**What are shares?**

A share is a certificate that says you are a part owner of a particular company. As a part owner of a company, you get access to all the advantages that come with that company. Shares are also called stocks, securities or equities.

As an owner of a share, the value of your share depends on the market. If the market thinks your shares are more valuable, then your assets have grown as people are willing to pay you more to buy your share. If the market thinks the value of your share has fallen, then your asset value has also fallen.

Also as an owner, you get to share in the profits of the company. This is called a dividend and is usually payable twice a year.

Shares are traded on an exchange. In Australia that’s the Australian Securities Exchange. Shares can only be bought and sold by a licenced stock broker who charges a fee to do the exchange. Brokers can be a person on the exchange trading floor, or they can make trades over the phone, or through an online trading portal.

When you trade stocks online, you're using an online broker rather than a human broker. Real money is still involved, but rather than talking to a person about investments, you can decide which stocks to buy and sell yourself. Some online brokers offer advice from live brokers and assistance with trades.