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Apostrophes (')

THIS CHAPTER

- explains how to use apostrophes
- gives you practice using apostrophes correctly

TIP For fun podcasts with tips on grammar and usage, check out Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing on bedfordstmartins.com/realwriting.

Understand What Apostrophes Do

An **apostrophe** (') is a punctuation mark that either shows ownership (*Susan's*) or indicates that a letter has been intentionally left out to form a contraction (*I'm, that's, they're*). Although an apostrophe looks like a comma (,), it is not used for the same purpose, and it is written higher on the line than commas are.

apostrophe' comma,

Practice Using Apostrophes Correctly

Apostrophes to Show Ownership

Add **-'s** to a singular noun to show ownership even if the noun already ends in **-s**.

Karen's apartment is on the South Side.

They all followed the *college's* rules.

James's roommate is looking for him.

If a noun is plural and ends in **-s**, just add an apostrophe. If it is plural but does not end in **-s**, add **-'s**.

My *books'* covers are falling off.

[more than one book]

The *twin's*' father was building them a playhouse.
[more than one twin]

The *children's* toys were broken.

The *men's* locker room is being painted.

The placement of an apostrophe makes a difference in meaning.

My *sister's* six children are at my house for the weekend.
[one sister who has six children]

My *sisters'* six children are at my house for the weekend.
[two or more sisters who together have six children]

Do not use an apostrophe to form the plural of a noun.

Gina went camping with her *sister/s* and their children.

All of the *highway/s* to the airport are under construction.

Do not use an apostrophe with a possessive pronoun. These pronouns already show ownership (possession).

Is that bag *your/s*? No, it is *our/s*.

Possessive Pronouns

my	his	its	their
mine	her	our	theirs
your	hers	ours	whose
yours			

The single most common error with apostrophes and pronouns is confusing *its* (a possessive pronoun) with *it's* (a contraction meaning “it is”). Whenever you write *it's*, test correctness by replacing it with *it is* and reading the sentence aloud to hear if it makes sense.

PRACTICE 1 Using Apostrophes to Show Ownership

Edit the following sentences by adding -'s or an apostrophe alone to show ownership and by crossing out any incorrect use of an apostrophe or -'s.

EXAMPLE: People must respect other people's needs for personal space.

TIP For more practice using apostrophes correctly, visit Exercise Central at bedfordstmartins.com/realwriting.

TIP Answers to odd-numbered practice items for this chapter appear on page AK-9 at the back of the book.

1. A persons feelings about personal space depend on his or her's culture.
 2. Personal space is especially important in cultures' that are formal and reserved.
 3. Putting your face too close to anothers is considered rude.
 4. Fistfights often are preceded by someones aggressive violation of someone elses space.
 5. The expression “Get out of my face!” is a warning meant to prevent the confrontations violent conclusion.
 6. A dogs interaction with a member of it's own species can follow a similar pattern; dogs are determined to defend what is their's.
 7. The hair on dogs neck's may stand on end.
 8. A researchers recent work examines various species' personal space.
 9. For example, seagulls positions on a log follow a pattern similar to that of people lined up waiting for a bus.
 10. Studies show that an animals overcrowded environment can lead to violent behavior.
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Apostrophes in Contractions

TIP Ask your instructor if contractions are acceptable in papers.

A **contraction** is formed by joining two words and leaving out one or more of the letters. When writing a contraction, put an apostrophe where the letter or letters have been left out, not between the two words.

She's on her way. = *She is* on her way.

I'll see you there. = *I will* see you there.

Be sure to put the apostrophe in the right place.

It *doesn't* really matter.

LANGUAGE NOTE: Contractions that include a *be* verb cannot be followed by the base verb or the helping verbs *can*, *does*, or *has*.

INCORRECT She's *work* late. He's *has* sick.

CORRECT She's *working* late. He's sick.

Common Contractions

aren't = are not	she'll = she will
can't = cannot	she's = she is, she has
couldn't = could not	there's = there is
didn't = did not	they'd = they would, they had
don't = do not	they'll = they will
he'd = he would, he had	they're = they are
he'll = he will	they've = they have
he's = he is, he has	who'd = who would, who had
I'd = I would, I had	who'll = who will
I'll = I will	who's = who is, who has
I'm = I am	won't = will not
I've = I have	wouldn't = would not
isn't = is not	you'd = you would, you had
it's = it is, it has	you'll = you will
let's = let us	you're = you are
she'd = she would, she had	you've = you have

PRACTICE 2 Using Apostrophes in Contractions

Read each sentence carefully, looking for any words that have missing letters. Edit these words by adding apostrophes where needed and crossing out incorrectly used apostrophes.

EXAMPLE: Although we observe personal space boundaries in our daily lives, they're not something we spend much time thinking about.

1. Youll notice right away if a stranger leans over and talks to you so that his face is practically touching yours.
2. Perhaps youd accept this kind of behavior from a family member.
3. There is'nt one single acceptable boundary wed use in all situations.
4. An elevator has its own rules: Dont stand right next to a person if there is open space.
5. With coworkers, were likely to keep a personal space of four to twelve feet.

6. Well accept a personal space of four feet down to eighteen inches with friends.
 7. The last sixteen inches are reserved for people were most intimate with.
 8. When people hug or kiss, theyre willing to surrender their personal space to each other.
 9. A supervisor whos not aware of the personal space boundaries of his or her employees might make workers uncomfortable.
 10. Even if the supervisor does'nt intend anything by the gestures, its his or her responsibility to act appropriately.
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Apostrophes with Letters, Numbers, and Time

Use -'s to make letters and numbers plural. The apostrophe prevents confusion or misreading.

In Scrabble games, there are more *e*'s than any other letter.

In women's shoes, size *8*'s are more common than size *10*'s.

Use an apostrophe or -'s in certain expressions in which time nouns are treated as if they possess something.

She took four *weeks'* maternity leave after the baby was born.

This *year's* graduating class is huge.

PRACTICE 3 Using Apostrophes with Letters, Numbers, and Time

Edit the following sentences by adding apostrophes where needed and crossing out incorrectly used apostrophes.

EXAMPLE: When I returned to work after two weeks' vacation, I had what looked like a decades' worth of work in my box.

1. I sorted letters alphabetically, starting with *A*s.
 2. There were more letters by names' starting with *M*s than any other.
 3. When I checked my e-mail, the screen flashed 48s to show that I had forty-eight messages.
 4. My voice mail' wasn't much better, telling me that in two weeks time I had received twenty-five messages.
 5. I needed another weeks time just to return all the phone calls.
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Edit for Apostrophes

PRACTICE 4 Editing for Apostrophes

Edit the following paragraphs by adding two apostrophes where needed and crossing out four incorrectly used apostrophes.

(1) Have you noticed many honeybee's when you go outside? (2) If not, it is'nt surprising. (3) For reasons that scientists still don't quite understand, these bees have been disappearing all across the country. (4) This mass disappearance is a problem because bees are an important part of growing a wide variety of flowers, fruits, vegetables, and nuts as they spread pollen from one place to another.

(5) In the last year, more than one-third, or billions, of the honeybees in the United States' have disappeared. (6) As a consequence, farmers have been forced either to buy or to rent beehives for their crops. (7) Typically, people who are in the bee business ship hives to farmers fields by truck. (8) The hives often have to travel hundreds of miles.

(9) Scientist's have been trying to find out what happened to the once-thriving bee population. (10) They suspect that either a disease or chemicals harmed the honeybees. (11) As part of their research, scientists are taking samples from different hives to study. (12) They are eager to find out what caused bee's to disappear so that they can help reverse the trend, if possible.

PRACTICE 5 Editing Your Own Writing for Apostrophes

As a final practice, edit a piece of your own writing for apostrophes. It can be a paper you are working on for this course, a paper you have already finished, a paper for another course, or a recent piece of writing from your work or everyday life. In your learning journal, record any examples of sentences with apostrophe problems that you find, along with edited versions of these sentences.

Chapter Review

1. An apostrophe (') is a punctuation mark that either shows _____ or indicates that a letter or letters have been intentionally left out to form a _____.

- 2.** To show ownership, add _____ to a singular noun, even if the noun already ends in *-s*. For a plural noun, add an _____ alone if the noun ends in *-s*; add _____ if the noun does not end in *-s*.
 - 3.** Do not use an apostrophe with a _____ pronoun.
 - 4.** Do not confuse *its* and *it's*. *Its* shows _____; *it's* is a _____ meaning “it is.”
 - 5.** A _____ is formed by joining two words and leaving out one or more of the letters.
 - 6.** Use *'s* to make letters and numbers _____.
 - 7.** Use an apostrophe or *'s* in certain expressions in which _____ are treated as if they possess something.

Chapter Test

Circle the correct choice for each of the following items.

TIP For advice on taking tests, see Appendix A.

- 1.** If an underlined portion of this sentence is incorrect, select the revision that fixes it. If the sentence is correct as written, choose d.

I've always believed that it's a crime to use software that you haven't
A **B** **C**
paid for.

- a. I've
 - b. it's
 - c. haven't
 - d. No change is necessary.

- 2.** Choose the item that has no errors.

 - a.** The thieves boldness made them a lot of money, but it eventually landed them in jail.
 - b.** The thieves's boldness made them a lot of money, but it eventually landed them in jail.
 - c.** The thieves' boldness made them a lot of money, but it eventually landed them in jail.

3. Choose the item that has no errors.

 - a.** By playing that slot machine, your throwing away money.
 - b.** By playing that slot machine, you're throwing away money.
 - c.** By playing that slot machine, youre' throwing away money.

4. If an underlined portion of this sentence is incorrect, select the revision that fixes it. If the sentence is correct as written, choose d.

The house is now Renee's, but she'll regret having an address with
A B

five 3s in it.
C

- a. Renees c. 3's
b. sh'ell d. No change is necessary.

5. Choose the item that has no errors.

- a. Her eighteen months' service overseas has somehow made her seem older.
b. Her eighteen month's service overseas has somehow made her seem older.
c. Her eighteen months service overseas has somehow made her seem older.