



THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe is used in a variety of situations and is one of the most complicated punctuation marks to use. Unless you know for sure that the way you use it is always correct, it is a good idea to double check its use during your editing sessions or revise your sentence to avoid it.

19a

Mark omissions when parts of words are removed

An apostrophe is used to show that one or more letters have been omitted. For instance, use an apostrophe to show in *I'm* that the *a* has been deleted.

1. Mark contractions when parts of words are removed

- I'm, you're, he's, she's, it's, they're, we're
- I hadn't, you haven't
- I can't, I couldn't, you won't, you wouldn't, they'll, they shouldn't

2. Mark numbers when parts of numbers are removed

- in the year '95

3. Mark words used to represent oral language

When using unusual or informal spellings to represent oral language, you can use apostrophes to mark contractions.

- a-walkin', trekin', y'all

DID YOU KNOW?

You ain't ever gonna believe this! *Ain't* is, in fact, a word. This "improper" word is a contraction of *am* (from the verb *to be*) and *not*—similar in construction to *isn't* and *aren't*. Grammatically, it should follow a first person pronoun (*I*), but it is often used in informal speech following any noun. But watch out! *Ain't* ain't acceptable in formal English.



19b

Form plurals

The MLA recommends that an apostrophe along with an *-s* be used to create the plural of abbreviations that include lowercase letters, uppercase letters, or both.

- ➔ A's, B's, C's, D's, E's
- ➔ PhD's, Mind your P's and Q's!

However, many instructors prefer that no apostrophe be used at all.

- ➔ As, Bs, Cs, Ds, Es
- ➔ PhDs, Mind your Ps and Qs

Some instructors may prefer that you italicize the letter and use regular font style for the *-s* ending.

- ➔ *As, Bs, Cs, Ds, Es*

It is best to check with your instructor on how he or she wants you to format letters.

Helpful hint

Apostrophes, in general, should not be used to form the plurals of numbers, abbreviations or acronyms that include all uppercase letters, and phrases that refer to words.

- 1980s, the 60s
- TAs, CEOs, IOUs
- She uses many *ands* but not enough other conjunctions in her writing.



How would you edit this sign?

19c

Form possessives

An apostrophe is used in various ways to form possessives. Knowing the difference between singular nouns, indefinite pronouns, and plural nouns will help you use the apostrophe correctly.

1. Form singular possessives

A. SINGULAR NOUNS

An apostrophe and *-s* can be added to most singular nouns and acronyms to form the possessive.

- Sam's book, the student's pen, the new sign's message
- the CEO's email, MLA's style guide



Helpful
hint

In the past, several apostrophe rules were dependent on what letter ended the singular noun. However, *The MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* now recommends always using an apostrophe and *-s* at the end of any singular noun. If your instructor wants you to use another style guide for your research and writing, you will need to check how this rule is handled in that system.

→ Giles's plan, the boss's idea, Ms. Jones's books

B. PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronouns do not take an apostrophe since they already show possession.

→ my, your, yours, his, her, hers, its, our, ours, their, theirs

C. INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

An apostrophe and an *-s* is used at the end of an indefinite pronoun to show possession.

→ anyone's, anybody's, everyone's, everybody's, someone's, somebody's

2. Mark plural possessives

Plural nouns that do not end in *-s* take an apostrophe plus an *-s* to form the possessive. Plural nouns that end in *-s* only take the apostrophe.

→ the children's song, the geese's honk, the data's collection

→ the cats' meows, the judges' decision, the zodiacs' signs, the Smiths' house, the Joneses' cat

3. Form possessive compound nouns

When a sentence includes conjoined nouns, the type of ownership or possession determines how to use the apostrophe. If each noun has separate ownership, each noun is marked by the possessive. If the

nouns have ownership together, only the last noun is made possessive by using the apostrophe.

Separate ownership → Sam's and Alex's zodiac signs are not compatible.

Joint ownership → Jack and Jill's pail fell down the hill.

19d

Form compounds

An apostrophe and *-s* is placed at the end of a compound word when signaling possession.

→ my mother-in-law's sign, mother-of-pearl's color

An apostrophe and *-s* can be placed at the end of a plural compound word, or the possession can be signaled with an *of* phrase.

→ my brothers-in-law's zodiac signs

→ the zodiac signs of my brothers-in-law



What is wrong with the sign in this picture?

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Add the missing apostrophes to the following paragraph.

I cant believe how lucky I was to land the latest client for my advertising company. Its not that I doubted my abilities, but this client has been particularly picky in choosing an advertising firm to represent it. Since its such an established company, the boards decision to reinvent themselves with a new logo could launch them into future success or signal the end of their heyday. Its a delicate situation to be sure, and Im excited for the challenge. I already have an idea in mind, and its success could land me a significant promotion if all goes to plan. Though I cant disclose specific details, Ill just say that the clients former business focus was on an outdated technology. Now that theyve adapted to modern technological advances, my job is to bring their image up to date as well. Ive handled similar situations with other outdated companies images with success, so Im confident that Ill be able to pull this off. I cant wait to see my familys reaction when I tell them about this great news!

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