The Writing Centre’s Guide to Apostrophes
Apostrophes – The Beginning

- There are two distinct purposes of the apostrophe:
  - Contractions
  - Indicating Possession
Contractions

What is it?

• It is a shortened form of two words.
• It can add an informal tone to your writing.
• Use caution when using contractions in essays.
Contractions

- When two words are shortened into one and one or more letters are left out, the apostrophe goes in the place of the missing letter(s).

- The apostrophe is also used to show the omission of numbers
  - The class of 1997 = The class of ‘97

- Here are examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original</th>
<th>Contraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They are</td>
<td>They’re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not</td>
<td>Didn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not</td>
<td>Won’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is, who has</td>
<td>Who’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is not</td>
<td>Isn’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let us</td>
<td>Let’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is, it has</td>
<td>It’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You would</td>
<td>You’d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is, there has</td>
<td>There’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are</td>
<td>We’re</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will</td>
<td>We’ll</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is, she has</td>
<td>She’s</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Possession

What is it? 😞?

• The apostrophe also shows ownership.
• In these cases there are two nouns.
• The owner is the first noun.
• The apostrophe is given to this noun.
• It possesses the noun or nouns that come right after it.
Examples:
Ask yourself, who possesses what?
The student’s homework
The opera singer’s voice
A driver’s license
Worker’s compensation
A day’s work
Your money’s worth
Examples:

Ask yourself, **who** possesses **what**?

The student’s homework

The opera singer’s voice

A driver’s license

Worker’s compensation

A day’s work

Your money’s worth
Examples:
Ask yourself, who possesses what?
The student’s homework
The opera singer’s voice
A driver’s license
Worker’s compensation
A day’s work
Your money’s worth
Other rules to remember

**Add an apostrophe and an “s” to singular and plural nouns that don’t end in “s”:**

- Person + ’s = the person’s opinion
- Teacher + ’s = the teacher’s lecture
- Father-in-law + ’s = my father-in-law’s house
- People + ’s = people’s choice
- Women + ’s = women’s coat
- Children + ’s = children’s toys

**Add ONLY an apostrophe to the end of plural nouns that end in “s”:**

- James + ’ = James’ dog
- Boys + ’ = the boys’ washroom
- Two girls + ’ = two girls’ dolls
- Doctors + ’ = doctors’ office
- Workers + ’ = workers’ break
- Bridget Jones + ’ = Bridget Jones’ Diary
Other rules to remember

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Remember!

• Don’t assume that if a word ends in “s”, it is possessive.

• Make sure that the word possesses something before you give it an apostrophe.

Examples:
• The hunters were angry.
• We invited the Johnsons over for dinner.

Notice there are no apostrophes in the words “hunters” and “Johnsons” because these words do not possess anything.
Remember!

• Don’t assume that if a word ends in “s”, it is possessive.

• Make sure that the word possesses something before you give it an apostrophe.

Examples:
• The **hunters** were angry.
• We invited the **Johnsons** over for dinner.

Notice there are no apostrophes in the words “hunters” and “Johnsons” because these words do not possess anything.
Special Considerations

**Joint Possession**

• If more than one noun has ownership of the same thing, only the last noun should be possessive.
  - Joyce and Greg’s new car is red
  (The car belongs to both Joyce and Greg)

• To show individual possession, make each noun possessive.
  - Joyce’s and Greg’s opinions were different.
  (The opinions that Joyce had were different from the opinions that Greg had)
Special Considerations

Plurals of Numbers, Letters, and Abbreviations

- An apostrophe and an “s” can be used to pluralize single letters and abbreviations with punctuation.
  
  Examples:

  - Make sure to cross your t’s and dot your i’s.
  - Three students got A’s on the test.
  - It took Joanne many years to earn their Ph.D.’s.

- You only need to add an “s” to make numbers and abbreviations without punctuation plural.
  
  Examples:

  - My grandfather was born in the 1930s.
  - Isabelle loved to skate figure 8s.
  - There have been many UFOs sighted in New Mexico.
Possessive Pronouns

- Note that in the following words, which are called possessive pronouns, are already possessive in form and do **NOT** take an apostrophe or an “s”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chart of possessive pronouns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My/Mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her/Hers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s Review what we’ve learned:

1. Contractions
2. Possession
3. Joint Possession
4. Plurals of Numbers, Letters, and Abbreviations
5. Possessive Pronouns

You’re finished!

**If you found this helpful, please speak to one of our Writing Centre tutors on ways to view these slides on your own time**