Guidelines for the Use of Apostrophe to Indicate the Possessive Form of Nouns

Singular nouns: Form the possessive by adding *’s*, no matter what the final consonant is. This means that even if the singular noun already ends in *s* or a sibilant consonant sound, you still add *s*:

Emil’s paper

James’s family

The church’s congregation

Note:

1. One common exception is the accepted use of Jesus’, with no added *s* after the apostrophe.
2. Perhaps the most common error is confusing *it’s* for *its*. While the apostrophe in the first looks like a possessive, it indicates the contraction of *it + is*. We write,

If necessary, look up that meaning again; it’s difficult to remember. (contraction)

I had read the word twice before I looked up its meaning. (possessive).

1. While most pronominal possessive pronouns (pronouns that indicate possession and refer to a previous noun or noun phrase, including yours, hers, his, its, ours, theirs) DON’T use an apostrophe, the indefinite pronouns DO. Write,

Know one’s rights

Everyone’s coffee

Someone else’s email

1. In a series of possessive nouns, use the possessive with only the last noun in the list. Write,

Salma, Dennis, and Yuko’s vacation was coming up fast.

Plural nouns: Make the regular noun plural by adding *s* or *es* and then add the apostrophe. Write,

The Alvarezes’ new address

The dogs’ new veterinarian

Note: For irregular plural nouns not ending in *s*, you must add *’s*.

The People’s Choice awards

Children’s voices

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