Apostrophes

Five Steps in Using the Apostrophe Correctly

1. Look for possessive construction. Usually two nouns appear together. The first noun shows ownership of, or a special relationship to, the second noun.
   - the girl's car
   - one month's time
   - the employees' duties

2. Reverse the nouns using a prepositional phrase. Examine the ownership word. Does it end in an "s" sound?
   - car of the girl (ownership word, girl, does not end in an "s" sound)
   - time of one month = (ownership word, month, does not end in an "s" sound)
   - duties of employees (ownership word, employees, does end in an "s" sound)

3. If the ownership word does NOT end in an "s" sound, add an apostrophe and "s."
   - car of the girl (ownership word does not end in an "s") = girl's car
   - time of one month (ownership word does not end in an "s") = one month's time

4. If the ownership word DOES end in an "s" sound, usually add only an apostrophe.
   - duties of employees (ownership word ends in an "s") = employees' duties
   - rent of six months (ownership word ends in an "s") = six months' rent

5. If an extra syllable can be easily pronounced in the possessive form, add an apostrophe and "s" to singular nouns. Relatively few words fall in this category.
   - station of the waitress = waitress's station (extra syllable can be pronounced)
   - desk of the boss = boss's desk (extra syllable can be pronounced)

Try your skill in making words possessive in the following. Write the correct form in the space provided. Write C if the sentence is correct.

1. We must answer this customers e-mail immediately.

2. Is Tylers report ready to be submitted?

3. In six months time you will have forgotten about this event.

4. Some customers felt they didn't get their moneys worth.

5. All applicants must pay two months rent in advance.

6. Our company's policy is to issue credit, not cash, refunds.

7. All new depositors qualify for free checking accounts.
8. The goal of the IRS is to simplify all taxpayers' returns.

9. Passengers' concerns about cell phone use on planes is valid.

10. Every passengers' luggage must be X-rayed, and some bags will be opened.

11. The profits of all companies are being affected by developing technologies and worldwide competition.

12. Sam told me that five dollars' worth of gas would not take me very far.

13. Nearly all management firms tailor their services and charges to a customer's needs.

14. Police officers checked all drivers' licenses at two checkpoints.

15. You can download many news releases that promote cell phones and ring tones.

Key

1. customer's (e-mail of this customer)
2. Tyler's (report of Tyler)
3. months' (time of six months). Notice that ownership word ends in "s."
4. money's (worth of their money). No apostrophe is needed for the plural word "customers."
5. months' (rent of two months). No apostrophe is needed for the plural word "applicants."
6. company's policy (policy of our company)
7. C. The words "depositors" and "accounts" end in "s," but they are merely plural nouns. They do not show possession. We do not see two nouns together.
8. taxpayers' (returns of taxpayers)
9. Passengers' (concerns of passengers)
10. passenger's (luggage of every passenger)
11. C. The nouns "profits," "companies," and "technologies" are all plural words. They do not show possession.
12. dollars' (worth of five dollars)
13. customer's (needs of a customer)
14. drivers' (licenses of all drivers). Note that some states are now calling them "driver licenses," using the word "driver" as an adjective rather than as a possessive.
15. C. The word "news" functions as an adjective telling what kind of "release" it is. Therefore, it is not possessive.