

## Plural and the ´s possessive form

### I. Plural of nouns

### II. The ´s possessive form

### III. Use of the ´s possessive form

#### I. Plural of nouns

		Singular	Plural
In most cases	-s	desk, service	desks, services
Nouns ending in -s, -ss, -sh, -x, -ch	-es	bus, box, speech	buses, boxes, speeches
Nouns ending in a consonant + -y	-ies	country	countries
Nouns ending in -f	-ves	half, leaf, life	halves, leaves, lives

#### Notes:

-y does not change into -ie after a vowel: day – days, key – keys

-f does not change in: beliefs, roofs, proofs

Singular	Irregular plural
child	children
foot	feet
man	men
woman	women
tooth	teeth

#### Note:

“Foot” as a unit of measurement can be used as a plural form:

*He is six feet/foot tall.*

See also Guidelines for Academic Writing: Nouns of Latin and Greek origin.

#### II. The ´s possessive form

Singular noun	+ ´s	my teacher´s advice
Plural noun	+ ´	the English teachers´ meeting
Irregular plural	+ ´s	many people´s opinion

#### Notes:

- The **definite article** and **other determiners** (e.g. my, this, many, every, etc.) **apply to the possessive form**, not to the noun that follows.

*the teacher´s advice*

*my teacher´s advice*

- With a **noun phrase**, the apostrophe ´ **follows the last noun**.

*the University of West Bohemia´s Rector*

*the Czech Technical University´s Rector*

The “of” phrase is, however, more common.

*Rector of the University of West Bohemia  
Rector of the Czech Technical University*

- **The noun** following the possessive form **can be left out** when the meaning is clear.

*Teachers' salaries are lower than doctors'.*

= *than doctors' salaries.*

= *than the salaries of doctors.*

= *than those of doctors.*

### **Common mistake:**

leaving out the apostrophe '.

*Teachers' salaries are lower than doctors.*

(= *salaries are lower than doctors*, which is nonsense)

### **III. Use of the 's possessive form**

Very often, the relationship expressed by **the 's possessive form** can also be expressed by a **prepositional phrase**, usually an "of" phrase, without any difference in meaning. It is, however, sometimes difficult for a non-native speaker to know which of the options is appropriate in the given context. Below you will find recommendations that will help you make the right choice.

**The 's possessive form** is preferred with

- **people** : *the student's ID* (= *the ID of the student*)

- **groups of people** (companies, institutions): *the committee's decision* (= *the decision of the committee*)

- **animals**: *the dog's collar* (= *the collar of the dog*)

- **countries/cities**: *the country's/China's rapid development* (= *the rapid development of the country/China*)

- **time expressions**: *five minutes' break* (= *a break of five minutes*), *in a week's time*

- **"world", "earth"**: *the world's economy* (= *the economy of the world*)

**The prepositional phrase** is always correct with nouns not listed above, although you may sometimes hear or read the 's possessive form even with these nouns. For non-native speakers it is safer to always use the prepositional phrase.

*the title of the book/the book's title*

*the failure of the system/the system's failure*

*the heating system of the train/the train's heating system*

*the topic of the lecture/the lecture's topic*

But NOT *a table's leg!*

### **Notes:**

- With nouns denoting **institutions, organizations, companies**, the **prepositional phrase**, not the 's form, is used when describing **a change or a process**.

*the foundation of the University*      not: *the University's foundation*

- Although **the most common preposition** used in the prepositional phrase is **"of"**, **other**

**prepositions** are used, too.

*children's books = books for children*

*John Updike's novels = novels by John Updike*

(John Updike is the author)

*the world's biggest cities = the biggest cities in the world*

("in" is used with place names + a superlative, or first, only, last)

- With some time expressions, the **'s possessive form** can also be replaced by a **hyphenated combination**. In this case, the noun is singular although its meaning is plural.

*five minutes' break = a five-minute break = a break of five minutes*

## EXERCISES

### I. Fill the gaps with the plural forms of the following nouns.

<b>life</b>	<b>gentleman</b>	<b>tooth</b>	<b>child</b>	<b>woman</b>
<b>foot</b>	<b>leaf</b>	<b>half</b>	<b>speech</b>	<b>chairman</b>

1. This device isn't safe for ..... to play with.
2. Those were the two best ..... I've ever heard.
3. Good morning, ladies and .....
4. Two of the ..... on the toothed wheel got broken.
5. These two ..... do not match.
6. We need three ..... for the afternoon sessions.
7. Rescuers often risk their own .....
8. She was standing just a few ..... away from us.
9. At this time of year most of the ..... have already fallen.
10. The number of ..... in politics is still very small.

### II. Join the following groups of words, using

**a) the 's possessive form wherever possible,**

**b) the prepositional phrase in the other cases. In some of these cases a native speaker might also use the 's possessive form. Do you think you could identify these cases?**

1. the surface + the earth .....
2. the population + the country .....
3. the future + the project .....
4. the signature of the Head of the Department .....
5. the most successful products + the Company .....
6. the experiments + our partners .....
7. women + movement .....
8. the basis + the theory .....
9. the degree + a doctor .....
10. the oldest university + the country .....
11. the programme + tomorrow .....
12. the economic policy + the Czech government .....
13. a delay + two hours .....

- 14. the history + computers .....
- 15. the announcement + the chairman .....
- 16. the growth + the gross national product .....
- 17. a holiday + two weeks .....
- 18. the budget + the University .....
- 19. the name + the journal .....
- 20. the meaning + the word .....
- 21. the suggestion + our partners .....
- 22. the future + the organization .....
- 23. an increase + energy consumption .....
- 24. the Board of Governors + the decision .....
- 25. the recommendation + my supervisor .....

**III. Correct the mistakes. There are several options in some of the cases.**

- 1. Our results are better than our partners.  
.....
- 2. The University's of Nottingham Vice-Chancellor visited our Faculty last year.  
.....
- 3. The Czech team's approach to the problem is not very different from the British team.  
.....
- 4. Mount Everest is the highest mountain of the world.  
.....
- 5. At the presentation's end he spoke briefly about his future work.  
.....
- 6. Charles University is considered to be the best university of this country.  
.....
- 7. My view of the situation is very similar to my colleague.  
.....