

THE APOSTROPHE TO SHOW POSSESSION

Explanation

I. DETERMINING WHETHER POSSESSION EXISTS

Although there are many unrelated uses for the apostrophe (contractions—aren't—and plural forms—three C's), the most common use is in showing possession. Simply, possession means that something or someone has or owns something else.

Example: Bob's car was in front of my uncle's garage.

Students who make errors in possession will neglect to insert an apostrophe in Bob's and uncle's or possibly put it in the wrong spot. To determine possession ask yourself the following two questions:

1. Did I add -s to Bob and uncle to indicate plural? NO.
2. Is the word that follows a noun something that can be possessed? YES.

If you follow the above routine, you can prevent errors, such as:

Example: Toms sister's were away for the weekend.

Toms #1 NO

#2 YES

Correction= Tom's

Sister's #1 YES

#2 NO

Correction= sisters

Tom's sisters were away for the weekend.

II. DETERMINING SINGULAR OR PLURAL POSSESSION

The next step in avoiding misuse of the apostrophe is to determine if the possessive word is singular or plural (NOTE: in the vast majority of cases it is singular). Compare these two sentences:

1. I met this boy's mother.
(mother of the boy)
2. I met several boys' mothers.
(mothers of several boys)

To determine whether the possessive word is singular or plural:

1. Look for clues
a, one, this= singular
2. Reverse the nouns in the phrase under consideration and add of.
My friend's house= house of my friend (singular)
My friends' houses= houses' of my friends (plural)

NOTE: The position of the apostrophe differs in the singular and plural forms (SEE III)

EXERCISE A:

In the list below, determine if possession is involved. If it is not, mark no. If possession is involved, mark yes and then determine if it is singular or possessive (mark S) or plural possessive (mark P). Example: the girl's sweater (Yes-S)

1. A man's job _____
2. The boys' tried _____
3. Two girls' voices _____
4. My dog's paw _____
5. Several, old tires' littered _____

III. WHERE TO PLACE THE APOSTROPHE

About ninety-nine of every hundred name words end with -s in the plural:

<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
boy	boys
friend	friends
citizen	citizens

However, there are a small number of irregular words which do not end with the usual -s in the plural. These are the most common:

Singular	Plural
Man	men
Woman	women
Child	children

Your problems with where to put the apostrophe can be solved by following the next two rules:

Rule #1: to form the possessive always add 's to all singular words and to all plurals which do not form the plural by adding -s (men, women).

Rule #2: To all other words, add just an apostrophe (These are the words which end in -s in the plural).

EXERCISE B:

For the following list, determine if the word given fits Rule #1 or rule #2. Indicate possession accordingly.

Example: captain #1 captain's
ladies #2 ladies'

1. Men _____
2. Cousin _____
3. Families _____
4. Teacher _____
5. Mr. Burns _____

IV. AVOID UNNECESSARY APOSTROPHES

1. Don't insert an apostrophe whenever you see a final -s. Make sure the word shows possession, not just plural or verb form.

Example: Ms. Gill sing's while she works.

Correction: Ms. Gill sings while she works. (-s added to show tense)

Example: Rita bought some apple's and pear's.

Correction: Rita bought some apples and pears. (-s to show plural)

2. Don't slice off part of a name with an apostrophe.

Example: Charles father is at work.

Correction: Charles's father is at work.

3. The following possessive pronoun forms do not need apostrophes:

Yours	his
Ours	theirs
Hers	its (<u>it's</u> is the contraction for <u>it is</u>)

Example: Fred said we could use his' books.

Correction: Fred said we could use his books.

REVIEW:

1. To form the possessive, always add 's to all singular words and to all plural words which look singular (men, women, children).

2. To all other words add just an apostrophe. (These are words which end with –s in the plural.)

EXERCISE C:

Supply all the necessary apostrophes in the following sentences. Remember to change each possessive word to an “of” expression to discover whether it is singular or plural. Place your apostrophes accurately.

1. This store sells women and childrens clothing.
2. I could see my friends (plural) boat from Mr. Andersons cottage.
3. The childs crying and the dogs (singular) barking are disturbing everyone.
4. A mans voice is deeper than a boys voice.
5. Almas stolen purse was in the police man’s hand
6. The girls (plural) study hall is on the same floor as the boys (plural) study hall.

ANSWER KEY
EXERCISE A

1. Yes S
2. No
3. Yes P
4. Yes S
5. No

EXERCISE B

1. #1 men's
2. #1 cousin's
3. #2 families'
4. #1 teacher's
5. #1 Mr. Burns's

EXERCISE C

1. Women's, children's
2. Friends', Anderson's
3. Child's, dog's
4. Man's, boy's
5. Weeks, days'
6. Alma's, police man's
7. Girls', boys'

7/28/2010