

Apostrophes

APSU Writing Center Handout

Use apostrophes (') to:

indicate possession.

show omission of letters or numbers.

form plural of letters, numbers, and symbols.

Do not use apostrophes to:

form possessive pronouns (my/mine, our/ours, your/yours, his, her/hers, their/theirs, its, whose).

form noun plurals that are not possessives.

Multiple Nouns Showing Possession

If the nouns possess separate things, make each noun possessive.

- **Example:** Mary-Kate's and Ashley's acting careers began when they were only infants.

If the nouns jointly possess one thing, make only the last noun possessive.

- **Example:** I am my mom and dad's second child. I am my dad and mom's second child.

To Show Possession

To see if you have a possessive, turn the phrase around to make an "of the..." phrase.

- **Example:** the newspaper's column = the column of the newspaper

To show possession by a singular noun, add ('s) to the singular form of the word (even if it ends with the letter s.)

- **Example:** the owner's car.

- **Example:** James's hat.

Plural nouns not ending in s

Add 's.

Example: the children's game

Example: the geese's honking

Plural nouns ending in s

Add only an apostrophe (').

Example: the houses' roofs

Example: three friends' letters

Joint Possession

Add 's to the last noun only.

Example: Todd and Anne's apartment.

To Form Plurals of Letters, Numbers, and Symbols

Use apostrophes to make letters, numbers, and symbols plural for clarity.

Example: Nita got A's on her Biology quizzes.

Example: There are six 5's in my SSN.

Contractions

A contraction is a shortened form of a group of words. It combines two or more words by removing certain letters and replacing them with an apostrophe. Only specific word combinations can form contractions.

When Should I Use Contractions?

Use contractions when:

You want a conversational or informal tone

You are writing dialogue in stories

You are writing everyday speech

Avoid contractions when:

Writing formal or professional documents

Writing cover letters, résumés, business writing, or academic essays (unless quoting)

Its and It's

Its is a possessive pronoun meaning belonging to it.

- **Example:** This town is famous for its beautiful buildings.
- **Example:** The film has been shown in its entirety for the first time.
- **Example:** A bird may be known by its song.

It's is a contraction of "it is" or "it has."

- **Example:** It's necessary to avoid stress.
- **Example:** I think it's a wild goose chase.
- **Example:** It's likely that she'll succeed.

Common Contractions

aren't → are not

can't → cannot

couldn't → could not

didn't → did not

doesn't → does not

don't → do not

hadn't → had not

hasn't → has not

haven't → have not

he'd → he had; he would

he'll → he will; he shall

he's → he is; he has

I'd → I had; I would

I'll → I will; I shall

I'm → I am

I've → I have

isn't → is not

let's → let us

mightn't → might not

mustn't → must not

shan't → shall not

she'd → she had; she would

References

Southern Utah University. (2000). *Apostrophe*. Sothern Utah University Writing Center.

<https://www.suu.edu/writingcenter/undergraduate/pdf/tip-sheets/apostrophe.pdf>

Tucker, A. (2011). *Contractions*. San José State University Writing Center.

<https://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/docs/handouts/Contractions.pdf>