



Apostrophes

Apostrophes have four main roles: creating possessive nouns, creating possessive indefinite pronouns, representing omitted letters in a word, and forming plurals of letters and numbers.

Creating possessive nouns

Examples: My **car's** tires are all flat.

Carolyn's house is so nice.

Your **cat's** toy mouse has been destroyed.

James' (or **James's**) bike is awesome.

*Note: When you have a noun that ends with an **s**, you can either add **s'** or **'s** to make it possessive: the Jones' or the Jones's. The determining factor is pronunciation. If you pronounce the possessive of Perkins as three syllables, you will write Mr. Perkins's kindness....When you hear yourself pronounce the possessive of boss as two syllables (boss's) and the possessive of witness as three (witness's), you will not be tempted to write your boss' approval or the witness' reply.

Also note: **Its is an exception to this rule. It's one of the top mistakes writers make. Use an apostrophe for "its" when it represents the conjunction "it is" and NOT for possession. "It's" always means "it is." "Its" always shows possession"; for example, "Its color is blue" does not use an apostrophe.

When using a compound word or phrase, follow the same rule but include the apostrophe after only the last word.

Examples: Her **brother-in-law's** business is booming.

The proofreader's suggestions make perfect sense.

To indicate individual possession of a noun by more than one person or object, use an apostrophe with each individual:

Examples: **Mike's** and **Sarah's** speeches were the best ones given at the ceremony.

The **dachshund's** and **boxer's** tails were wagging furiously at the mention of a treat.

To indicate joint or group possession of a noun, use an apostrophe with only the last person or object in the phrase:

Examples: **Ellen and Dave's** collage depicted the impact of global warming.

The **pilot and co-pilot's** effort to land the plane was successful.

Creating possessive indefinite pronouns

Examples: **Anyone's** car would be suitable.

One's perspective on life changes with age.

This world is made better by **everyone's** contributions.

Other indefinite pronouns: Anybody, someone, something, anything, all, each, others.

Standing for omitted letters in a word (a contraction)

Use an apostrophe to indicate where letters are left out in a word or combination of words:

Examples: **I'll** = I will

They're = They are

They'd = They would

Wouldn't = Would not

Tricky cases: To determine whether or not you need an apostrophe for words like "it's" and "who's," replace the words that make up the contraction in the sentence and see if it makes sense:

Examples: Yes: **It's** going to be hot and humid today. (**It is** going to be hot and humid today.)

No: The community is working to fix **it's** flood-ravaged roads. (The community is working to fix it is flood-ravaged roads doesn't work. Correct = **its**)

Yes: **Who's** going to be the new president of the United States? (**Who is** going to be the new President of the United States?)

No: **Who's** scarf is this? (Who is scarf doesn't work but **whose** scarf does.)

Forming plurals of letters, numbers, and abbreviations

Letters meant to be used as letters need an apostrophe:

Examples: Your name has too many **k's** in it.

I received **A's** in all of my classes. (In this case, it is good to include an apostrophe for the sake of clarity, since "as" is a word.)

Years used as a plural (but not possessive) do not need an apostrophe:

Examples: We are past the **1990s**. (plural but not possessive)

The 1980s' heavy metal bands produced some great ballads. (plural and possessive)

Numbers and symbols used as plurals (but not possessives) do not need an apostrophe:

Examples: How many **4s** are in your phone number? (plural but not possessive)

The **5's** lines were drawn perfectly straight. (singular and possessive)

All of the **5s'** lines were drawn straight. (plural and possessive)

The **&s** used in the sentence didn't make sense. (plural but not possessive)

Abbreviations do not need an apostrophe unless possessive:

Examples: There are two YMCAs in town, and both YMCAs' swimming pools are open.

The larger YMCA's swimming pool has a Jacuzzi.

The PTAs are made up of a lot of Ph.D.s.

Practice Exercise

For each of the following sentences, select the correct word from the choices inside of the parentheses.

1. The team lost (its/it's) first game.
2. Battalion (101s/101's) mission is to rescue hostages.
3. The cashier asked if I wanted change in (50s/50's) or (20s/20's).
4. Annie borrowed (James'/Jamases/James's) book.
5. On the playground, Jake stole the (girls/girl's/girls') jump rope. (meaning one girl)
6. Jake stole the (girls/girl's/girls') jump rope. (meaning more than one girl)
7. Last semester I earned all (As/A's)
8. Last semester I earned all (Bs/B's)
9. Jimmy (shouldn't/shouldnt) have gone over and talked to the (girls/girl's).
10. The (father-in-laws/father-in-law's) house was a mansion.
11. (Who's/Whose) going to the game with us?
12. (Jim's and Nina's/Jim and Nina's) joint presentation on the new system was impressive.
13. Last night there was a huge party at (Erins'/Erin's) house.
14. (Everyone's/Everyones) opinion matters in a group.
15. (You're/your) not allowed to do that.
16. It is said that a dog is (mans/man's/mans') best friend.
17. Sheila's (parent's/parents') house is in White Bear Lake. They love it there.
18. My quilt is in the small room; the (other's/others'/others's) quilts are in the big room.
19. The (partys/party's/parties) (hosts/host's/hosts') dress was bright pink.
20. The first (bands/band's/bands') playlist was the (concerts/concert's/concerts')
(participants/participant's/participants') vote for best playlist of the night.

For answers to this exercise, see the following page.

Practice Exercise Answers

1. The team lost **its** first game. (**The team lost it is game does not make sense.**)
2. Annie borrowed **James'** (or **James's**) book. (**singular and possessive**)
3. Battalion **101's** mission is to rescue hostages.
4. The cashier asked if I wanted change in **50s** or **20s**.
5. On the playground, Jake stole the **girl's** jump rope. (meaning one girl)
6. Jake stole the **girls'** jump rope. (meaning more than one girl)
7. Last semester I earned all **A's**. (**letter meant as a word**) (include apostrophe to clarify meaning, since "As" is a word)
8. Last semester I earned all Bs (If it was all A's and B's then you would use an apostrophe with the B to match the A.)
9. Jimmy **shouldn't** have gone over and talked to the **girls**. (**contraction/plural but not possessive**)
10. The **father-in-law's** house was a mansion. (**compound word and possessive**)
11. **Who's** going to the game with us? (**Who is going to the game with us makes sense.**)
12. **Jim and Nina's** joint presentation on the new system was a success. (**joint possession**)
13. Last night there was a huge party at **Erin's** house. (**singular and possessive**)
14. **Everyone's** opinion matters in a group. (**indefinite pronoun and possessive**)
15. **You're** not allowed to do that. (**contraction, not possessive**)
16. It is said that a dog is **man's** best friend. (**singular and possessive**)
17. Sheila's **parents'** house is in White Bear Lake. They love it. (**plural and possessive**)
18. My quilt is in the small room. The **others'** quilts are in the big room.
19. The **party's host's** dress was bright pink.
20. The first band's playlist was the concert's participants' vote for best playlist of the night.