Possession

In the English language, there are several ways to show possession.

Possession may be indicated by using 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/their; 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 indicate 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.

For further information, please use the following link via Purdue OWL:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/apostrophe_introduction.html