



## Apostrophes

Apostrophes have four main roles: creating possessive nouns (both singular and plural), 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. (singular, indicates the tires of one car)

- Both of my **bikes'** lights need batteries. (plural possessive, lights of more than one bike)
- **Carolyn's** house is so nice. (singular, the house of Carolyn)
- **James's\*** bike is awesome. (singular, the bike of James.)
- **Shawn's and Susan's** sunglasses are the same brand. (two singular possessive nouns—the sunglasses of Shawn and the sunglasses of Susan)
- **Yang and Natalie and Sidney's** project won first place. (plural possessive—one project of several people. Note the apostrophe is only placed after the last person listed)

\*Note: When a noun that ends with an s is possessive, either write **s'** or **s's** to make it possessive is acceptable: James' or the James's. There is conflicting opinion about a set way, but the Concordia University Writing Center uses pronunciation as the determining factor. If the possessive of Perkins is pronounced as three syllables (Perk-en-sez), write Perkins's. When pronouncing the possessive of boss as two syllables (boss-sez), write boss's and not boss' (ess apostrophe ess). When pronouncing the possessive of Israelites as two syllables, use just one apostrophe after the ess: The Israelites' flag design is nice (not Israelites's flag). It is acceptable to write "James' bike..." but the Writing Center style is "James's bike." Whatever you choose, be consistent.

Also note: Use an apostrophe for "it's" 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.

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

Examples: **Ming's** and **Peter'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.

The blue **couch's** and the **two chairs'** upholstery is new. (singular *and* plural possessive)

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

Examples: **Theodore and Thaddeus's** collage depicted the impact of global warming. (joint collage)

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

## Creating possessive indefinite pronouns

Indefinite pronouns are nonspecific individuals or groups, and they are *singular*.

Examples: **Each** student's grade was marked on his or her paper. **Anyone's** car would be suitable. **One's** perspective on life changes with age. This world is made better by **everyone's** contributions. **Someone** left his or her shampoo in the locker room. **Someone's** comb is there too. He or she will miss them (NOT Someone left *their* shampoo...*they* will miss it.). Everyone's final vote reflected his or her political beliefs (NOT Everyone's final vote reflected their...).

## 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                      **Wouldn't** = Would not                      **It's** = It is  
**They're** = They are                      **Haven't** = Have not                      **He'll** = He will  
**They'd** = They would                      **Hasn't** = Has not                      **Who's** = Who is

Note: It's is never used for the possession of it. **It's** always is a contraction for **it is**.

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. Correct: **whose**)

## Forming plurals of letters, numbers, and abbreviations

Capital letters and abbreviations are pluralized by adding "s" alone, except where confusion could result. For clarity of possibly confusing instances, uncapitalized letters are pluralized by adding an apostrophe and an "s."

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

I received **A's** in all of my classes. (A's, I's, and U's are exceptions to just adding an "s" because they may be confused for the words "As," "Is," and "Us.")

My neighbor received **Bs** and **Cs**. (no apostrophes needed, but add if they are combined with letters needing apostrophes. Example: Lucy got A's and B's on her flute exams.

Mind your **p's** and **q's** and get your **pj's** on. (apostrophes added for clarity)

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

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

Plural and possessive years do need an apostrophe:

Example: The **1980s'** heavy metal bands produced some great ballads. (the bands of the 1980s)

Note: It is 1980s' and not 1980s's because it is pronounced aye-tees and not aye-tees-sez.

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

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

She paid me three 20s and a 10. (plural but not possessive)

Acronyms do not need an apostrophe unless possessive:

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

**Practice Exercise** (For answers to this exercise, see the following page.)

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 of checkers.
2. Air Force (33s/33's) mission is to rescue stranded sea turtles.
3. The cashier asked if I wanted change in (50s/50's) or (20s/20's).
4. Lakeshya borrowed (James'/Jamses/James's) book.
5. On the playground, Jake stole the (girls/girl's/girls') jump rope. (meaning one girl)
6. Jake also stole the (girls/girl's/girls') Hula Hoops. (meaning more than one girl)
7. My grades are all (As/A's).
8. Last semester I earned all (As and Bs/A's and Bs/A's and B's).
9. Quinn (shouldn't/shouldnt) have gone over and talked to the (girls/girl's).
10. (Zoes'/Zoe's) (father-in-laws/father-in-law's/father's-in-law/father-in-laws's) house was a mansion.
11. (Who's/Whose) going to the game with us?
12. (Kiki's and Eileen's/Kiki and Eileen's) joint presentation on the new system was impressive.
13. The (family's/families'/families's) tables were labeled so we all knew where to sit. My (family's/families'/familie's) table was near the water fountain.
14. (Everyone's/Everyones/Everyones') zodiac sign reflects (their/his or her) personality.
15. (You're/your) not allowed to do that.
16. It is said that a dog is (mans/man's/mans') best friend.
17. Mona'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.
21. (Texases/Texas'/Texas's) delegates' are interesting. My (bosses/boss'/boss's) niece, Ester, knows someone who went to Texas to help count the (participants/participants'/participant's) votes. Ester is the one who borrowed the (Lewis's/Lewis/Lewis') lawnmower.

## Practice Exercise Answers

1. The team lost **its** first game of checkers. (The team lost it is game does not make sense.)
2. Air Force **33's** mission is to rescue stranded sea turtles. (possessive)
3. The cashier asked if I wanted change in **50s** or **20s**. (plural and not possessive)
4. Lakeshya borrowed **James'** (or **James's**) book. (singular and possessive)
5. On the playground, Jake stole the **girl's** jump rope. (meaning one girl)
6. Jake also stole the **girls'** Hula Hoops. (meaning more than one girl)
7. My grades are all **A's**. (**letter meant as a word**) (apostrophe clarifies meaning, since "As" is a word)
8. Last semester I earned all A's and B's. (If just Bs, it would not have an apostrophe.)
9. Quinn **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. **Kiki and Eileen's** joint presentation on the new system was a success. (**joint possession**)
13. Last night there was a huge party at **Zoe's** house. (**singular and possessive—the house of Zoe**)
14. **Everyone's** zodiac sign reflects **his or her** personality. (**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. Mona'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.
21. Texas's delegates are interesting. My boss's niece, Ester, knows someone who went to Texas to help count the participants' votes. Ester is the one who borrowed the Lewis's lawnmower. (delegates of Texas because one does not pronounce the plural of delegates as delegates-sez, just delegates/niece of the boss and s's because it is pronounced boss-sez/votes of the participants, more than one participant, and s's because the plural of participant is pronounced participants, not participants-sez/lawnmower of more than one Lewis is Lewis's because it is pronounced Lewis-sez.)