

# APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes show possession, replace letters in contractions, and occasionally create plurals. This guide discusses some common apostrophe rules.

Since 2001, the Apostrophe Protection Society has sought to preserve the correct use of the apostrophe!

**NOTE:** Academic writing does not use contractions to preserve a scholarly tone.

## APOSTROPHES SHOWING POSSESSION

**Single Owner:** To show possession by a single owner, add an apostrophe and -s.

- A student's paper
- The baby's blanket

**Single Owner Ending in -s:** Even if the single owner ends with -s, add an apostrophe and -s.

- My boss's report
- Kansas's weather
- Chris's car

**NOTE:** Style manuals may vary and prescribe adding only an apostrophe to some nouns ending with -s. When in doubt, check your style manual.

**Multiple Owners Ending in -s:** In most cases where there are multiple owners, just add an apostrophe.

- The students' professor
- The babies' mothers

**Multiple Owners Not Ending in -s:** To show possession by multiple owners **not** ending in -s, add an apostrophe and -s.

- Children's program
- Men's group

**Possessive Pronouns:** Possessive pronouns already show possession. They do not need apostrophes.

- |                          |                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| ⊗ This is yours'         | ⊗ Who's is this?           |
| ✓ This is yours          | ✓ Whose is this?           |
| ⊗ These papers are hers' | ⊗ Give this to it's author |
| ✓ These papers are hers  | ✓ Give this to its author  |

**Indefinite and Reciprocal Pronouns:** Indefinite pronouns do not refer to a particular person, place, or thing and include words like “anyone,” “someone,” “anything,” or “something.” Reciprocal pronouns express a mutual relationship and include words like “each other” or “one another.” Both these types of pronouns require apostrophes to show possession. These follow the same rules for single and multiple owners as listed above.

- Anyone’s call
- All the others’ opinions
- Everybody’s first choice

**Joint Ownership:** To express that two or more individuals own something, only the last individual takes on the possessive form.

- John, Tim, and Michael’s camping trip
- Mother and father’s home

**Individual Ownership:** If two or more individuals own separate things, each individual takes on the possessive form.

- John’s, Tim’s, and Michael’s hiking boots
- Mother’s and father’s jobs

#### AWKWARD USE OF APOSTROPHES

Sometimes using apostrophes creates awkward or confusing constructions. Often, it is best to revise these awkward sentences by including “of” or “belonging to.”

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| ⊗ Mothers Against Drunk Driving’s press release      | ⊗ San Francisco’s demography                    |
| ✓ The press release of Mothers Against Drunk Driving | ✓ The demography of San Francisco               |
| ⊗ Angela’s aunt’s office                             | ⊗ The waitress at the Corner Cafe’s sister      |
| ✓ The office belonging to Angela’s aunt              | ✓ The sister of the waitress at the Corner Cafe |
|  | ⊗ The lady-in-waiting’s amusement               |
|  | ✓ The amusement of the lady-in-waiting          |

#### APOSTROPHES FORMING CONTRACTIONS

Apostrophes indicate where sounds have been omitted in contractions. Most contractions are informal and should not be used in academic writing.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ● Who is = Who’s: <i>Who’s that?</i>            | ● She had/would = She’d: <i>She’d gone out of town.</i> |
| ● It is = It’s: <i>It’s my friend.</i>          | ● Will not = Won’t: <i>She won’t be coming.</i>         |
| ● Could not = Couldn’t: <i>I couldn’t come.</i> |   |

- Noun + is/has: i.e. book is = book's: *The book's on the shelf.*

- 1990s = '90s: *It was written sometime in the '90s.*

## AVOID MISSPELLINGS

Since academic writers should generally avoid contractions, you must be careful to correctly identify the full-length words. For example, contractions ending in *-'ve*, when pronounced, sound like "of." However, *-'ve* is short for the word "have." The contraction "might've" sounds like "might of," but it is short for the words "might have." Contractions like *could've*, *should've*, *must've*, and *would've* stand for *could have*, *should have*, *must have*, and *would have*.

## APOSTROPHES CREATING PLURALS

Apostrophes rarely form plurals. Exceptions to this involve the plurals of lowercase letters and abbreviations with multiple periods. Apostrophes in these instances help prevent misreading. It is no longer necessary to use apostrophes to create other plurals.

- ⊙ Her math homework was filled with xs and ys.
- ✓ Her math homework was filled with x's and y's.
- ⊙ He carefully dotted each of his is.
- ✓ He carefully dotted each of his i's.
- ⊙ The student already had two B.A.s.
- ✓ The student already had two B.A.'s.

- ⊙ She was born in the 1980's.
- ✓ She was born in the 1980s.
- ⊙ Several B-52's
- ✓ Several B-52s
- ⊙ In the stack of Bibles, there were two NASB's and four ESV's.
- ✓ In the stack of Bibles, there were two NASBs and four ESVs.

**PRACTICE NOW**