

# Apostrophes - its and it's

**This hand-out has been compiled to enable students to distinguish when it is appropriate (and not appropriate) to use apostrophes with the word its/it's.**

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This is what you need to remember:

1. Possessive adjectives do not use apostrophes.
  2. Apostrophes are used in words to denote missing letters.
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## Possessive adjectives

Adjectives are describing words. There are many of these in English, e.g. blue, happy, distinguished.

Possessive adjectives are words that describe possession. There are seven of these in English: my, your, his, her, its, our, their. Note that none of these takes an apostrophe. This includes "its".

Examples of the use of possessive adjectives:

1. The information manager has been in *her* job for ten months. [The job belongs to her].
  2. The organisation prepared *its* information strategy in 2013. [The information strategy belongs to it].
  3. *Their* market sector is in decline. [The market sector belongs to them].
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## Missing letters

In written English words that have been contracted (i.e. shortened) use apostrophes to show where the missing letters would normally appear. This has two main purposes: to avoid confusion with other words and to indicate a different pronunciation e.g. "we're" is a shortened version of "we are". The apostrophe distinguishes the word "we're" from "were", which has both a different meaning and different pronunciation.

If the appearance of the word "it's" in your written work is there as a shortened version of two words, such as "it is" you should use the apostrophe.

Examples of the use of apostrophes to denote missing letters:

1. They *don't* employ staff in Wales. [do not]
2. I *can't* come on Monday. [cannot]

3. *It's* likely that the company will grow by 10% in the next financial year. [It is]
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## Exercise

Work out which version of its/it's should be used in the following phrases.

If in doubt ask yourself "Does the use of the word its/it's indicate possession?" If so *do not* use an apostrophe. If the use of the word its/it's *does not* indicate possession, then check that the word is actually a shortened version of two words and *do* use an apostrophe.

1. ☐ a shame about Ray.
  2. The user group understands the product and ☐ benefits.
  3. ☐ not unusual to be loved by anyone.
  4. ☐ business plan was drawn up by an accountant.
  5. ☐ now or never.
  6. ☐ raining men.
  7. The firm takes good care of ☐ placement students.
  8. ☐ the end of the world as we know it.
  9. The department will lose ☐ funding if ☐ judged as a poor information provider.
  10. ☐ my party and I'll cry if I want to.
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## One final point

Remember that this hand-out is about the words its/it's and apostrophes. The instructions given above are limited to this single problem.