

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services
Singular nouns with plural possessives

To avoid ambiguity, use a singular noun with a plural possessive when only one of the things possessed could belong to each individual.

Forbes knew most of them by their first name.

Four pilots crashed to their death.

Think of the last name of five students in the room.

The steam line ruptured, causing the death of seven longshoremen.

However, take care not to apply the rule to the wrong noun.

Wrong

It is pretty clear that the smile on the face of the delegates, whenever they look at each other, is not a sincere one.

Right

It is pretty clear that the smile on the *faces* of the delegates, whenever they look at each other, is not a sincere one.

(*Smile* is the noun the rule applies to.)