

The Apostrophe

There are two main uses of the apostrophe: to make nouns and pronouns possessive and to stand in for omitted letters and numbers.

Possession

Possessive nouns and pronouns indicate ownership. Add -'s to singular words to make them possessive, even if the singular word ends in -s.

Thank you for giving back the teacher's wallet

Oh no, we have to do another one of Mr. Mullins's grammar handouts.

Note: adding the -'s on words ending with -s is debated. Some people only use an apostrophe.

If a word is plural and ends in -s, then just add an apostrophe.

The teachers' salaries have not gone up in ten years.

Joint possession

If two nouns own the same thing, just add -'s to the last noun.

Bozo and Helga's computer fell into the pool.

But if the two nouns own different things, then have two sets of -'s.

Bozo's and Helga's ideas for how to fix the computer differ.

Bozo and Helga have different ideas, so both names require -'s.

Indicate missing letters and numbers

Apostrophes are used in contractions to show where the letter or letters are missing. They are also used to show missing numbers.

It's a shame that Bozo can't fix his computer.

It's = it is. The apostrophe stands in for the missing *i*. And can't = cannot. The apostrophe stands in for the missing *no*.

He had that computer since '98.

The apostrophe stands in for the *19* in 1998.

Misuses of the apostrophe

- Do not use an apostrophe to make a word plural.

Taxi's downstairs.

> A single taxi owns the downstairs?

Please do not feed the donkey's.

>The donkey's what?

- Do not use the apostrophe to make numbers, letters, or abbreviations plural.

The Jazz Age started in the 1920s.

He received two Ds that quarter.

Elizabeth earned two PhDs.

You may use an apostrophe if the thing you wish to make plural would look like another word otherwise. For instance, making the letter "a" plural would make it look like "as".

I got all A's this quarter.

- Do not use an apostrophe and an s (-'s) to make personal pronouns possessive. The most common personal pronouns are: I, we, you, she, he, and they. These pronouns have their own possessive forms: my, our, your, her, his, and their.

Helga cried when her (not she's) computer was broken.

- Do not use an apostrophe to make the possessive pronouns its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, and theirs possessive.

The hard drive has lost all of its (not it's) information.

> *It's* always means *it is*.

Bozo took the computer to a friend whose (not who's) wife fixes computers.

> *Who's* means *who is*. *Whose* is the possessive form of *who*.

Apostrophe Exercise

name:

Edit the following sentences to correct errors in the use of the apostrophe. If a sentence is correct, write "correct" after it.

- a. This diet will improve almost anyone's health.

 - b. The innovative shoe fastener was inspired by the designers young son.

 - c. Each days menu features a different European country's dish.

 - d. Sue worked overtime to increase her families earnings.

 - e. Ms. Jacobs is unwilling to listen to students complaints about computer failures and damaged disks.
1. Siddhartha sat by the river and listened to its many voices.

 2. Three teenage son's can devour about as much food as four full-grown field hands. The only difference is that they dont do half as much work.

 3. We handle contracts with NASA and many other government agency's.

 4. Patience and humor are key tools in a travelers survival kit.

 5. My sister-in-law's quilts are being shown at the Fendrick Gallery.