to Beth should hold enough hot chocolate to warm us up."  
*Beth's mugs*

Which possessive pronouns belong in the following examples?

This is Kimberly's handbook.

This is her handbook. The handbook is hers.

Those are Jessie's records.

Those are her records. The records are hers.

That is Frank and Todd's car.

That is his car. The car is his.

The tall vase belongs to you.

The tall one is your vase. The vase is yours.

## **Exercise 2 – Possessives**

Rewrite each underlined group of words, using apostrophes to show possession.

1. The combined losses of the North and South were the greatest in any American war.  
*The North's and South's combined losses*
2. The president took away some of the responsibilities of the chief-of-staff.  
*the chief-of-staff's responsibilities.*
3. We loved the shoes of George and Sara.  
*George's and Sara's shoes.*
4. She was insulted by the rude remarks of her sister-in-law.  
*her sister-in-law's rude remarks.*
5. I couldn't stand the behavior of Alan and Jennifer.  
*Alan and Jennifer's behavior.*
6. The information of the ambassador was mostly incorrect.  
*The ambassador's information*
7. The voyages of Magellan and Columbus were controversial.  
*Magellan's and Columbus's voyages*
8. The novels of Fitzgerald and Nabokov are among the most admired in modern literature.  
*Fitzgerald's and Nabokov's novels*
9. One of the most famous events in American history is the journey west of Lewis and Clark.  
*Lewis and Clark's journey west*
10. Don't forget the birthday of your mother-in-law.  
*your mother-in-law's birthday.*