

What Are Possessive Nouns?

A possessive noun is a noun that possesses something—i.e., it has something. In most cases, a possessive noun is formed by adding an apostrophe +s to the noun, or if the noun is plural and already ends in s, only an apostrophe needs to be added. In the following sentence, boy's is a possessive noun modifying pencil: The boy's pencil snapped in half. It is clear that the pencil belongs to the boy; the 's signifies ownership.

The cat's toy was missing.

The cat possesses the toy, and we denote this by use of an apostrophe + s at the end of cat.

Is this Brandon's book?

I pulled a feather from the goose's tail.

When a noun ends in the letter s or an s sound, the same format applies. This is a matter of style, however, and some style guides suggest leaving off the extra s.

I have been invited to the boss's house for dinner.

The trainer flipped a fish into the walrus's open mouth.

Plural nouns ending in an s simply take an apostrophe at the end to form a possessive noun. Of course, there are many plural nouns in English that are irregular and do not end in s.

The chickens' eggs were taken by the farmer early in the morning.

The children's clothes were brand new.

Sometimes the idea of possession is more abstract. When you talk about long you've been doing something, it's possible to use an apostrophe.

Ten years' experience in marketing has taught me what works and what doesn't.

Twenty years' experience is nothing to sneeze at.

But it usually sounds better to use the word of instead of an apostrophe.

Ten years of experience in marketing has taught me what works and what doesn't.

Twenty years of experience is nothing to sneeze at.

Join the sentences below by using possessive forms. Study the boxes above.

1. The student has a pen. The pen is on the table.

2. The man has a car. The car is in the garage.

3. My friends had a party. The party was fun.

4. The women have kids. The kids are playing.

5. India has a population. The population is very large.

6. The children have a mother. The mother is over there.

7. My sisters have friends. The friends are interesting.

8. The teachers had a meeting. The meeting was last week.
