

## The Apostrophe

The apostrophe has three uses:

- It is used to form the possessive of nouns to show ownership.
- It is used to show the omission of letters when combining two words (contractions).
- It is used to indicate certain plurals of lower case and upper case letters.

### Possessives

If you are unsure whether a noun is possessive, turn it into a phrase:

The \_\_\_\_\_ belongs to \_\_\_\_\_.

<u>Examples:</u>	Jane's dress	The dress belongs to Jane.
	Florida's weather	The weather belongs to Florida.
	the child's book	The book belongs to the child.
	the girl's ambition	The ambition belongs to the girl.

### How to form the possessive:

- Singular or plural nouns that do not end in *s*, add an apostrophe and *s* (*'s*).  
Examples: child's toy, children's toys, man's suit, men's suits, people's rights
- Plural nouns that end in *s*, add only the apostrophe (*'*).  
Examples: the girls' locker room, the teachers' work room, the babies' toys
- Singular nouns that end in *s* . . . even the experts differ on this. You will be right, however, if you add an apostrophe and an *s* (*'s*) to most singular nouns, even those ending in *s*, *ss*, and *x*.  
Examples: James's house, Xerox's copies, boss's memo, witness's testimony

EXCEPTIONS: If adding 's makes a word hard to pronounce, use only an apostrophe:  
Sophocles' plays.

- To show joint possession, place 's or s' on the last noun only.  
Examples: Mary and John's new house, Anne and Pat's contributions
- For compound nouns, place 's or s' on the last element.  
Examples: sister-in-law's dog, mother-in-law's house
- Possessive pronouns (*its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, my, and theirs*) never use an apostrophe.

### Omission of Letters

An apostrophe can take the place of missing letters or numbers in a contraction or an abbreviated year.

Examples:

- it is          it's          • cannot      can't          • has not      hasn't
- it has        it's          • we are      we're        • 2009        '09

### Plurals of Numbers and Lower/Upper Case Letters

Do not use an apostrophe in the plural of numbers. Examples: figure 8s, the 1990s

For plurals of letters, the rule is to avoid misreading. Use an apostrophe to avoid confusion.

Examples: Watch your p's and q's. (not ps and qs)

Students with dyslexia write their d's like b's. (not ds and bs)

NOTE: MLA recommends using an apostrophe for the plural of both capital and lowercase letters.

Example: R's, M's, g's, r's

### **Practice Exercises**

#### **I. Fill in the appropriate words under each heading.**

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Singular Possessive</u>	<u>Plural</u>	<u>Plural Possessive</u>
1.	child	<u>child's</u>	<u>children</u>	<u>children's</u>
2.	lawyer	<u>lawyer's</u>	<u>lawyers</u>	<u>lawyers'</u>
3.	brother	<u>brother's</u>	<u>brothers</u>	<u>brothers'</u>
4.	mouse	<u>mouse's</u>	<u>mice</u>	<u>mice's</u>
5.	patron	<u>patron's</u>	<u>patrons</u>	<u>patrons'</u>
6.	princess	<u>princess's</u>	<u>princesses</u>	<u>princesses'</u>
7.	sheep	<u>sheep's</u>	<u>sheep</u>	<u>sheep's</u>
8.	deer	<u>deer's</u>	<u>deer</u>	<u>deer's</u>
9.	woman	<u>woman's</u>	<u>women</u>	<u>women's</u>

	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Singular Possessive</u>	<u>Plural</u>	<u>Plural Possessive</u>
10.	lady	<u>lady's</u>	<u>ladies</u>	<u>ladies'</u>
11.	thief	<u>thief's</u>	<u>thieves</u>	<u>thieves'</u>
12.	class	<u>class's</u>	<u>classes</u>	<u>classes'</u>
13.	ox	<u>ox's</u>	<u>oxen</u>	<u>oxen's</u>
14.	fox	<u>fox's</u>	<u>foxes</u>	<u>foxes'</u>
15.	ally	<u>ally's</u>	<u>allies</u>	<u>allies'</u>

**II. Rewrite each group of words to show ownership.**

**Example:** the light of the dawn - the dawn's light

- |    |   |     |  |
|----|---|-----|--|
| 1. | the pages of the books<br><b>books' pages</b>       | 9.  | the rattles of the babies<br><b>babies' rattles</b>  |
| 2. | the room of the class<br><b>class's room</b>        | 10. | the owner of the ox<br><b>ox's owner</b>             |
| 3. | the tails of the monkeys<br><b>Monkeys' tails</b>   | 11. | the hat of the man<br><b>man's hat</b>               |
| 4. | the keys of the piano<br><b>piano's keys</b>        | 12. | the hats of the men<br><b>men's hats</b>             |
| 5. | the edge of the knife<br><b>knife's edge</b>        | 13. | the children of the woman<br><b>woman's children</b> |
| 6. | the legs of the table<br><b>table's leg</b>         | 14. | the children of the women<br><b>women's children</b> |
| 7. | the husbands of the wives<br><b>wives' husbands</b> | 15. | the dress of the lady<br><b>lady's dress</b>         |
| 8. | the rattle of the baby<br><b>baby's rattle</b>      |     |  |

### III. Circle the right answer.

1. There are (e ms, **3 m's**) in the word mommy..
2. The (**1920s**, 1920's) were called the Jazz Age.
3. Please, change this \$100 bill into (**5s and 20s**, 5's and 20's).
4. We went in (Mary's and Bill's, **Mary and Bill's**) car to the festival.
5. Children in kindergarten learn their (ABCs, **ABC's**).
6. The (Smiths, Smith's, **Smiths'**) boat is docked in Miami.
7. It is (**Mary's**, Marys, Marys') responsibility to feed the cat.
8. The tricycle lost (it's, **its**) wheel.
9. She phoned three (M.D.s, **M.D.'s**) and then went to three (M.D.'s, **M.D.s'**) offices.
10. That book is (her's, **hers**), not (your's, **yours**)

### IV. Write the correct possessive form of the word in parentheses.

1. Ray Charles's (Ray Charles) music has thrilled generations.
2. wife's Ted couldn't decide if the pens were his or his (wife).
3. box's The (box) lid was broken.
4. Mrs. Harris's (Mrs. Harris) party was a huge success.
5. ladies' We go to the game on Monday because it is (lady) night.
6. horses' All the (horse) manes and tails were carefully groomed.
7. baby's A (baby) stroller was stolen from the parking lot.
8. Today's (Today) weather is going to be rainy.
9. businessmen's The three (businessmen) trips were cancelled.
10. Jones's The (Jones) dog barked all night.