The forms of the genitive

The genitive is formed in two ways:

1. By a prepositional phrase with **of** and a head noun (**of- genitive**):
e.g. the title **of** the book, the top **of** the mountain.

2. By **-s** which is preceded by an apostrophe (which is called **apostrophe -s**) or by an apostrophe only:

a) Apostrophe -s is used in the following:
— when nouns occur in the singular:
e.g. *a child's dream, the dog's kennel, Tom's new job, the boy's toy, the elephant's trunk*
- when two names are joined by **and**, add **'s** to the second:
*John and Mary's bank account; Scott and Henderson's race*

— when singular nouns end in **-s** or **-x**:
e.g. *an actress's career, a waitress's job, St. James's Square, Joe Alex's detective stories*

— when plural nouns do not end in **-s**:
e.g. *the gentlemen's hats, the children's behaviour*.

b) Only apostrophe is used in the following:
— when proper nouns ending in **-s** are classical or less usual:
e.g. *Archimedes' Law, Pepys' Diary*

— when singular nouns form fixed expressions of the type: for ... sake:
e.g. *for goodness' sake, for kindness' sake*
— when plural nouns end in -s:
e.g. *boys' school, girls' school, Winchester Ladies' College, the Joneses' house, the heroes' honesty*.

The use of the genitive

1) The of- genitive
a) The genitive with **of** is usually used with inanimate nouns:
e.g. the leg of the table, the bank of the river.
In some constructions of this type it is possible to use such expressions
e.g. town walls, church tower, where "the possessor" noun functions as an adjective.
b) The **of construction** is also found with animate nouns if they are postmodified by a phrase or relative clause:
e.g. What is the name of the guest in the long white dress?
What is the name of the guest who came first ?

2) The -s genitive
The -s genitive occurs with animate nouns:
e.g. *the family's money, the dog's food*.
There are some cases when inanimate nouns are used in the genitive with apostrophe -s:
a) When inanimate nouns are personified: e.g. *the ship's funnel, the country's beauty*.
b) When nouns denote the length of duration: e.g. *a month's time, a two weeks' holiday*.
c) When nouns concern measurement:
e.g. *five yards' length, a park's area*
d) When nouns express value:
e.g. *fifteen dollars’ worth of flowers*.
e) When inanimate nouns are of special interest to human activity:
e.g. *the science's development, the brain's power*.
f) In a number of idiomatic expressions:
e.g. *to come to one's journey's end, to go down to the water's edge, a pin's head, to be at one's wits' end*.
g) Optionally, when inanimate nouns refer to a group of people, to places where people live, to human institutions:
e.g. *the nation's problems, London's smog, the club's terrains*.
It should be noted that the usage of the **-s genitive** has recently changed. This is observed in such frequently used expressions as:
e.g. *Seven Years War, twenty-four hour general strike*.

The group genitive

1) Compounds are treated as one word and therefore **apostrophe -s** is added to the final part of the word:
*my sister-in-law's car, the passer-by's observation*.
2) In titles apostrophe -s is used with the last word:
e.g. *Henry the Eighth's marriages, the Secretary of State's visit, Elizabeth the First's reign, The Prince of Denmark's island*.
3) In case of nouns that are postmodified apostrophe -s is added to the final part of the post-modification:
e.g. the teacher of biology's equipment -someone else's business.
4) When two or more nouns are conjoined and they denote one idea, they are treated as single units:
e.g. Beaumont and Fletcher's plays
Tom, Mary and John's house. However, when they refer to different ideas, they form the genitive as follows:
e.g. Mr. Brown's and Stephen's gardens or Mr. Brown's garden and Stephen's garden
Eve's and James's books or Eve's books and James's books.

Double genitive

1) Form
The double genitive is formed by combining an **of- genitive** with an **-s genitive**:
e.g. *a friend of Tom's*
*this book of my brother's*.
A double genitive construction must begin with *a, this, that, these, those* whereas it cannot start with the definite article **the** or with the proper noun.
On the contrary, the noun with the **-s genitive** must be both definite and personal.

2) Meaning
The meaning of the double genitive may be observed by the analysis of contrasting examples:
a) a photograph of Tom (means 'a photograph presenting Tom') b) a photograph of Tom's (means either 'a photograph done by Tom' or 'a photograph belonging to Tom')

The genitive with ellipsis

1) Form
The noun modified by the -s genitive may be omitted:
e.g. My daughter is taller than *Mr. Brown's*. *I shall be at the tailor's*.

2) Use
The genitive with ellipsis is used in the following cases:
a) If the identity of the noun is clear from the context:
e.g. I have a tall son. Mr. Greene's is a tall son, too (i.e. 'Mr. Greene's son'}
*His strength is like Hercules'.* (i.e. 'Hercules' strength').
b) In expressions relating to premises or establishments:
e.g. *I shall be at the doctor's*. *I shall be at Mary's*.
The same refers to small shops:
e.g. I always buy at Smith's.
as well as to commercial firms:
e.g. *I always buy at Harrod's*.