

THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS CENTER

at **Sam Houston**
STATE UNIVERSITY

Apostrophes

Apostrophes Generally Do Two Things:

1. Indicate that some object or quality belongs to someone or something.
2. Indicate that a letter or group of letters have been left out to create contractions.

Apostrophes Help the Reader Understand the Meaning

Apostrophes are necessary to help your reader understand what you mean on first reading.

Won't and wont mean two different things.

Can't and cant mean two different things.

Readers may not understand whether you mean the possessive or the plural.

“The **chairs** legs are broken,” as opposed to, “The **chair's** legs are broken.”

Apostrophes Indicate Belonging

Apostrophes are added to nouns and names to indicate ownership or possession of a thing or quality.

If the owner is singular, add an apostrophe and an “s.”

Bob's book got wet.

The **student's** assignment is due.

When the owner of the object or quality is a plural noun which ends in an “s,” the apostrophe goes after the “s.”

The **players'** uniforms got lost.

The **girls'** dresses are cute.

If you use a plural noun which doesn't end in “s,” add the apostrophe and the “s.”

The **men's** tools were stolen.

The **deer's** wide eyes were large and brown.

If something belongs to two or more people, use the apostrophe and “s” only with the last noun.

Bill and Carol's new camper sleeps six.

If you want to show that each individual owns something, make all the nouns possessive.

Tommy's and Mark's houses were very different.

Sometimes it is hard to see the ownership:

A day's work

To determine if a noun is possessive, try turning it into an *of* phrase:

The work **of a day**

Note: When the owner's name ends in an "s," you will be writing "s's."

UPS's deliveries are never on time.

*Bridget **Jones's** Diary* was an okay movie.

Exceptions

Possessive pronouns which end in "s" **do not** use an apostrophe.

His books are heavy.

This house is **ours**.

That desk is **hers**.

Its tail is wagging.

Apostrophes Create Contractions

When you leave letters out and create a word made by two different words, use an apostrophe to indicate where the left out letters would go.

Why **can't** you understand? (cannot)

He **doesn't** care at all. (does not)

He **won't** do his homework. (will not)

Are you sure **it's** a problem? (it is)

Plural Numerals and Acronyms

The plural form of numerals and acronyms **do not** use apostrophes.

Peggy skated nearly perfect figure **8s**.

He owns many **CDs**.

Making a Plural of a Decade

When using numbers, the apostrophe is omitted when creating the plural form of a decade.

The **1960s** birthed new forms of music.

The **90s** were rad.

When do you use its and when do you use it's?

When editing, most people have to stop and read the sentence saying, "it is."

If the sentence makes sense, use the apostrophe because you are wanting to create a contraction. If the sentence doesn't make sense, don't use the apostrophe, meaning it's a possessive pronoun.

Example: **It's** confusing in the Evans Building that each level doesn't have **its** own floor number.

You would say "**it is** confusing," but you would not say "**it is** own floor number."