



Possessive Pronouns Guide: Definitions and Examples

What is a possessive pronoun?

Possessive pronouns are words that show that something belongs to someone. We use them instead of repeating the noun to avoid saying the same thing twice.

The possessive pronouns are **mine**, **yours**, **his**, **hers**, **ours**, and **theirs**.

For example:

- That book is my book. → That book is **mine**.

Here, we use 'mine' so that we don't have to repeat 'my book'.

- This pen is her pen. → This pen is **hers**.

Here, we use 'hers' so that we don't have to repeat 'her pen'.

How to Use Possessive Pronouns in a Sentence

Possessive pronouns replace a noun.

- That big house is **their big house**. → That big house is **theirs**.

(The word 'theirs' replaces 'their big house', so we don't need to repeat the noun.)

- This pen is **my pen**. → This pen is **mine**.

(The word 'mine' replaces 'my pen', so we don't need to repeat the noun.)

Possessive pronouns can't go before a noun.

- NOT: That is ~~mine book~~.
- That is **mine**.



We often use them after the verb ‘be’, like **is**, **are**, **was**, and **were**, or with modal verbs + ‘be’ like **must be**, **might be**, or **could be**:

- That bag **is** hers.
- The shoes **are** theirs.
- The last cookie **was** hers.
- The backpacks **were** theirs.
- This phone **must be** yours.
- Those keys **might be** ours.

A possessive pronoun must match the person (or people) who owns the thing:

If **one person** owns something:

- Julie brought her phone. The phone is **hers**. (one owner (Julie) → ‘hers’ for a singular owner)
- Those cookies are **mine**. (one owner (me) → ‘mine’ for a singular owner, even though ‘cookies’ is plural)

If **several people** own something:

- They brought their phones. The phones are **theirs**. (multiple owners (they) → ‘theirs’ for plural owners)
- We bought a new car. The car is **ours**. (multiple owners (we) → ‘ours’ for plural owners)

Traditionally, singular owners need **his** or **hers**, and plural owners need **theirs**.

However, we can also use theirs for a singular noun when we don’t know the person’s gender or when it’s not important:

- Someone left **theirs** here.



We don't use 'its' as a possessive pronoun - we just use a different kind of sentence!

- NOT correct (talking about a dog!): ~~The tail is **its**.~~
- Correct: **Its** tail is very long.

Possessive Pronouns Examples

- I wasn't sure if the sandwich in the fridge was **mine**, so I put it back.
- That leather handbag by the window is **yours**, isn't it?
- I think that brand new laptop on the table was **his**.
- This scarf smells like Julie, so it must be **hers**.
- Those homemade cookies in the kitchen are **ours**.
- Those bicycles near the fountain are **theirs**, so they must have gone to get ice cream.
- Whose notebook is this on the desk? I think it's **yours**.
- That corner table at the cafe is **hers** - she always sits there when she studies.
- The students finished their project yesterday, so the essays on the shelf are **theirs**.
- I left my book on the sofa, so the one on the chair must be **yours**.

Possessive Pronouns vs. Possessive Determiners

Possessive pronouns are different from possessive determiners. Possessive determiners (sometimes called possessive adjectives) include **my, your, his, her, our, their**, and **its**, and they always come before a noun.

For example:

- **My** book is on the table. (possessive determiner = my; noun = book)
- **Her** pen is on the floor. (possessive determiner = her; noun = pen)



What's the difference?

Possessive pronouns *replace* a noun.

- That car belongs to me. It's **mine**.
- That phone belongs to him. It's **his**.
- This house belongs to us. It's **ours**.
- This phone number belongs to them. It's **theirs**.

Possessive determiners always come *before* a noun.

- That car belongs to me. It is **my car**. (NOT: ~~It is my.~~)
- That phone belongs to you. It is **your phone**. (NOT: ~~It is your.~~)

Possessive Pronouns

mine

your

his

hers

-

ours

theirs

Possessive Determiners

my

your

his

her

its

our

their

Here are some examples of both possessive determiners and possessive pronouns:

- It's **my book**. It's **mine**.
- That's **your car**. It's **yours**.
- Those are **his shoes**. They're **his**.
- That is **her umbrella**. That is **hers**.
- Please open **our gift** first. Please open **ours**.
- The students took **their books**. The students took **theirs**.



Common Mistakes with Possessive Pronouns

1. Confusing possessive pronouns with possessive determiners. For example:

- NOT: Is ~~this yours~~ bag?

The correct sentence is:

- Is this **your** bag? (possessive determiner before a noun)
- Is this **yours**? (possessive pronoun replacing the noun)

2. Confusing the possessive determiner *its* with the contraction *it's* (it is). For example:

- NOT: ~~The dog hurt it's~~ paw.

The correct sentence is:

- The dog hurt **its** paw. (possessive determiner)
- **It's** raining outside. (it is)

3. Confusing *your* (possessive determiner) with *you're* (you are). For example:

- NOT: ~~Your~~ welcome to join us!

The correct sentence is:

- **You're** welcome to join us! (you are)
- Is this **your** bag? (possessive determiner)

4. Confusing *their* (possessive determiner), *they're* (they are), and *there* (place) because we pronounce them in the same way. For example:

- NOT: ~~Their~~ going to the park.

The correct sentence is:

- **They're** going to the park. (they are)
- **Their** car is new. (possessive determiner)
- The keys are over **there**. (place)



5. Another point of confusion is how to pronounce *our*, *ours*, and *are*.

This is **our** house. /'aʊə/ → 'Our' has two syllables.

This house is **ours**. /'aʊəz/ → 'Ours' has two syllables and ends with a /z/ sound.

These **are** mine. /'ɑ:/ → 'Are' has one syllable with a long vowel sound, like the vowel sound in 'start' or 'car'.

Conclusion

Possessive pronouns (**mine, yours, his, hers, ours** and **theirs**) show that something belongs to someone, and they avoid repeating the noun. They are different from possessive determiners (**my, your, his, her, our, their**, and **its**), which always come before a noun.

We use possessive pronouns after verbs like **is, are, was, were**, and sometimes with modal verbs like **must be** or **might be**.