

Formation of the possessive case

Singular nouns form their possessive case by adding 's to the singular.

The boy's dog

My father's office

Only the apostrophe (') without s is added if the noun contains too many hissing sounds.

For goodness' sake

For conscience' sake

For Jesus' sake

Moses' laws

Plural nouns ending in -s form their possessive case by adding only an apostrophe.

Boys' school

Girls' hostel

Plural nouns that do not end in -s, form the possessive case by adding 's.

Children's books

Women's club

Uses of the possessive case

The possessive case is now used chiefly with the names of living things.

The lion's mane

The minister's bodyguards

The King's palace

The possessive case is not normally used with the names of lifeless things; instead, we use a structure with of

The leg of the table (NOT The table's leg)

The cover of the book (NOT The book's cover)

The roof of the house (NOT The house's roof)

Exceptions

Formation of the possessive case

The possessive case is often used with the names of personified objects.

Nature's laws

Fortune's favourites

At duty's call

At wit's end

The possessive case is also used with nouns denoting time, space and weight.

In a year's time

A day's work

At a stone's throw

A pound's weight

The possessive of a proper noun denoting a trade, profession or relationship can often be used to denote a building or place of business.

She has gone to the baker's. (= baker's shop)

Tonight we are dining at Smith's (= Smith's house)