

Journalism Style

Possessives and Apostrophes Continued

As you learned in the Chapter 15 *Journalism Style*, possessives are highly useful and great space savers when you are writing for tight spaces. But knowing when and how to use an apostrophe can be challenging. Does an inanimate object, such as a 5k race, possess its starting line? What if three people share ownership of a pet?

Possessives with Inanimate Objects

If you are not talking about a person or people—even if you are talking about a team or club—think carefully before you use a possessive. In particular, monitor your use of possessives for non-living nouns. In the strictest sense, only people—or things you are personifying—can possess other things.

There are at least two ways to limit the number of possessives you use with inanimate objects, that is, non-living things:

1. **Make it a descriptive adjective:** If you can recast the expression that contains the possessive with *for* or *by*, consider turning it into a descriptive adjective and a noun.

2. **Use a preposition:** It is not *The Wild's Call*, it is *The Call of the Wild*. *The leak from the sink* may sound better than *the sink's leak*. *The houses' keys* does not read as well as *the keys to the houses*. *Advances in physics* is preferable to *physics' advances*.

Try It!

By yourself or with your group, scan your own publication or that of another school to find sentences containing weak use of possessives, generally possessives of teams or groups or objects. Find at least six. Recast the sentences with either descriptive adjectives or prepositional phrases. In which cases do your revisions read better than the original? Why?

| As a possessive | Could be recast with <i>by</i> or <i>for</i> | As a descriptive adjective (no apostrophes needed) |
|--|--|--|
| Oilers' softball | softball by Oilers | Oiler softball |
| the storm's damage | damage by the storm | storm damage |
| the Quill and Scroll's installation ceremony | the installation ceremony for Quill and Scroll | the Quill and Scroll installation ceremony |
| the sophomore's service project | the service project by sophomores | the sophomore service project |
| the theater department's storeroom | the storeroom for the theater department | the theater department storeroom |

Two or More People Possess the Same Thing—Where Does the Apostrophe Go?

The humble apostrophe can transmit big differences in meaning.

If three people worked on a yearbook spread, write *Kyle, Francisco and Bree's spread*.

Only the last named carries the apostrophe.

If three people worked together on six yearbook spreads, write *Kyle, Francisco and Bree's spreads*.

Again, only the last named carries the apostrophe.

If the three people each did their own spread, so *spreads* is plural, write *Kyle's, Francisco's and Bree's spreads*. Each name carries an apostrophe.

Try It!

1. Write a sentence using a possessive for twins who share a car. Name the twins.
2. Write a sentence using a possessive for five brothers who share two cars. Name the brothers.
3. Write a sentence using a possessive for wealthy triplets, each of whom own a car. Name the triplets.