

Apostrophes

Overview

Apostrophes have two main functions:

- 1) To form possessives of nouns
- 2) To form contractions, like "can't"

Summary

Possessives of Nouns (people, places, or things)

To show the possessive of a singular noun, add an apostrophe and the letter *s*.

- Ex: The boy's hat; the professor's class.

To show the possessive of a plural noun that already ends in an *-s*, add only an apostrophe.

- The firefighters' trucks; two cats' toys.

To show the possessive of a plural noun that does not already end in an *-s*, add an apostrophe and then an *s*.

- The children's game; the bird's chirping,

Contractions

A contraction is a word where at least one letter is missing; the apostrophe indicates where the omission occurs. Contractions are more commonly used in speech and informal writing, and less in more formal, scholarly writing.

Examples:

- Do not = don't
- Cannot = can't
- I will = I'll
- Should not = shouldn't
- Did not = didn't
- Could not = couldn't
- Who is = who's
- You are = you're
- It is = it's

- **Possessive Pronouns:** A pronoun is a word that is used in place of a noun; examples are you, we, I, and they. Possessive pronouns are used to indicate ownership; examples are mine, yours, ours, theirs, his, hers, and whose. You do NOT need an apostrophe with possessive pronouns, as they already indicate ownership.

Things to Avoid

- Incorrect: His' glasses
- Correct: His glasses
- Incorrect: Who's glasses are these?
- Correct: Whose glasses are these?
- Pluralizing last names: If your last name does NOT end in an *s*, simply add an *s* to the end of your name. If your last name ends with an *s*, *x*, *z*, *ch*, or *sh*, add an *-es* at the end.
 - Incorrect: Merry Christmas from the Smith's.
 - Correct: Merry Christmas from the Smiths.
 - Incorrect: Merry Christmas from the Jones's.
 - Correct: Merry Christmas from the Joneses.

Relevant Resources

Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook*. 9th ed., Modern Language Association of America, 2021.

Purdue University. "The Apostrophe." *Purdue Online Writing Lab*, 2022, owl.purdue.edu/ow/general_writing/punctuation/apostrophe_introduction/html.