

## What Are Possessive Nouns?

A **possessive noun** does just that—it shows “possession.” Possessive nouns can be common or proper, singular or plural, as well as compound. Possessive nouns show a “relationship” or “ownership” between an object and people or ideas.

### Examples:

My husband’s brother is a dwarf. (Relationship between people)

Brad Paisley’s guitar sold at the charity auction. (Relationship with object)

Henry VIII’s faith changed when he didn’t get his way. (Relationship with idea)

There is a lot of confusion about possessive nouns which causes errors even in professionally written works. Many believe that formatting of possessive nouns is determined by spelling and others believe that forming them is determined by number. The truth is that BOTH rules need to be applied.

If a noun is singular in number, always add an –’s. What letter the singular noun ends in does not matter. Remember, you are NOT making the noun plural, you are showing possession or ownership of the relating noun.

### Examples:

index’s, couch’s, activity’s, bush’s, thief’s

Contrary to singular nouns, plural nouns show possession based on the last letter of the word—this is what leads to the confusion of possessive nouns. If a noun in its normal plural use ends in –s or –es, you would only add an –’. On the other hand, if the noun does not end in –s in its normal plural use, you would add an –’s. This leads to the mistaken use of solely applying the rules to spelling. As you can see, “spelling” only applies to plural nouns, NOT singular nouns.

### Examples:

indices’, couches’, activities’, bushes’, thieves’

The chart below may help you to understand the differences:

Rule	Add	Examples
Singular noun	-’s	Bess’s purse, deer’s bush, rat’s teeth, dog’s bone
Plural noun ending in –s	-’	Wagons’ wheels, parents’ advice, states’ rights
Plural noun NOT ending in –s	-’s	women’s party, oxen’s horns, mice’s cage

**NOTE:** Many writers do not like the awkwardly added sound that occurs with singular nouns ending in –s and will just add the –‘ alone—which is incorrect. In essence, when a singular noun ending in –s is used in possessive form (Illinois’s constitution) it adds an – s or –z sound to the end of the word. Simply put—form matters! If you do not like the awkwardness of the word’s “sound” in your written piece, use the word in singular form with a prepositional “of phrase”—constitution of Illinois.

How many possessive nouns can you form from the person, ideas, and objects presented in this image? Practice your technique of using possessive nouns and “of phrases.”



LARP (live action role playing) player in Germany by Ralf Huels—  
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