

## WHAT IS A POSSESSIVE ADJECTIVE?

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

Whose house is that? It's *his* house.

*His* shows who possesses the noun *house*.

The possessor is "he." The thing possessed is *house*.

### IN ENGLISH

Like subject pronouns, possessive adjectives are identified according to the person they represent (see p. 41).

#### SINGULAR POSSESSOR

1 <sup>ST</sup> PERSON	my
2 <sup>ND</sup> PERSON	your
3 <sup>RD</sup> PERSON	MASCULINE his
	FEMININE her
	NEUTER its

#### PLURAL POSSESSOR

1 <sup>ST</sup> PERSON	our
2 <sup>ND</sup> PERSON	your
3 <sup>RD</sup> PERSON	their

The possessive adjective refers only to the person who possesses, i.e., the possessor.

Aeneas was Venus's son. Venus loved *her* son.  
 |  
 possessor

Aeneas's mother was a goddess. He loved *his* mother.  
 |  
 possessor

Troy's walls were high. Troy did not defend *its* walls.  
 |  
 possessor

When the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular (*his*, *her*, *its*) and plural (*their*) are used, two meanings are often possible. For example, the sentence "Medea murdered *her* children" could mean that Medea murdered her own children or someone else's children. Usually the context of the sentence helps us understand the correct meaning. However, when there is

40 a possibility of a misunderstanding, the word “own” is added after the possessive adjective: “Medea murdered *her own* children.” In this case, and whenever *own* can be added after the possessive adjective, the possessive adjective is called **REFLEXIVE**; it “reflects back” to the possessor which is usually the subject of the sentence or clause.

The goddess saw *her* father. [*her own* father]

If the possessive adjective refers to a possessor other than the subject of the sentence or clause, it is called **NON-REFLEXIVE**.

The goddess saw *her* (the nymph’s) father. [*someone else’s* father]

### 50 IN LATIN

As in English, a Latin possessive adjective changes to identify the possessor, but like most Latin adjectives it must agree in case, number, and gender with the noun possessed.

All the Latin possessive adjectives are declined according to Group A (see pp. 122-3). The 3<sup>rd</sup> person possessive adjective **suus**, **-a**, **-um** is reflexive, and can only have the “own” meaning, *his own*, *her own*, *its own*, and *their own*.

60 Here are the steps you should follow to choose the correct possessive adjective and its proper form:

1. **POSSOR:** Indicate the possessor with the stem of the possessive adjective.

#### SINGULAR

<i>my</i>	<b>me-</b>
<i>your</i>	<b>tu-</b>
<i>his, her, its (own)</i>	<b>su-</b>

#### PLURAL

<i>our</i>	<b>nostr-</b> [nom. sing. <b>noster</b> ]
<i>your</i>	<b>vestr-</b> [nom. sing. <b>vester</b> ]
<i>their (own)</i>	<b>su-</b>

2. **NOUN POSSESSED:** Identify the case, gender, and number of the noun possessed.
3. **SELECTION:** Provide the ending of the possessive adjective which reflects the case, gender, and number of the noun possessed.

*Citizens, the walls of **your** city are not high enough!*

1. **POSSOR:** *your* (many people) → 2<sup>nd</sup> per. pl. → **vestr-**

2. **NOUN POSSESSED:** *city* → **urbs**

CASE: possessive → genitive

GENDER & NUMBER: feminine singular

3. **SELECTION:** **vestrae** → genitive feminine singular

*Cīvēs, moenia urbis **vestrae** nōn sunt satis alta.*

*Aeneas loved his mother.*

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1. POSSESSOR: *his* → 3<sup>rd</sup> per. sing. reflexive → **su-**
2. NOUN POSSESSED: *mother* → **māter**  
CASE: direct object → accusative  
GENDER & NUMBER: feminine singular
3. SELECTION: **suam** → accusative feminine singular

*Aenēas mātrem suam amābat.*

*Venus often gave comfort to her son.*

1. POSSESSOR: *her* → 3<sup>rd</sup> per. sing. reflexive → **su-**
2. NOUN POSSESSED: *son* → **filius**  
CASE: indirect object → dative  
GENDER & NUMBER: masculine singular
3. SELECTION: **suō** → dative masculine singular

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*Venus filiō suō consōlātiōnem saepe dedit.*

For the 3<sup>rd</sup> person non-reflexive possessive adjectives, Latin uses the genitive case of the personal pronoun (see p. 45), regardless of the case of the noun modified. These forms: singular → **eius**; plural → **eōrum** (masc. & neut. pl.) and **eārum** (fem. pl.), have endings reflecting the gender and number of the possessor. The literal meaning is *of him, of her, of it, of them*, i.e. **librī eōrum** → *the books of them (their books)*.

*The goddess saw her father.* [referring to the goddess' father]

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Dea patrem **eius** vīdit.

3<sup>rd</sup> person personal pronoun genitive  
fem. sing. (referring to *the goddess*)

Compare to:

*The goddess saw her father.* [referring to her own father]

Dea patrem **suum** vīdit.

3<sup>rd</sup> person reflexive possessive adjective  
acc. masc. sing. agrees with case, gender, and number of  
**patrem** (*father*)

**N.B.** Possessive adjectives are frequently omitted in Latin if there is no doubt as to who is the possessor. However, you should add them in the English translation.

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*Eurōpa cum amīcīs lūdit.*

*Europa is playing with her friends.*



### REVIEW

Underline the possessive adjectives in the following English sentences.

- Fill in the requested information.
- Indicate the gender and number of the possessive adjective in Latin: masculine (M), feminine (F), or neuter (N); singular (S) or plural (P).
- Complete the Latin possessive adjective.

1. We love our mothers.

NOUN POSSESSED: \_\_\_\_\_

■ FUNCTION: \_\_\_\_\_ → CASE: \_\_\_\_\_

■ GENDER & NUMBER: M F N S P

SELECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

Mātrēs nostr\_\_\_\_\_ amāmus.

2. You love your mothers.

NOUN POSSESSED: \_\_\_\_\_

■ FUNCTION: \_\_\_\_\_ → CASE: \_\_\_\_\_

■ GENDER & NUMBER: M F N S P

SELECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

Mātrēs vestr\_\_\_\_\_ amātis.

3. They love their (own) mothers.

REFLEXIVE/NON-REFLEXIVE: R NON-R

NOUN POSSESSED: \_\_\_\_\_

■ FUNCTION: \_\_\_\_\_ → CASE: \_\_\_\_\_

■ GENDER & NUMBER: M F N S P

SELECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

Mātrēs su\_\_\_\_\_ amant.

4. The girls love their (boyfriends') mothers.

REFLEXIVE/NON-REFLEXIVE: R NON-R

■ CASE PERSONAL PRONOUN: \_\_\_\_\_

POSSESSOR: \_\_\_\_\_

■ GENDER & NUMBER: M F N S P

SELECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

Mātrēs e\_\_\_\_\_ amant.