

Possessive Apostrophes

Apostrophes are punctuation marks that are used to indicate omission of letters or numbers, or to indicate possession. In writing, it can be difficult to figure out the proper usage of possessive apostrophes, especially with nouns that vary from singular to plural or have different endings. In this handout, we will review correct ways to use **possessive apostrophes**.

Possessive Apostrophe Usage: the Basics

- Types of possessive nouns:
 - Singular nouns not ending in -s
 - Ex. student's, dog's, cat's
 - Singular nouns ending in -s
 - Ex. boss's, Arkansas's, Carlos's
 - Plural nouns ending in -s
 - Ex. fathers', puppies', bosses'
 - Indefinite singular pronouns
 - Ex. somebody's, everyone's

Additional Rules:

- “It’s” is a contraction meaning “it is.” “Its” is the possessive pronoun and does not use an apostrophe (like “yours” or “hers.”) Consider the following to determine when to use “it’s” vs. “its.”
 - Try reading the sentence aloud with both options to determine which makes sense.
 - Ex. “Its bone is in the pantry.” vs. “It’s bone is in the pantry.”
 - “Its” is correct because it’s an indefinite pronoun, whereas “It’s” means “it is.”
- Add ‘s to the last name only in the case of a joint possession.
 - Ex. Jaime and Claire’s daughter returned from Boston.
 - This is because the two “owners” are considered a single entity when combined with “and.”

- Add 's to each name if there is no joint possession.
 - Ex. Griffin's and Henry's offices are in entirely different buildings.

Ready for some practice?

Choose the correct possessive apostrophe option in each of the sentences below:

1. The **dogs/ dog's/ dogs'** bone is on the patio.
2. **Ians/ Ian's/ Ians'** car is to the left of the entry door.
3. **Everyones/ Everyone's/ Everyones'** locker comes with a registration number.
4. The cat left **its/ it's** toy mouse in the dining room.
5. **Taylor and Joe's/ Taylor's and Joe's** cat likes to sit by the window.
6. The **bosses/ boss's** schedule is very busy this week.
7. The **puppies's/ puppies'** treats are on top of the refrigerator.
8. **Markus's/ Markus'/ Markuses** thermos is lost.

Answer Key:

1. dogs
2. Ians
3. everyone's
4. its
5. Taylor's and Joe's
6. Boss's
7. Puppies'
8. Markus'



Works Cited

Lunsford, Andrea. *The Everyday Writer 7th edition*. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2020.

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