

Using Apostrophes Correctly

And Other Related Issues

Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are perhaps the most confusing of all punctuation marks.
- They have a number of uses:
 - ◆ **Showing possession**
 - ◆ **Singular**
 - ◆ **Plural**
 - ◆ **Joint**
 - ◆ **Indicating omissions**
 - ◆ **Forming some plurals**
- Some of the uses seem contradictory; that's why they are confusing.



Showing Singular Possession

● Add **'s** to make most single nouns possessive.

◆ **A day's pay** **Les's presentation**

◆ **Harry's vomit** ***Bridget Jones's Diary***

● **Exception:** Add only **'** to words that already end in **s** if pronunciation would be difficult with **'s**.

◆ **Socrates' philosophy**

◆ **Massachusetts' laws**



Showing Plural Possession

- Add only ' to show possession for plural nouns ending in **s**.
 - ◆ **the instructors' meagre salaries**
 - ◆ **17 students' marks**
 - ◆ **Three weeks' pay**
- Add 's for words that don't use **s** to form plurals
 - ◆ **The children's boots are wet.**
 - ◆ **We have two men's rooms in the building.**



Showing Joint Possession

- Joint possession indicates that two or more people share something.
- The apostrophe should be added to the last item in the series.
 - Bob and Carol's house**
- Exception:** Add the apostrophe to both items to show individual possession.
 - Ted's and Alice's cars**



Rules for Compound Nouns

- Hyphenated nouns add to the confusion.
- Show possession by adding 's at the end of the word.
 - ◆ **The governor-general's car**
 - ◆ **My brother-in-law's boat**
- **But:** To form the plurals of hyphenated nouns, add **s** only to the first word.
 - ◆ **Governors-general from four countries**
 - ◆ **Brothers-in-law and their wives**



Forming Contractions

● Apostrophes are used to show where letters or numbers have been left out.

- **Do not = don't**
- **The flood of '97**
- **Should have = should've**
- **It is = it's**



(not “should of”)

(Memorize this rule)

- Contractions are frequently used in speaking and informal writing.
- When in doubt, write the words out in full without using a contraction.

Forming Plurals

- Add **'s** to form the plurals of numbers, letters, symbols, and abbreviations.

A sale on **VCR's**

I got two **A's**

His **5's** look like **S's**

I use many **@'s** with e-mail

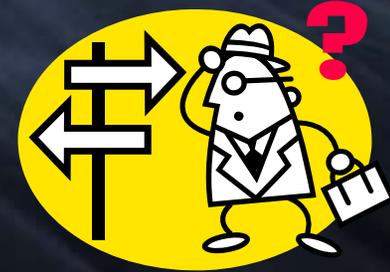
- **Note:** Some guides recommend not using apostrophes to show plurals in abbreviations and numbers.

● **VCRs**

5s

1920s

- Choose one rule or the other and follow it consistently.



Using Pronouns to Show Possession

■ Personal pronouns do not use apostrophes to show possession.

◆ We refer to **his** boat, not **he's** boat

■ None of these pronouns uses an apostrophe:

◆ **His, hers, ours, yours, theirs, whose, its**

◆ **Note: It's = it is** **It's a nice day**

◆ **A chicken lays eggs in its nest.**



Using Pronouns to Show Possession

Indefinite pronouns use 's to show possession in the same way as nouns

◆ Someone's car each other's work

◆ Anybody's guess no-one's fault



Trouble Spots

■ Don't use apostrophes to form the plurals of names

✗ Come to a party with the Jackson's.

✓ Have a visit with the Osbournes.

■ On a related note, don't change **y** to **ies** when forming plurals of names ending in **y**

✗ Pictures of the Kennedies

✗ Gossip about the Kennedy's

✓ Scandals involving the Kennedys



More Trouble Spots

■ Don't use apostrophes to make nouns plural

✗ Customer's will be served on the terrace.

✓ Customers will be served in the bar.

■ Remember that **it's** means **it is**

✗ Every dog has **it's** day.

✓ Every dog has **its** day.

✓ **It's** about time this presentation ended.



Practice Exercise

- Let's get some practice with apostrophes before attempting the homework.

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http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Hot_Potato/apostrophe6.htm