

25. POSSESSIVES

To possess something means to have or own it. We make a noun or pronoun possessive to show that it has or owns something. For example, Mary's mother is the mother that Mary has; Jerry's car is the car that Jerry owns. Here are the rules for making nouns and pronouns possessive.

Singular Nouns

Add -'s to singular nouns.

- *The teacher's instructions were confusing.*
- *The city's program to provide healthcare to the poor has gained widespread support.*

If a person's name or a singular common noun ends in -s, add -'s.

- *Most of those who attended the meeting objected to Charles's ideas for improving the city's parks*
- *Mr. Smith, the Democratic candidate for senator, advocates reducing the middle class's tax burden.*

Plural Nouns

If a plural common noun ends in -s, add an apostrophe (').

- *Both doctors' testimonies were disregarded by the judge for being faulty.*
- *The prominent scientists' ideas about improving air qualities in U.S. cities are being considered by lawmakers.*

Irregular plural nouns do not end in -s. Add -'s to these nouns.

- *Children's reading skills improve greatly if parents read stories to them at a young age.*
- *In the early 1900's, the question of women's right to vote was a divisive issue in the United States.*

More Than One Noun

If two or more people own something together, make just the last name possessive.

- *The U.S. government condemned Iran and Syria's involvement in worsening the conflict in Iraq.*
- *Although all volunteers at the homeless shelter were commended by the Mayor, Steve and Susan's contributions won the most praise.*

If two or more people own separate things, make each name possessive.

- *Picasso's and Rembrandt's paintings will be sold at the auction.*
- *Cindy's and Doris's dogs are expected to take part in the dog show.*

Personal Pronouns

The possessive forms of pronouns do not have apostrophes.

- *Voters in every electoral district choose their own representatives.*
- *Every ethnic group has its unique cuisine.*

Note: "It's" is not a possessive. It means "it is."