

Basic Apostrophe Rules

The apostrophe has three uses:

1. to form possessives of nouns
2. to show the omission of letters

Forming Possessives of Nouns

the girl's shoes = the shoes of the girl

four days' vacation = vacation of four days

Once you've determined whether you need to make a possessive, follow these rules to create one:

- add 's to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in -s):

the dog's bone

James's car (James' car is also acceptable.)

- add 's to the plural forms that do not end in -s:

the men's room

the children's toys

- add ' to the end of plural nouns that end in -s:

the girls' swim team

four friends' pact

- add 's to the end of compound words:

my mother-in-law's apple pie

- add 's to the last noun to show joint possession of an object:

Jerry and Lynn's apartment

Showing omission of letters

Apostrophes are used in contractions. A contraction is a word in which one or more letters have been omitted. The apostrophe shows this omission. Contractions are common in speaking and in informal writing but should be avoided in formal writing. To use an apostrophe to create a contraction, place an apostrophe where the omitted letter(s) would go. Here are some examples:

don't = do not

I'm = I am

he'll = he will

who's = who is

shouldn't = should not

didn't = did not

could've = could have (NOT "could of")

'60 = 1960

NOTE: the 1960s = the years in decade from 1960 to 1969

The 1960s were a time of great social unrest.

Do not use apostrophes for personal pronouns, the relative pronoun *who*, or for noun plurals.

Apostrophes should not be used with possessive pronouns because possessive pronouns already show possession; they don't need an apostrophe. His, her, its, my, yours, ours are all possessive pronouns. However, indefinite pronouns, such as one, anyone, other, no one, and anybody, can be made possessive. Here are some examples:

wrong: his' cat

correct: his cat

correct: one's cat

correct: anybody's cat

wrong: a colleague of yours'

correct: a colleague of yours

wrong: Who's peach is this?

correct: Whose peach is this?

Its and it's are not the same thing. *It's* is a contraction for "it is." *Its* is a possessive pronoun meaning "belonging to it." It's raining out= It is raining out. A simple way to remember this rule is the fact that you don't use an apostrophe for the possessive his or hers, so don't do it with its.

wrong: The board made **it's** final recommendation.

correct: The board made **its** final recommendation.

Always check to make sure you need an apostrophe; you might just have a plural noun.

wrong: She waited for three **hours'** to get her ticket.

correct: She waited for three **hours** to get her ticket.