

GET TO GRIPS WITH GRAMMAR

Help sheet three: possessive apostrophes and the exception “its”

RULES

1. **Apostrophes, followed by the letter “S”, show that something belongs to somebody.** For example:

- George hid Lenny’s mouse.
- Juliet’s parents hated Romeo’s parents.

2. **If the word that the apostrophe follows already ends in an “S” then you only need to add an apostrophe.** For example:

- Mr Doolittle barged into Professor Higgins’ study.
- The guards played dice for Jesus’ clothes.

3. **This also applies when the word ending in “S” is a plural.** For example:

- If all the pupils in a class were laughing, then it would be: the pupils’ laughter.
- If all the rooks in a rookery were cawing, then it would be: the rooks’ cawing.

4. **The one exception to the rule is “its”.** You do not need to put in an apostrophe to show possession with “its”. “It’s” with an apostrophe means “it is”, where the apostrophe is standing in for the missing “i”. For example:

- The elephant lifted **its** trunk and trumpeted.
- The rhinoceros lowered **its** head and charged.
- But, **it’s** Friday or **it’s** time to go home.

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A. Write out these sentences, putting in any missing apostrophes:

1. Is that James fountain pen you are using?
2. That’s the cats chair, so you’ll get covered in hairs.
3. The triceratops gobbled its meal of ferns.
4. Through the window you could hear the pupils chatter.
5. “Don’t put your cereal in there, that’s the dogs bowl.”
6. They offered to clean all their teachers cars to raise money for Children in Need.
7. Mary Poppins was a magical childrens nanny.
8. Hardly anyone can remember the coal miners strike.
9. They cornered Bess donkey at the top of the field.
10. The velocireptor stalked after its prey.

B. Shorten these sentences by adding possessive apostrophes and “Ss” where necessary. For example: the salty tears of the dragon were emerald green; the dragon’s salty tears were emerald green.

1. The Oscars belonging to Emma Thompson are kept in her downstairs lavatory.
2. The horse that belonged to the Queen Mother once won the Cheltenham Gold Cup.
3. The cars belonging to the New Age travellers were vandalised.
4. The thinness of Victoria Beckham makes people think she has an eating disorder.
5. The death of Princess Dianna shocked the whole world.
6. The wild howls of the wolves echoed across the snow.
7. The noise of our neighbours, the Williamsons, meant we could not hear the television.
8. The forgiveness of Jesus gives people new life.