



The Catholic University of America
Writing Center Handout

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/theirs; 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