**APOSTROPHE**

Thetwo uses of the **APOSTROPHE** are:

* to turn a noun into a modifier. Usually this is done to form the *POSSESSIVE CASE – the form of a noun or pronoun that shows possession or ownership of one thing by another;* and
* to form ***CONTRACTIONS*** – *two-word combinations formed by leaving out certain letters which are indicated by an* **APOSTROPHE**.

**USING APOSTROPHES TO SHOW POSSESSION**

**SINGULAR NOUNS:**

**A. To form the possessive of singular nouns that do NOT end with the letter *S*, add ’s:**

Jim**’s** nose my sister**'s** thesis

Helen**’s** teeth the student**’s** desk

The cat**’s** food Shakespeare**’s** sonnets

**The possession or ownership in these examples is explicit. Sometimes, however, ownership is loosely implied, as in the following examples:**

a day**’s** work a tree**’s** roots

the diet**’s** benefits winter**’s** chill

**If you’re uncertain whether a noun is possessive, try rewriting the phrase as an *OF* phrase:**

the work ***of*** the day the roots ***of*** a tree

the benefits ***of*** the diet the chill ***of*** winter

**B. To form the possessive of singular nouns that DO end with the letter *S*** add *’s* if the resulting word is not difficult to say. If adding the extra S sound would make the word awkward to pronounce, add just an apostrophe.

In the following, the extra *S* sound is easy to pronounce, so add ’s:

Queen Bess’s throne Lois’s sister my boss’s office

In the following, the extra *S* sound is hard to pronounce, so only add the apostrophe:

Charles Dickens’ novels

Holmes’ pipe

Sophocles’ plays

for goodness’ sake (for the sake of goodness)

**PLURAL NOUNS**:

**A. To form the possessive of plural nouns that do NOT end with the letter S, add 's:**

women’s rights men’s room children’s games

**B. To form the possessive of plural nouns that DO end with S add only an apostrophe:**

girls’ basketball team the lawyers’ briefcases

three days’ pay in twelve months’ time

the wrens’ nests the bosses’ secretaries

**Note:** Don’t be confused by the plural form of names ending in S, like Jones or James. When Mr. and Mrs. Jones and all their children walk around together, they are “the Joneses.” To form the joint possessive, add an apostrophe only : “We were invited to the Joneses’ house.”

**C. To show joint possession, use ’s (or s’) with the last noun only:**

Fernando and Eva’s wedding

The same rule applies to compound words:

my mother-in-law’s garden the president-elect’s vocabulary

the secretary-of-state’s speech her in-laws’ vacation

**POSSESIVE PRONOUNS:**

**hers, his, ours, yours, theirs, whose, AND its have no apostrophe:**

The cat lost its tongue. His singing is beautiful.

One of the most common apostrophe errors occurs with **its** and **it’s**. Just remember that **its** is a possessive pronoun, just like his and her; and like them, it doesn’t have an apostrophe. **It’s** is a contraction for **it is** and **it has**.

The cat knows its name; it’s called Pasha.

Finally, keep in mind that the use of the apostrophe is not the only way or always the best way to indicate possession. Instead of “an hour’s pay,” for example, you may write “hourly pay.” Choose the form that is the most precise or the most appropriate.

**Practice 1:** Rewrite the following sentences, using apostrophes to indicate possession. For example, “the house of my father” becomes “my father’s house.”

1. If you don’t want the sweater, I’ll give it to the son of my friend.

2. Take the westbound train to the birthplace of Shakespeare.

3. He’ll enjoy the movie if you don't tell the ending of it.

4. The binder of the tutor couldn’t be found anywhere.

5. The backpacks of the students were jammed with books.

6. The family looked for the lost cat in the tree house of the children.

7. Penny was unfamiliar with the titles of the books.

8. Please put the flowers on the desk of my boss.

9. Antonio feared the wrath of his father-in-law.

The second major function of the **APOSTROPHE** is to show **CONTRACTION**. When we contract words or phrases or figures, we shrink them or draw them together by eliminating a letter or letters (or numbers); we denote that elimination by inserting an apostrophe (’). The apostrophe tells us that one or more letters have been left out. It is important, therefore, to place the apostrophe where the omission is.

**CONTRACTION** in writing is meant to reflect speech and so tends to bring a casual tone to written language. The writer, therefore, should be certain that the conversational tone is appropriate for the writing at hand. Formal writing and even most informal writing will not include contractions of the kind illustrated here, except in quotations. The writer’s judgment regarding contractions is crucial. When in doubt, ask your instructors whether they allow the use of contractions in your writing. Following are some contractions commonly used in conversation and in informal writing:

it is, it has**/it’s** I would**/I’d** will not**/won’t**

was not**/wasn’t** he would**/he’d** let us**/let’s**

I am**/I’m** would not**/wouldn’t** who is, who has**/who’s**

he is, he has**/ he’s** do not**/don’t** cannot**/can’t**

she is, she has**/she’s** you will**/you’ll** does not**/doesn’t**

**Note:** Remember to place the apostrophe at the spot where the omission occurs. Use only one apostrophe to indicate an omission, whether that omission is of one letter or two, or more.

**The following contractions use the verb "to have":**

would've should've

could've might've

Do not write these words out as "would of," "could of," etc., because the apostrophe is helping to stand in for the word "*have*," not "*of*”.

**OTHER USES OF APOSTROPHES:**

**A. Use apostrophes in common phrases:**

Rock ’n’ roll Class of ’97

**B. Use apostrophes to form plurals of numbers, letters, & symbols:**

The skater needs scores of **8’s** and **9’s** to qualify for the finals.

My brother got **A’s** and **B’s** in math all through high school.

**C. Use apostrophes to indicate omissions in colloquial speech and dialects:**

“It’s an **amaz’n’** good idea, Duke – you have got a **rattlin’** clever head on you.”

(from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain)