

WHAT IS A POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE?

- 1 A **POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE** is a word that describes a noun by showing who possesses that noun.

Whose house is that? It's *my* house.
 possessor is *me* object possessed

IN ENGLISH

Like subject pronouns, possessive adjectives are identified according to the person they represent (see p. 33).

SINGULAR POSSESSOR

1 ST PERSON	my
2 ND PERSON	your
3 RD PERSON	MASCULINE his
	FEMININE her
	NEUTER its

PLURAL POSSESSOR

1 ST PERSON	our
2 ND PERSON	your
3 RD PERSON	their

- 20 A possessive adjective changes according to the possessor, regardless of the noun possessed.

Is that Daniel's house? Yes, it is *his* house.

Is that Alice's house? Yes, it is *her* house.

Although the object possessed is the same (*house*), different possessive adjectives (*his* and *her*) are used because the possessors are different (*Daniel* and *Alice*).

Is that Daniel's house? Yes, it is *his* house.

Are those Daniel's keys? Yes, they are *his* keys.

Although the objects possessed are different (*house* and *keys*), the same possessive adjective (*his*) is used because the possessor is the same (*Daniel*).

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IN FRENCH

Like in English, French possessive adjectives change according to the possessor, but unlike English they also agree, like all French adjectives, in gender and number with the noun possessed.

Let us look at French possessive adjectives to see how they are formed. We have divided the French possessive adjectives into two groups.

SINGULAR POSSESSOR (1ST, 2ND AND 3RD PERS. SING.)

my, your (tu-form), his, her, its

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In French, each of these possessive adjectives has three forms depending on the gender and number of the noun possessed: the masculine singular, the feminine singular, and the plural (the same for both genders).

To choose the correct possessive adjective:

1. Indicate the possessor with the first letter of the possessive adjective.

<i>my</i>		m-
<i>your</i>		t- (tu-form)
<i>his</i>	}	s-
<i>her</i>		
<i>its</i>		

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2. Choose the ending according to the gender and number of the noun possessed.

- noun possessed is masculine singular or feminine singular beginning with a vowel → add **-on**

Alice lit mon livre.	<i>Alice reads my book.</i>
masc. sing.	noun possessed

Alice lit ton livre.	<i>Alice reads your book.</i>
Alice lit son livre.	<i>Alice reads her (his) book.</i>

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Max connaît mon amie.	<i>Max knows my friend.</i>
fem. sing. begins with vowel	noun possessed

Max connaît ton amie.	<i>Max knows your friend.</i>
Max connaît son amie.	<i>Max knows his (her) friend.</i>

- noun possessed is feminine singular beginning with a consonant → add **-a**

Max lit ma lettre.	<i>Max reads my letter.</i>
fem. sing.	noun possessed

Max lit ta lettre.	<i>Max reads your letter.</i>
Max lit sa lettre.	<i>Max reads his (her) letter.</i>

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- noun possessed is plural → add **-es**

Alice lit mes livres.	<i>Alice reads my books.</i>
masc. pl.	noun possessed

Max lit tes lettres.	<i>Max reads your letters.</i>
fem. pl.	

Elle lit ses livres.	<i>She is reading his (her) books.</i>
masc. pl.	

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3. Select the proper form according to the two steps above.

Let us apply the above steps to examples:

Roger is looking at his mother.

1. Possessor: *his* → 3rd pers. sing. → s-
2. Noun possessed: *mère* (*mother*) → feminine singular → a
3. Selection: s- + -a

Roger regarde **sa** mère.

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Roger is looking at his father.

1. Possessor: *his* → 3rd pers. sing. → s-
2. Noun possessed: *père* (*father*) → masculine singular → on
3. Selection: s- + -on

Roger regarde **son** père.

CAREFUL — Make sure that the ending of the possessive adjective agrees with the noun it modifies and not with the possessor. Context usually makes it clear whether you are referring to *his* or *her*.

PLURAL POSSESSOR (1ST, 2ND AND 3RD PERS. PL.)

100 **our, your (vous-form), their**

In French, each of these possessive adjectives has two forms depending on the number of the noun possessed; that is, whether the noun possessed is singular or plural.

■ noun possessed is singular → **notre, votre, or leur**

Marie est **notre** fille. *Mary is **our** daughter.*

noun possessed singular

Roger lit **votre** lettre. *Roger reads **your** letter.*

Ils lisent **leur** lettre. *They read **their** letter.*

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■ noun possessed is plural → **nos, vos, or leurs**

Les parents sont **nos** amis. *The parents are **our** friends.*

noun possessed plural

Alice lit **vos** livres. *Alice reads **your** books.*

Elles lisent **leurs** lettres. *They read **their** letters.*

Although **votre** and **vos** are classified as forms of the second person plural they can refer to a single possessor when used in a formal form of address (see pp. 34-5).

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CAREFUL — Make sure that you use the same “you” form, either familiar or formal, for the verb and the possessive adjective: “*You* are reading *your* letter” would be either “*Tu* lis **ta** lettre” or “*Vous* lisez **votre** lettre.”

SUMMARY

Here is a chart you can use as a reference.

POSSESSOR SINGULAR	NOUN POSSESSED	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
<i>my</i> { MASC. FEM. + VOWEL FEM.	mon mon ma	mes
<i>your</i> { MASC. FEM. + VOWEL FEM. (<i>tu form</i>)	ton ton ta	tes
(<i>vous formal form</i>)	votre	vos
<i>his, her, its</i> { MASC. FEM. + VOWEL FEM.	son son sa	ses
POSSESSOR PLURAL	NOUN POSSESSED	
	SINGULAR	PLURAL
<i>our</i>	notre	nos
<i>your</i>	votre	vos
<i>their</i>	leur	leurs

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In English and in French possession can also be indicated with the possessive form: *Mary's dress, the teacher's book* → la robe **de** Marie, le livre **du** professeur (see *What is the Possessive?*, p. 22).

STUDY TIPS — POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVES

Pattern (see *Tips For Learning Word Forms*, p. 4)

It will be easy for you to establish a pattern if you follow our instructions under "Singular Possessor" and "Plural Possessor" (pp. 95-6).

Practice

1. Sort out your noun flashcards and select a few of the following:

- all masculine nouns
- feminine nouns beginning with a consonant
- feminine nouns beginning with a vowel

2. Look at the French side and go through the cards saying the noun preceded by the correct forms of the possessive adjective. Concentrate on the singular forms **mon, ton, son** since they are the forms that change.

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|--------------------------------|----------------|
| le jardin | <i>garden</i> |
| mon jardin, ton jardin, etc. | |
| la maison | <i>house</i> |
| ma maison, ta maison, etc. | |
| l'adresse (fem.) | <i>address</i> |
| mon adresse, ton adresse, etc. | |

3. Look at the English side and go through the cards saying the French equivalent of the noun preceded by the correct form of the possessive adjective, again concentrating on the singular forms.

Flashcards

1. For review, create one card for each of the persons (1st, 2nd, and 3rd singular and plural) with an example of the different forms, including an example of a feminine singular noun beginning with a vowel.

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|---|-----------------------------------|
| 1. mon livre, ma chaise, mes devoirs | <i>my (book, chair, homework)</i> |
| mon idée (fem.) | <i>my (idea)</i> |
| 2. ton livre, ta chaise, tes devoirs, | <i>your</i> |
| 3. votre (livre, chaise), vos (livres, chaises) | <i>your</i> |

2. On the card for the 3rd person singular, to reinforce the fact that *his*, *her* and *its* can be either **son** or **sa**, write French sentences with 3rd pers. sing. possessive adjectives modifying masculine and feminine singular nouns.

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Il prend son livre. | <i>He takes his (her) book.</i> |
| Elle prend son livre. | <i>She takes his (her) book.</i> |
| Il prend sa chaise. | <i>He takes his (her) chair.</i> |
| Elle prend sa chaise. | <i>She takes his (her) chair.</i> |
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