



Using the Apostrophe

In general, apostrophes are used to show possession and to form contractions.

Using the Apostrophe to Indicate Ownership

Possessive nouns usually indicate ownership, as in “Tim’s hat” or “the lawyer’s desk.”

Frequently, however, ownership is only loosely implied: “the tree’s roots” or “a day’s work.” If you are not sure whether a noun is possessive, try rephrasing it: the roots of a tree; the work of a day.

To create a possessive form:

1. If the noun does not end in s, add 's. Example: Roy climbed out on the driver's side.
2. If the noun is singular and ends in s, add 's. Example: Lois's sister spent a year in India.
3. If the noun is plural and ends in s, add only an apostrophe. Example: Both actresses' jewels were stolen.
4. To show *joint possession*, use an apostrophe with the last noun only. Example: Have you seen Joyce and Greg's new camper?
5. To show *individual possession*, make all nouns possessive. Example: John's and Marie's expectations of marriage couldn't be more different.

Note: *In the first sentence above, Joyce and Greg jointly possess one camper. In the second sentence, John and Marie individually have different expectations.*

6. If a noun is hyphenated or compound, use an apostrophe with the last element. Example: Her father-in-law's sculpture won first place.

Using the Apostrophe to Mark Contractions

In contractions the apostrophe takes the place of a missing letter.

Example: If that's not love, what would you call it? “That’s” stands for “that is.”

Example: Doesn't Frank plan to go on the tour? “Doesn’t” stands for “does not.”

Incorrect Uses of the Apostrophe

1. Do not use an apostrophe with nouns that are not possessive.

Incorrect: Some outpatient's are given special parking permits.

Correct: Some outpatients are given special parking permits.

2. Do not use an apostrophe in the possessive pronouns *its*, *whose*, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *yours*, and *theirs*.

Incorrect: Each area has it's own conference room.

Correct: Each area has its own conference room.

It's means *it is*. The possessive pronoun *its* contains no apostrophe, despite the fact that it is possessive.

Incorrect: This course was taught by a florist who's technique was oriental.

Correct: This course was taught by a florist whose technique was oriental.

Who's means *who is*. The possessive pronoun is *whose*.