

How to

...use the possessive apostrophe

This use of the apostrophe mystifies many writers. Some people try to overcome the problem by putting an apostrophe next to any 's' which comes at the end of a word; it's not unknown to find an apostrophe over an 's'!

Some simple rules will help you get it right. Read the text in the box below:

Then it was Parveen's turn to demonstrate how to weave and apply colour using foil squares. The remains of Keira's effort were on the floor for everyone to see. Would Parveen's attempt be any better?

You'll see that each apostrophe links two words together in meaning (so it's not just about ' Parveen ' and not just about 'turn' , but about both).

Parveen's turn = the turn *of* Parveen

Keira's effort = the effort *of* Keira

Parveen 's attempt = the attempt *of* Parveen

If something needs a possessive apostrophe, you can reverse the words, inserting the word *of* or *belonging to*.



Try this!

Turn round the following phrases, inserting 'of' or 'belonging to', depending on which makes more sense. Put a box round the last letter of the last word in the phrase you have turned round.

- Malcolm's scissors = the scissors belonging to Malcolm m

- the client's jacket

- the receptionist's books

- the men's rest room

- Beverley's tea

- the women's changing room

The apostrophe *always* follows the last letter of the reversed phrase.

- the customer's coat = the coat belonging to the customer
- the hair's colour = the colour of the hair
- the company's policy = the policy of the company
- the clients' reactions = the reactions of the clients

If something is in the possessive case, you can reverse the words, inserting the word 'of' or 'belonging to'.

Try this!

In the following sentences, change the words into a possessive phrase using an apostrophe.

E.g. (The lock of the door) was stuck.

= *The door's lock...*

- 1 I am going on a course in (the time of two days).

- 2 (The idea of Tom) is brilliant.

- 3 (The bag of the vacuum cleaner) was full of hair.

- 4 They bought (worth of two thousand pounds) of equipment.

- 5 (The arm of the chair) was broken.

- 6 (The temperature of the rest room) was correct.

RULES

's is added to singular words to show possession

the customer's shoes (one customer)

the assistant's back

's is added to plural words that don't end in s

the children's toys

the men's room

' is added after the s to all other plural words

the customers' shoes (many customers)

the boys' games

RULE

Words like

yours

his

hers

theirs

its

never have an apostrophe, since they already show possession.

Try this!

Insert apostrophes into these sentences where required. Two of the sentences don't need apostrophes, so check each one by turning round the phrase as you've learnt. If you can't turn it round, an apostrophe is not required.

RULE

It's = it is

Its does not use an apostrophe at any other time!

1 The managers list of clients was very long.

2 The learners assignments needed to be completed.

3 The clients requirements were not clear.

4 The stylists skin was damaged by the product.

5 They were dependent on Helens selling skills.

6 The trainees were not allowed to use the computer.

7 Paul knows more about male styling than Carl does.

8 It's obvious that Parvatis overalls are too small for her.

9 Tomorrows meeting is likely to be difficult.

10 I am taking two weeks holiday.

Try this! Write down as many possessive phrases as you can think of.