



How to use Apostrophes

Use apostrophes to signal possession and the omission of letters or words.

1. Possession: Apostrophes are used to indicate possession.

- A. Singular form add an apostrophe 's'
 - I. The cat's tale
 - II. The boy's book
 - III. John's car
 - IV. James's computer. Note the use of the apostrophe when the name ends in an 's'.
 - V. The Jones' children. When the proper name ends in an 's' and you are referring to the group or, in this case, the parents, you will add an apostrophe after the 's'
- B. Indicating plural form possession add an apostrophe 's'
 - I. The men's hats
 - II. The women's purses
 - III. The children's toys
- C. Indicating possession of plural nouns that end in 's'
 - I. The boys' bikes
 - II. The dogs' bones
 - III. The friends' meeting
- D. Compound words add an apostrophe 's'
 - I. My sister-in-law's car
 - II. The secretary of state's proposal
- E. Compound nouns add an apostrophe 's' to the last noun
 - I. Jane and Mary's house

2. Omission: Apostrophes are used to indicate an omission.

- A. Signaling the omission of letters in contractions.
 - I. Does not—doesn't *and* Will not – won't
- B. Signaling the omission of words in common phrases
 - I. Rock 'n' roll *and* Class of '03
- C. Signaling the omission of a letter in word for creative purposes
 - I. Pa said, "I said, 'nough."
 - II. She said, "The students are all swimmin' and havin' fun."

3. Editing: When you edit for apostrophes, follow the following guidelines.

- A. Examine each plural possessive noun.
- B. Identify and examine each possessive form of the indefinite pronouns.
- C. Examine each "it's" and "its" to make sure you have the correct usage. "It's" means *it is* and "its" is the plural of the possessive pronoun *it* and does not require an apostrophe.
- D. Remember that apostrophes are **not** used with possessive pronoun forms: yours, his, hers, its, ours, theirs.

Avoid excessive use of contractions in formal writing; in **business** and **government** writing, contractions are typically acceptable as they make it easier for your writing to be read and understood quickly.