



Possessive Adjectives: Definition, Examples, and Usage Guide

Possessive adjectives (or 'determiners') are words like **my, your, his, her, its, our, and their** that show possession. They always go with a noun (e.g., **my book**).

It's easy to confuse possessive adjectives with possessive pronouns (e.g., **mine, yours, his**).

What are Possessive Adjectives?

Possessive adjectives are words that we use to say who owns something. We also use them to show relationships. For example:

- It was **her idea**. (the idea belonged to her)
- That's **my car**. (the car belongs to me)
- That man is **his dad**. (he has a relationship with that man)

Examples of Possessive Adjectives

Here is a table of personal pronouns with their possessive adjectives, and some examples.

Personal pronoun	Possessive adjective	Example
I	my	I'm looking for my keys . (the keys belong to me)
you	your	Don't forget to bring your homework . (the homework belongs to you)
he	his	He left his wallet at home. (the wallet belongs to him)
she	her	She loves her new phone . (the phone belongs to her)
it	its	The cat is licking its paw . (the paw belongs to the cat)
we	our	We're spending the weekend with our friends . (describes relationship)
they	their	They sold their old house last year. (the house belonged to them)
who	whose*	Whose shoes are these? (we're asking who the shoes belong to)



*Whose means "belonging to someone". As a possessive adjective, it comes before a noun. We often use it in questions to ask who something belongs to, for example, "*Whose shoes are these?*". We can also use it as a possessive pronoun on its own, for example, "*Whose are these?*", where it replaces the noun.

We can also use 'whose' to introduce a relative clause to give extra information about the owner of something. For example, "*We talked to a couple whose child took part in the Olympics*".

Common Mistakes

In English, we often use possessive adjectives with body parts, personal things, and daily activities. A common mistake is using the definite article (*the*) or reflexive pronouns (*myself, yourself*) because it sounds more natural in other languages.

For example:

- **English:** My head hurts / I washed my hands / I forgot my homework
- **Other languages:** I hurt me the head / I washed me the hands / I forgot the homework

We often use a possessive adjective (*my, your, his, her, our, their*) when we talk about our own body, things that belong to us, or activities connected to ourselves.

- **Body parts / clothes:** *my hand, her hair, his shoes*
- **Personal things:** *my phone, our house, their car*
- **School / work:** *my homework, his job, her project*

Next, it's easy to confuse possessive adjectives with other words, because they sound the same or look very similar. Even native speakers confuse these sets of words!

Its vs It's

Its and *it's* sound the same, but they have different meanings and uses.

Its is a possessive adjective which means 'belonging to'.

- The dog played with **its** ball. (The ball belongs to the dog.)
- The company changed **its** logo last year. (The logo belongs to the company.)
- The tree lost **its** leaves in winter. (The leaves belong to the tree.)

It's is a contraction (short form) of 'it is' or 'it has'.

- **It's** a sunny day today. (= It is a sunny day.)
- **It's** been a long day. (= It has been a long day.)
- **It's** not a big problem. (= It is not a big problem.)

Their vs they're

Their and *they're* are confusing because they sound the same, but they also have different meanings.

Their is a possessive adjective meaning 'belonging to'.

- This is **their** car. (The car belongs to them.)
- The students handed in **their** homework on time. (The homework belongs to the students.)
- I love **their** new house near the park. (The house belongs to them.)

They're is a contraction of 'they are'.

- **They're** late for the meeting. (= They are late.)
- **They're** watching a movie right now. (= They are watching.)
- **They're** planning a trip to Italy. (= They are planning.)

Whose vs who's

In a similar way, *whose* and *who's* are also confusing because they sound the same, but their meanings are also very different.

Whose is a possessive adjective which means 'belonging to'. We use it to ask or say who something belongs to.

- Do you know **whose** phone this is? (= Who does this phone belong to?)
- **Whose** bag is on the chair? (= Who does this bag belong to?)
- I met a woman **whose** brother works abroad. (= The woman who is connected to her brother.)

Who's is a contraction of 'who is' or 'who has'.

- **Who's** coming to the party? (= Who is coming...?)
- **Who's** ready to start the game? (= Who is ready...?)
- **Who's** been using my laptop? (= Who has been using...?)

Your vs you're

Your is a possessive adjective that means 'belonging to you'.

- Is this **your** pen? (Does this pen belong to you?)
- Don't forget to bring **your** keys. (The keys belong to you.)
- I really like **your** new haircut. (The haircut belongs to you.)

You're is a contraction of 'you are'.

- **You're** my best friend. (= You are my best friend.)
- **You're** very kind. (= You are very kind.)
- **You're** going to love this film. (= You are going to love this film.)



Conclusion

We use possessive adjectives (**my, your, his, her, its, our, and their**) to show who something belongs to. They always come before a noun, and they tell us who owns or is connected to that noun.

It's easy to confuse them with possessive pronouns (**mine, yours, hers, ours, theirs**) or contractions like **it's, you're, and they're**, but remember:

- Possessive adjectives go *before* a noun.
- Possessive pronouns *replace* the noun.