

PUNCTUATION RULES: APOSTROPHES

THREE DIFFERENT WAYS TO CORRECTLY USE APOSTROPHES:

TO SHOW POSSESSION (ONE NOUN BELONGS TO ANOTHER NOUN)

If the noun is singular and/or a plural noun not ending in "s," add an apostrophe + s to show possession

Grandma's house Sophie's paper children's pool sheep's wool

If a proper noun ends in an "s," add an apostrophe + s to show possession

Alexis's cat Lewis's novel St. Louis's Arch Memphis's music

If a plural noun ends in an "s," follow the "s" with an apostrophe

drivers' cars students' books teachers' meeting tutors' table

If using a list of nouns, placement of the apostrophe(s) affects the meaning:

John, Paul, and George's songs (the songs belong to John, Paul, and George together)

John's, Paul's, and George's songs (the songs are unique to each individual)

TO FORM A CONTRACTION (COMBINING TWO WORDS INTO ONE)

***NOTE:** Contractions are usually not acceptable in academic writing. You should spell out the two words.

The contraction takes the place of the removed letter(s), which is usually a vowel in the second word.

cannot ⇒ can't do not ⇒ don't should have ⇒ should've

The difference with "it":

It's ⇒ it is its ⇒ the possessive of "it" (this does not follow the first apostrophe rule)

TO INDICATE THE LETTERS OF THE ALPHABET

Plural forms of letters (A, B, C...) need apostrophes to indicate the plural.

I earned three A's and one B. There are two l's in the word "yellow."

DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE TO MAKE A NOUN (INCLUDING NUMBERS AND ACRONYMS) PLURAL:

CD's → CDs Congratulation's → Congratulations 1920's → 1920s

☆An exception with acronyms: if the acronym uses periods, use an apostrophe: Ph.D.'s

DO NOT USE AN APOSTROPHE TO PLURALIZE A FAMILY NAME:

Happy New Year from The Barry's → ...the Barrys

Apostrophes