

Apostrophe Rules

For apostrophes used to show possession, there are basically three rules.

1. For all singular words—add an apostrophe and an “s” at the end of the word.

Ex. the sled of the one boy = the boy’s sled
 the car of one woman = the woman’s car
 the office of one boss = the boss’s office
 the range of one deer = the deer’s range*

2. For all plural words ending in “s”—add an apostrophe after the “s”.

Ex. the sled of more than one boy = the boys’ sled
 the tree house of more than one girl = the girls’ tree house
 the office of more than one boss – the bosses’ office
 the house of the Jones family = the Joneses house

3. For all plural words that do not end in “s”—add an apostrophe and an “s”

Ex. the car of more than one woman = the women’s car
 the tree house of more than one child = the children’s tree house
 the locker room of more than one man = the men’s locker room
 the range of more than one deer = the deer’s range*

* You will note that the singular and plural of words like *deer*, *trout*, *elk*, and *series* are the same, so the possessive forms are also the same. The correct interpretation depends on the context in which the phrase occurs.

There is a commonly used exception to the rule for singular words. If the singular word ends with a voiced “s” (which means it sounds like “z”), most English speakers would add only an apostrophe after the word to show possession:

Ex. the novels of Charles Dickens = Charles Dickens’ novels
 the polo ponies of Prince Charles = Prince Charles’ polo ponies

the wife of Mr. Jones = Mr. Jones' wife

If that last exception is too much to remember, most people would accept the apostrophe and "s" (rule #1 above):

Charles Dickens's novels, Prince Charles's polo ponies, Mr. Jones's wife

Special Case: Phrasal Nouns

The plural "s" is attached to whatever an item is; the possessive apostrophe and "s" are attached to the end of the phrase:

the warnings of more than one **attorney general** = the attorneys general's warnings

the wills of more than one **mother-in-law** = the mothers-in-law's wills.

the election of more than one **superintendent of schools** =

the superintendents of schools' election.

When Is an Apostrophe Required?

Plural vs. Possessive

When a word is merely plural, it does not have an apostrophe.

The company foyer has many portraits of its former **presidents**.

The committee is tasked with providing adequate nutrition to **children**.

Influential **CEOs** affected tax **rates** for several **administrations** in the **1980s**.

(Note there is **nothing belonging to** the above plural nouns (no noun follows that is "of the" plural one.)

Possession and Apostrophes

If you can reword a phrase such that one thing "**belongs to**" another or is "**of the**" other such as "**the office belongs to the president**" or "**the office of the president**", you may show the possession as "**the president's office**".

Similarly, "**the resume belongs to the candidate**" or "**the resume of the candidate**" can be "**the candidate's resume**".

the policy **of the CEO** = **the CEO's** policy

the benefits **of the employees** = **the employee's** benefits

the education **of the children** = **the children's** education

the effects **of the medication** = **the medication's** effects

To see if an apostrophe is required, try to rephrase using “belongs to” or “of the”:

“the policys/policy's implications for retail investors” can be rephrased **“the implications of the policy for retail investors”**, so the correct form is **“the policy's implications for retail investors”**

Plural Possessives

When the possessor is plural and ends with “s”, the apostrophe goes after the “s”.

the portraits **of the presidents** = **the presidents'** portraits

Inanimate Objects

Inanimate objects may or may not have an apostrophe:

the school's dress code = the school dress code

the policy's implications = the policy implications