

# **Apostrophes**

**Gordon College Writing  
Center**

*“Saving the World, One Paper at a Time”*

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# **An apostrophe ( ' ) is a punctuation mark.**

When apostrophes are misused, your writing may become unclear to your readers. In English we use apostrophes in three unique ways:

- 1) With contractions
- 2) With possessives
- 3) With plurals

# Using Apostrophes within Contractions

- We'll begin with the use of apostrophes to form contractions.
- A contraction is the combination of two words into one abbreviated form.
- The apostrophe is placed where letters have been deleted.

## Examples:

have + not	= haven't
should + not	= shouldn't
will + not	= won't
it + is	= it's

# Contractions- Continued

Other Types of Contractions:

of the clock = o'clock

1929 = '29

To be concise we often use contractions in our everyday language, and sometimes in informal writing. As a general rule, though, contractions do **not** belong in either academic or professional composition.

# Using Apostrophes to Show Possession

- Possession is showing ownership.
- If something belongs to you, then you own or *possess* it.
- We mark this possession in multiple ways.

Singular Nouns: use 's

Courtland's pool

the garden's gate

Singular Nouns ending in -s: you may omit the **s** after the apostrophe

Charles's dog

(or)

Charles' dog

the glass's handle

(or)

the glass' handle

Plural Nouns ending in –s: add only an apostrophe  
the horses' pasture      The Smiths' house

Plural Nouns **not** ending in –s: (women, geese, children) use 's  
the women's club      the geese's pond

Indefinite Pronouns: (pronouns ending in –one or –body) use 's  
everybody's opinion      no one's business

Compound Words: add 's after the last word  
mother-in-law's cooking      everyone else's paper

Joint Ownership [of two or more nouns]: after the last noun use 's  
Sam and Savannah's dog [one shared dog]

Individual Ownership [of multiple nouns]: add 's after **each** noun  
Sam's and Savannah's dogs [two dogs]

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The most common mistake when using apostrophes is the misuse of **its** and **it's**. So let's get this straight right now, once and for all:

**Its** is the possessive of the pronoun it. (The dog wagged its tail.)

**It's** is the contraction of it + is. (I think it's going to rain tonight.)

So when you see it's, always think "it is." The dog wagged *it is* tail makes no sense.

# Using Apostrophes with Plurals

- Finally, apostrophes can be used to form the plurals of letters, numbers, abbreviations, and symbols.

## Necessary apostrophes:

*a*'s

B.A.'s

*A*'s

## Optional apostrophes:

8s

(or)

8's

1940s

(or)

1940's

UFOs

(or)

UFO's

&s

(or)

&'s

**Whichever you choose to do, be consistent!**

# Conclusion:

## Editing for Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are **not** used with Possessive Pronouns:

his

hers

whose

ours

yours

theirs

- Regular (non-possessive) forms of Plural Nouns do not need apostrophes either:

The **Taylors** went to Alaska on vacation.

**Dogs** like to be scratched behind their ears.

- When editing for apostrophe use, you need to be able to distinguish between an **s** used to form a plural subject and an **'s** used to form a plural possessive:

The *boys* forgot their coats. (plural subject)

The *boys'* coats are on the bed. (plural possessive)

- Always remember that nouns can only possess other nouns. They cannot possess verbs.

**Note:** This presentation is not an original work; it is primarily a compilation of information, ideas, and examples borrowed from various sources, including: the *Prentice-Hall Reference Guide*, the *Little, Brown Handbook – Brief Version*, and the *Longman Writer’s Companion*.

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