Possession

We can express the idea of possession, or ownership. In three different ways in English. One way is to say that someone or something possesses something:

George owns a new car.
The table has only three legs.
Lin possesses many talents.

In these cases, we have used the verb to express possession, and of course the most common verbs used to express possession are *owns, has, and possesses.*

A second way of expressing possession is to use the preposition *of.* When *of* is used to indicate possession, the thing being possessed comes first, then *of,* then the person or thing doing the possessing:

The new car of George.
The three legs of the table.
The talents of Lin.

The *of* method is most often used when we wish to say that a thing, especially an abstract thing, is doing the possessing:

The purpose of our foreign policy (our foreign policy has a purpose)
The inside of the house (the house has an inside)

When we talk about people, and often about things too, possessing something, we usually use a third way of expressing possession—that is, adding an apostrophe and an *s* to the noun telling who or what is doing the possessing:

George’s new car
The table’s legs
Lin’s talents

In the following cases, the verb *to have* has been used to show possession. Following each instance, show the same possession by using first the preposition *of* and then the apostrophe + *s.* Example:

Maria has a beautiful dress
The beautiful dress of Maria
Maria’s beautiful dress

Exercises:

The teacher has an office
The city has fifteen parks
The nation has armed forces
The student has a very definite goal
Sunday has weather
Our state has an agricultural problem
Ernesto has a very large library
Charles Has Twelve sisters
The classrooms have poor ventilation

How are the last two exercises different from the ones preceding them?

These exercises, of course, have nouns in them that already end in s (Charles and classrooms). If you followed the rule of adding apostrophe + s to these nouns, you did the exercise correctly and your answers look like this:

Charles's twelve sisters
The classrooms's poor ventilation

There is another, equally correct way of handling the possessive in the case of nouns that already end in s. That is simply to add an apostrophe to those nouns, without adding an additional s.

Charles' twelve sisters
The classrooms' poor ventilation

Change each of the following groups of words into apostrophe possessives in two ways--first, by using apostrophe + s, and second, by using just an apostrophe. There are two exercises in the following in which you must use apostrophe + s. Which ones are they?

The cars have new paint jobs.
His sisters have beautiful black hair.
The classes have difficult assignments.
The people have a choice.
The students have worries about their classes.
The rugs have a thick, soft texture.
The women have concerns.
Tomas has an excellent stereo.

Not all possessive words use apostrophes. The nouns do but the other possessive words don’t. You already know that the possessive its doesn’t use an apostrophe and that it's means it is. The same is true of the other possessives:

my I like my cat.
your I hate your cat.
his I ate his cat.
her She saved her cat.
their They gave away their cats.

Even the possessives that end in s (like Its) don’t use apostrophes:

He got his.
She bought hers downtown.
I'd rather have yours than mine.
Nobody likes theirs.

Now you should be able to give a complete rule for using the apostrophe to show possession in English. Write out the rule as you would for a friend from a foreign country who was just learning English, and give one example of your own (not one that appears in this chapter) for each aspect of the rule.