



Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logos

APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes are a form of punctuation that indicates possession or a contraction made up of two words.

Possession

If a noun does not end in **s**, use **'s** to show possession:

Myra's best friend is a rock.

If a noun ends in **s**, add **'s** even though there is an **s**:

James's pet monkey likes to bite.

If a noun is plural and ends in **s**, add an **'** at the end of the word:

The **girls'** cars were vandalized.

If a noun is plural and does not end in **s**, add **'s**:

The **geese's** feathers were covered in slime.

Contractions

Contractions show that the writer is combining two words and omitting certain letters from one or both of the words.

I could not breathe. → I **couldn't** breathe.

She is so bored. → **She's** so bored.

They are beautiful people. → **They're** beautiful people.

He will not do his work. → He **won't** do his work.

OR → **He'll** not do his work.

Special Cases

When making decades and symbols plural, do not use an apostrophe:

The **1980s** were the years Reagan took over.
The page is marked with **&s** to denote “and.”

Do not use apostrophes on possessive pronouns or noun plurals without possession:

It is **his** book. [**NOT his’** book]
The books were sitting on the shelf. [**NOT The book’s** were sitting on the shelf.]

Use an apostrophe when writing about letters and numbers:

Remember to try and get all **A’s** on your report card.
I counted the students off by **4’s**.

Do not use an apostrophe for the possessive of **it**, only for the contraction form of **it is**.

Its ice machine stopped working.
It’s time to go.

Exercise:

Give the appropriate punctuation in the following sentences, following the rules for apostrophes.

1. The dog was limping; its foot wasnt hurt, though.
2. The 1970's brought about many changes in the womens movement.
3. My phone number has six 7s and five 3's.
4. Its so nice outside; Id like to go swimming at their house.
5. He told me his heart was mine, but I didnt believe anything he said.

This handout was based on the following texts:

Online Writing Lab at Purdue University. West Lafayette, IN. 22 Mar. 2004
<http://owl.English.purdue.edu/handouts/print/grammar/g_apostEX1.html>.
Rosa, Alfred, and Eschholz, Paul. The Writer’s Brief Handbook: Third Edition. Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999.

For further reference, see the following books:

Anson, Chris, Robert Schwegler, and Marcia Muth. The Longman Writer’s Companion. New York: Longman, 2000.
Hacker, Diane. A Pocket Style Manual. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford, 2000.

All of the above texts are available in The Writing Center.

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