

The apostrophe is used for two distinct purposes: to indicate contraction and to indicate possession.

Contraction

A contraction is the shortened form of two words. Using contractions can add an informal tone to your writing. Apostrophes are used in contractions to indicate the omission of letters.

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

Examples:

they are = they're
did not = didn't
will not = won't
who is, who has = who's

is not = isn't
let us = let's
it is, has = it's
you would = you'd

there is = there's
we are = we're
we will = we'll
she is, she has = she's

The apostrophe is also used to show the omission of numbers.

Example: The class of 2005 = the class of '05

Exercise 1

Write the following set of words in their contracted form.

he will _____
you have _____
I am _____
do not _____
would not _____
where is _____

you will _____
it is _____
Jill is _____
they have _____
you are _____
has not _____

can not _____
have not _____
we are _____
should not _____
will not _____
could have _____

Exercise 2

Place an apostrophe where necessary in these sentences.

1. Im sorry, but we wont be able to attend the party on Friday.
2. Whats wrong with Dave? He hasnt come to class in two weeks.
3. The exam didnt have any questions on it that I couldnt answer.
4. Jonathan graduated Humber Colleges class of 99.

Possession

The apostrophe also shows ownership or possession. The owner is the first noun, and the apostrophe is given to the owner. It possesses the noun or nouns that come right after it.

Examples:

the student's homework
the opera singer's voice
a driver's license

worker's compensation
a day's work
your money's worth

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

Examples:

person	+ 's = the person's opinion	people	+ 's = people's rights
teacher	+ 's = the teacher's lecture	women	+ 's = women's rights
father-in-law	+ 's = my father-in-law's house	children	+ 's = children's toys
Bob	+ 's = Bob's hat	anyone	+ 's = anyone's responsibility

Add an apostrophe and an s to singular nouns that end in s:

Examples:

James	+ 's = James's	My boss	+ 's = My boss's
Paris	+ 's = Paris's	The business	+ 's = The business's

Add *only* an apostrophe to *plural* nouns that end in s:

Examples:

the Smiths	+ 's = the Smiths' boat	two girls	+ 's = two girls' dolls
boys	+ 's = boys' washroom	doctors	+ 's = doctors' office
musicians	+ 's = musicians' instruments	workers	+ 's = workers' break

Exercise 3

Make the following words possessive.

1. students
2. businesswomen
3. boys
4. girl
5. no one
6. Humber College
7. summer
8. Canada
9. yesterday
10. prime minister

Warning!

Don't assume that if a word ends in an s, it is possessive. Make sure that the word possesses something before you put in an apostrophe.

The **workers** were angry.
We invited the **Kennedys** over for dinner.

Notice that there are no apostrophes after the **workers** and **Kennedys** because these words do not possess the next.

Special Considerations:

Joint Possession

If more than one noun has ownership of the same thing, only the last noun should be possessive, as in the following:

Example: *Jillian* and *Jordan's* new car is red.

To show individual possession of something, make each noun possessive.

Example: *Jillian's* and *Jordan's* expectations were different.

Exercise 4

Add an apostrophe where necessary to show either joint or individual possession.

1. This is Chris and Pams new house.
2. Brett, Nathan, and Adams team won the competition.
3. Billys and Jimmys dads work together.
4. Sallys and Suzies trophies are in the display cabinet.

Plurals of Numbers, Letters, and Abbreviations

An *apostrophe* and an *s* can be used to pluralize single letters that appear in lowercase. This rule is meant to assist the reader's understanding and maintain clarity.

Examples:

Wrong: Make sure to cross all your ts and dot your is.

Correct: Make sure to cross all your t's and dot your i's.

The second sentence is much easier to read because the apostrophe clarifies the lowercase.

It is not necessary to use apostrophes when indicating plurals on capital letters, numbers or abbreviations. (Keep in mind that some professors and instructors prefer apostrophes to be used.)

Examples: There have been many UFOs sighted in New Mexico.

My grandfather was born in the 1930s.

Possessive Pronouns

Note that the following words, which are called possessive pronouns, are *already possessive* in form and **do not take** an apostrophe or an s.

my/mine
your/your
her/hers
his

its
our/ours
their/theirs
whose