

# Apostrophes

## WHAT IS AN APOSTROPHE?

An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark used in three different ways:

1. to form the possessive case (indicates ownership)
2. to indicate the omission of letters
3. to indicate the plurals of letters, numbers, and abbreviations

## Apostrophe Usage

### 1. Possessive Case

#### •Add 's to the singular form of the word:

our neighbor's yard  
the class's grades  
Mark's car

Note: With some singular nouns that end in -s, only an apostrophe is added to avoid awkwardness. For example:  
Charles' book.

Note: To determine whether a noun is simply plural or possessive, turn the phrase around. For example:  
the hole of the mice  
the toys of the children

If a noun is plural and is NOT showing ownership, no apostrophe is needed.

#### •Add 's to plural forms that do not end in -s:

the mice's hole  
the children's toys

#### •Add ' to plural forms that end in -s:

the dogs' fur  
the families' homes  
the buildings' windows

#### •Add 's to the end of compound words:

Father-in-law's home

#### •Add 's to the last noun to show joint possession.:

Anthony and Cleopatra's story

Note: This is true only in the case of joint ownership. Here, the same story belongs to both Anthony AND Cleopatra. However, if each subject in the sentence owned his or her own object, *both* nouns would need an apostrophe to show possession. For example:

My sister's and brother's cars

## 2. Omission of Letters

Apostrophes are used in contractions. Contractions are words (or numbers) that, when combined, omit one or more letters (or numbers). An apostrophe marks this omission. For example:

I am = I'm  
Who is = who's  
It is = it's  
Will not = won't  
Do not = don't  
Cannot = can't  
Should not = shouldn't  
Could not = couldn't  
Would not = wouldn't  
Should have = should've  
Could have = could've  
Would have = would've  
1975 = '75

## 3. Plurals of Letters, Numbers, & Abbreviations

When pluralizing lower case letters, an apostrophe is optional, although indicating one can clarify what you're trying to say. With capital letters, numbers, symbols, and abbreviations, no apostrophe is needed, but many people prefer the apostrophe to be included. For example:

The young child had trouble writing r's and q's correctly.  
The young child had trouble writing rs and qs correctly.

In the following sentences, whether to use an apostrophe or not is up to the writer. Remember to check with your professor to see whether he or she prefers the apostrophe or not.

NASA's space program is funded by the United States government.  
NASAs space program is funded by the United States government.

Some may argue that the 1960's were the best decade for rock music.  
Some may argue that the 1960s were the best decade for rock music.

Note: Apostrophes are NOT used in plurals of abbreviations (including acronyms) or numbers.