

# THE BEST ACT PREP COURSE EVER

## POSSESSION

*ACT English: Problem Set*

## **RULES FOR POSSESSIVES**

For the ACT you'll need to know when it's appropriate to use possessives (including 's or s'), as well as the idiomatic errors between homophones and possessive forms, i.e. its VS it's OR their VS they're VS there.

Remember, **it's** means "**it is**."

**Its'** is ALWAYS wrong.

**Its** is the possessive form of it.

To determine possession, think about:

### **1. Is the word in question possessing anything?**

- a. If no, then nothing needs an apostrophe by the "s."

Remember **apostrophes should (almost\*\*\*) NEVER be used to make something plural**. They make something possessive. We spend a lot of time "with the Joneses" **not** "with the Jones's." The second version is wrong.

- b. If yes, then add an apostrophe and if appropriate, an "s"

### **2. Is the word in question singular or plural?**

Most common cases:

- If singular** (and not a proper noun ending in "s"\*\*) **add an apostrophe then s** (dog's, Kennedy's (when referring to a single Kennedy), duchess's\*, dress's\*)
- If plural, and a word not ending in "s,"** add an apostrophe then "s" (people's, fish's)
- If plural ending in s, add a single apostrophe at the end** (the two dogs' favorite park, the Hansons' annual party)

Less common situations:

- \*\*If singular, and a proper noun ending in "s,"** you can either add an apostrophe then "s" (Jonas's, Dickens's) just as in rule a. above, OR you can simply add an apostrophe (Dickens', Jonas', Thomas')
- If plural, and a proper noun ending in "s,"** add an apostrophe (The Kennedys' legacy, the Joneses' success) (note this is the same as rule b. above). Remember to make the proper name plural before you add the apostrophe!
  - Some names take an "es" to become plural: names that end in "x," "z," "ch," "sh," and "s."
  - In other words, if you're discussing the whole Kennedy family, "the Kennedy's legacy" would be wrong. "The Kennedys' legacy" would be right.
- \*If singular, a common noun, and ending in "s" AND followed by a word that starts with s,** you can either add apostrophe "s" (dress's satin buttons) or simply add an apostrophe ("dress' satin buttons" could be correct if the next word after the apostrophe starts with "s" according to AP style guide...but that's unlikely to show up on the ACT, and in any case, dress's satin buttons would be correct).

**\*\*\* 's** could be used to make a plural of single letters, such as "I got all **A's**," or to make abbreviations with periods in them plural, like "**M.D.'s**."

Correct the possession error(s) in the following sentences or write “no error.”

1. The Haas’s’ annual holiday party was set for December 20th this year, but their party’s catering arrangements weren’t ready in time, so event was moved three days later.
2. It was never Boris’ dream to major in chemical engineering, but after spending a summer working in one of his professors’ labs he realized just how many jobs were available in engineering, and decided he would give it a try.
3. Many people accidentally mistake pyrite for gold because of it’s luster and hue.
4. As Saad stood up, he swerved to avoid his toddler brother’s grasping, sticky hands and slipped away to his room, despite his father’s demand that Saad watch his little brother while their mother attended her book club meeting.
5. Rachel knew that Paris was famous for food, fashion, and art, but she firmly believed that Budapest was just as interesting, and actually personally preferred Budapests central European culture to Parises.
6. Although Gina hated taking the bus, she had to admit that its’ existence is extremely important for many people who needed it to get around; still, she’s convinced it feeds her parents conviction that she didn’t need to learn to drive yet.
7. Tom went to the state park with a group of friends. They planned on camping out for the weekend and going on long hikes, but when they arrived he realized that most of his friends water canteens were empty. They had planned to fill them up at the campsite, but the campsites’ water supply was low because of the month-long drought.
8. The public library takes great pains to make the reading room kid-friendly; it has several toys there available for the childrens entertainment, and even provides blankets and pillows for comfort.
9. Before Layla left her cubicle, she placed a lunch order to pick up from a nearby restaurant. It wasn’t until after she went back to the office’s did she realize she grabbed a bag that wasn’t her’s.
10. Eloise learned many things about her aunt that she hadn’t known before during the five year’s Eloise lived with her; for example, Eloise found out that her aunts favorite activities to do on a rainy day were to bake and read mystery novels.
11. The orchid gardens were owned and cultivated by Amanda’s grandfather but after he passed they became hers.
12. Last year’s valedictorian emphasized in his speech just how much his teacher’s made an impact on his life.
13. Murano, a commune of Venice, is known for it’s intricate glassware.
14. Although he didn’t expect to get a part in the acclaimed directors play, Adam tried out anyway and even got a callback from the director herself.
15. The poetry contest’s panel of judges included editors, journalists, and professors.

Choose the correct use of the possessive from the following options.

1. Painting is my favorite hobby; it's soothing and fun, and most importantly it helps me think through my problems without feeling overwhelmed.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. Because its  
C. its'  
D. its
2. Yuko was studying for her astronomy class when she noticed that the textbook spelled one of the names of the constellations wrong; when she cross-referenced another book with different spelling, she realized that the book's spellings of the word were actually both correct, but one was the American spelling and the other was the British spelling.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. the two books spelling's  
C. the two books' spellings  
D. the two books spellings
3. While planning what classes to take for the next semester, Jeremy realized that the class he liked the most was also the most popular, so their wait list would probably be extremely long, meaning that he would have to sign up very early to guarantee a spot.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. its'  
C. it's  
D. its
4. Rita carefully shifted the car into reverse and eased her foot off of the brake, afraid that if she weren't extremely cautious she would accidentally scratch her mothers' car while trying to get out of the tiny parking lot.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. her mother's car  
C. her mothers car  
D. the car of her mother
5. The accounting firm always recognized an "employee of the month", and Ricardo was the companies most efficient and charismatic employee, so it was no surprise when he won that distinction three months in a row.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. the companys' most efficient and charismatic employee  
C. the companies' most efficient and charismatic employee  
D. the company's most efficient and charismatic employee
6. Dmitry volunteers at the Red Cross as an instructor for teenage volunteers, and he always says the most difficult thing about working there is not demonstrating difficult first aid procedures, but rather, having to hold the students attention for prolonged periods of time.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. the student's attention  
C. the students' attention  
D. his students attentions
7. Andrea tried her best to not make any noise, but she forgot about the water bottle she had left in her purse, and the bottles unpleasant squealing as she reached her hand into her purse broke the silence.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. bottle's  
C. Bottles'  
D. bottles,
8. Parker paced back and forth, scratching his head, pondering whether or not to change the novels ending, but ultimately decided to keep it the way it was.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. the novels' ending but  
C. the novel's ending, but  
D. the novels' ending but,
9. Last March I visited New York City with my theatre class and we got to see the newest musicals on Broadway and stayed in one of the city's nicest boutique hotels.  
A. NO CHANGE  
B. cities'  
C. cities  
D. citys'

10. Its' strings must be tuned regularly, otherwise the violin doesn't sound right.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. Its strings
  - C. It's strings'
  - D. Its strings'
11. In Europe there is considerably more regulation of produce and commerce than in other region's of the world; the laws are much more detailed, police forces and the people follow the rules as best as they can.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. in other regions
  - C. other regions'
  - D. in the region
12. Perched on two concrete slabs, hovering over people walking through the passageway under it's shadow, sits Michael Heizer's Levitated Mass.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. they're
  - C. their
  - D. its
13. It's increasingly evident that the tourism industry is a large contributor to Costa Rica's economic sector.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. To government officials, its
  - C. Its
  - D. Its'
14. The whole scene is serene: a quiet moment to appreciate the stars peeking between the yellow lanterns' in the navy skies.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. lanterns in the navy sky's
  - C. lanterns in the navy skies
  - D. lantern's in the navy skies
15. Salsa music originated from a mixture of Latin musical genres, but it's main influence is Cuban dance music.
- A. NO CHANGE
  - B. it's own
  - C. their
  - D. its

**ANSWER KEY**

1. The Haases' annual winter holidays party was set for December 20th this year, but their party's catering arrangements weren't ready in time, so the event was moved three days later.

The Chicago Manual of Style, AP Stylebook, and Garner's Modern American Usage all say to make names that end with "-s" plural by adding "-es," without exception. Thus Haas is not the necessary plural form of the family name. We assume this is the whole Haas family throwing the party, so first we must make this plural (Haases), and then we add an apostrophe. Haas' could be correct if we were referring to single person of the Haas family, (for instance if Jeremy Haas wrote an article, I could say "Haas' article was insightful") but in context, particularly given the pronoun "their" later in the sentence, it appears this is a whole family or plural.

2. It was never Boris' dream to major in chemical engineering, but after spending a summer working in one of his professor's labs he realized just how many jobs were available in engineering, and decided that he would give it a try.

AP (Associated Press) Style dictates that singular, proper names ending with an "s" should have a single apostrophe after the s to indicate possession (Boris'). That is the style we most often recommend (as it's what major journalism outlets in the US use), and the style we've found in use most often on the ACT. However, Boris's would be correct according to Fowler's Modern English Usage. Chicago Manual of Style calls both correct but prefers the latter (Boris's). In any case, the original is incorrect. Whichever of the above two options is available would be right on the ACT. However, professor's is the only correct way to indicate that a single professor has a lab as denoted later in the sentence.

3. Many people accidentally mistake pyrite for gold because of its luster and hue.

Remember it's means "it is." Imagine the apostrophe is a tiny little "i"!

4. No Error

5. Rachel knew that Paris was famous for food, fashion, and art, but she firmly believed that Budapest was just as interesting, and actually personally preferred Budapest's central European culture to Paris'.

See #1 and #2 for explanation, but Paris's could also be correct. Also, that of Paris (in place of Paris') would be an alternative, correct way to denote this comparison.

6. Although Gina hated taking the bus, she had to admit that its existence is probably extremely important for many people who needed it to get around; still, she's convinced it feeds her parents' conviction that she didn't need to learn to drive yet.

It is most likely Gina has two parents, and thus placing the apostrophe after the "s" correctly creates a possessive form of the plural parents. If it were only her mother or father, it is likely the sentence would have used the specific, appropriate form (mother's or father's).

7. Tom went to the state park with a group of friends. They planned on camping out for the weekend and going on long hikes, but when they arrived he realized that most of his friends' water canteens were empty. They had planned to fill them up at the campsite, but the campsite's water supply was low because of the month-long drought.

It is most logical that multiple friends had canteens versus a single friend carrying multiple canteens. As a result, we say friends' to denote the plural possessive form of friends. These canteens belonged to multiple friends. However, only one campsite is mentioned (the campsite), so it is more logical then that campsite's is used to denote the possessive form of a single campsite (as written the sentence referred to multiple campsites).

8. The public library takes great pains to make the reading room kid-friendly; it has several toys there available for the children's entertainment, and even provides blankets and pillows for comfort.

Children is plural but has no "s," so add an apostrophe "s" to make it possessive.

9. Before Layla left her cubicle, she placed a lunch order to pick up from a nearby restaurant. It wasn't until after she went back to the offices did she realize she grabbed a bag that wasn't hers.

Here "office" might be preferable, but "offices" is certainly better than "office's" or "offices'" if those are the only choices available. "Hers" and "his" and "its" have no apostrophes when they are possessive in nature.

10. Eloise learned many things about her aunt that she hadn't known before during the five years Eloise lived with her; for example, Eloise found out that her aunt's favorite activities to do on a rainy day were to bake and read mystery novels.

Remember, apostrophes do not make things plural!

11. No Error

12. Last year's valedictorian emphasized in his speech just how much his teachers made an impact on his life.

Teachers is not possessive, and it's likely plural not singular. Do not use apostrophes to indicate plurals.

13. Murano, a commune of Venice, is known for its intricate glassware.

It's means "it is."

14. Although he didn't expect to get a part in the acclaimed director's play, Adam tried out anyway and even got a callback from the director herself.

The play logically belongs to a single director, so this form is most appropriate.

15. No Error

**ANSWER KEY**

1. A   2. C   3. D   4. B   5. D   6. C   7. B   8. C   9. A   10. B   11. B   12. D   13. A   14. C  
15. D

**ANSWER EXPLANATIONS**

1. A. The sentence appropriately uses “it’s” as a contraction for “it is” to describe why painting is the author’s favorite hobby.
2. C. There are two books so the possessive uses only the apostrophe “books’” and spellings is correct as is because it is the plural of how things are spelled. This answer choice is the clearest, otherwise it appears the second book included two different spellings.
3. D. The possessive “its” is used in this sentence to indicate that the wait list belongs to the most popular class. Remember “its’” is never correct.
4. B. Rita’s mother owns the car so the possessive “mother’s” should be used. She is unlikely to have two mothers. If the car belonged to two mothers, then “mothers’” would be correct. Choice D is not incorrect but it’s stylistically awkward and unnecessarily wordy.
5. D. Ricardo is an employee under the company, so the possessive “company’s,” not the plural “companies,” should be used.
6. C. The students is a plural subject, so the possessive is “students’” with the apostrophe. Attention should be singular as it is an abstract mass noun.
7. B. The bottle is the object making the unpleasant noise, so it uses the possessive form “bottle’s.”
8. C. The possessive “novel’s” is used because the novel has the ending. Choice D is wrong because several novels would have several endings, so endings would need to be plural for this choice to be an option (noun agreement).
9. A. The sentence appropriately uses the possessive “city’s” because the city has the nicest boutique hotels.
10. B. The violin contains the strings, so the possessive “its” must be used.
11. B. The possessive is incorrect in this sentence because it describes the regulation in different parts of the world. Apostrophes cannot make words plural. The correct form is “in other regions.”
12. D. A possessive pronoun needs to come before “shadow” because it refers to a physical characteristic of the sculpture. It is also correct as shadow is singular.
13. A. The sentence appropriately uses “it’s” as a contraction for “it is” to describe Costa Rica’s tourism industry (singular noun).
14. C. The lanterns are plural, but the possessive is not necessary in this sentence. The lanterns do not possess anything.
15. D. A possessive pronoun needs to come before “main influence” because it refers to a formative aspect of salsa music. Salsa is singular, so “its” is most appropriate.