

Apostrophes



The **apostrophe** is used to indicate an omission, to indicate possession, or to form certain plurals.

To Indicate an Omission

An apostrophe indicates the omission of letters or numbers.

Examples:

Coming = comin'

1969 = '69

Apostrophes are also used in contractions to indicate the omission of letters.

Examples:

should not = shouldn't

how is = how's

To Indicate Possession

An apostrophe is used to indicate possession. **For most nouns (either singular or plural without a final s),** add 's to the word.

Example: the bird's nest

For plural nouns ending in s, only add an ' to the word to indicate possession.

Example: the birds' nest

Joint possession

If something belongs to two or more people, add an 's to the last name listed.

Example: Peter and Wendy's book report.

If two or more people own separate but similar objects that are listed together, 's is added to all applicable names.

Example: Peter's and Wendy's favorite books. (They each have different favorite books.)

Singular nouns ending in S

Common practice allows for the use of a single apostrophe after a singular noun ending in s. However, usage depends on the discipline and specific style guide. Writers should consult writing and writing resources from their discipline to determine appropriate usage.

Examples:

the boss's office

Thomas's bicycle

Example: Jesus's sermons (Chicago Manual of Style)

Jesus' sermons (Associated Press Style Book)

Do NOT Use Apostrophes in the Following Situations:

To create plurals of **words, letters, and symbols** that are used as **nouns**.

Correct:

dos and don'ts

3s and 4s

@s and #s

Incorrect:

do's and don't's

3's and 4's

@'s and #'s

Note: the use of 's is acceptable when the construction would be awkward or confusing.

Example: *yes's* and *no's*, not *yesses* and *nos*

To create **plurals of capital letters** and **abbreviations** without any internal punctuation.

Correct

As, Bs, and Cs

IRAs

PhDs

Incorrect:

A's, B's, and C's

IRA's

PhD's

Note: the use of 's is acceptable to create plurals of lowercase letters and abbreviations with two or more periods.

Correct: a's, b's, and c's; Ph.D.'s; M.A.'s

To indicate a **time period**.

Correct:

the 1990s

'40s

Incorrect:

the 1990's

'40's

To create **possessive pronouns**.

Correct

its

yours

theirs

Incorrect:

it's

your's

their's

Note: *It's* with an apostrophe is a contraction of *it is*.

To **pluralize** regular nouns.

Correct:

There are many dogs in the yard.

Who ate my sandwiches?

Incorrect:

There are many dog's in the yard.

Who ate my sandwich's?

Note: a singular noun with an 's creates a singular possessive noun.