

The Apostrophe

SUU Writing Center

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Acknowledgement of source: Much of the information in the following tipsheet is taken directly from Purdue University's handout on the subject: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_apost.html.

The apostrophe has several uses, including these common applications:

- 1) To form possessive nouns
- 2) To show the omission of letters
- 3) To indicate plurals of letters, numbers, and symbols

Do not use apostrophes to form possessive **pronouns** (i.e. *his/her* computer) or **noun** plurals that are not possessives.

1) To Show Possession

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| To see if you need a possessive, turn the phrase around to check if you can make an "of" phrase. If you can, the phrase is possessive. | Example: the newspaper's column = the column of the newspaper |
| To show possession by a singular noun, add -'s to the singular form of the word (even if it ends with the letter -s). | Example: the girl's watch Example: Charles's chickens |
| Add -'s to the plural forms that do not end in <i>s</i> . | Example: the oxen's hooves Example: the children's desks |
| Add ' to the end of plural nouns that end in -s . (Hint: Check for possession as indicated above and then ask yourself if the noun is plural as well as possessive.) | Example: the three aunts' suitcases Example: three friends' letters |
| Add -'s to the last noun in a group to show joint possession of an object. | Example: Jeff and Sally's computer |

2) To Show Omission of Letters

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| In contractions, one or more letters have been omitted. The apostrophe shows this omission. Usually, contractions are acceptable only in speaking and in informal writing. Avoid them in formal academic writing. | Examples: don't = do not can't = can not aren't = are not he'll = he will who's = who is |
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PLEASE TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE HELP WITH APOSTROPHES

3) To Form Plurals of Letters, Numbers, and Symbols

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| Although apostrophes are usually NOT used to form plurals, they may be inserted in the creation of the plurals of letters, numbers, and symbols. Several different variations are available, so check with your professors to see what s/he prefers. Below are some guiding examples. | |
| Two A's = two letters that happen to both be A. | Example: Nita got A's on her Biology quizzes. |
| Six 5's = six numbers that are each 5. | Example: There are six 5's in my SSN. |
| Many &'s = Many ampersands | Example: That printed page has too many &'s on it. |

Do Not Use Apostrophes for Possessive Pronouns or for Noun Plurals

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| His, her, its, my, yours, and ours are possessive pronouns. | Examples: Incorrect: The group followed it's leader. Correct: The group followed its leader. **(Note: <i>it's</i> is the contraction meaning <i>it is.</i>)** |
| NEVER, NEVER, NEVER use an apostrophe to make a noun plural except when the noun being pluralized is a number, letter, or symbol (see above). | Examples: Incorrect: My friend and I went to hunt duck's. Correct: My friend and I went to hunt ducks. Incorrect: My children washed their face's. Correct: My children washed their faces. Incorrect: There are several computer lab's on campus. Correct: There are several computer labs on campus. |