

## CHAPTER

## 9 Apostrophe

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Identify what an apostrophe is;
2. Identify apostrophe's application in sentences;
3. Identify the difference between the use of apostrophe for the possession and the use of apostrophe for contractions; and
4. Identify common errors in the use of apostrophes and correct them.

## INTRODUCTION

The apostrophe is signified by the following sign: ( ' ). It is used for two main purposes:

- To show possession.
- To contract (or shorten, or combine) certain words.

These are the examples of apostrophe usage:

Apostrophe shows **possession**

Apostrophe shows **contraction**

It is **Raju's** dog.



**That's** the dog that won first prize.

### 9.1

## APOSTROPHES FOR POSSESSION AND WHERE TO PLACE THEM

When we want to say that something belongs to something or someone else, we can use the apostrophe ( ' ) + "s" to indicate this.

**For example:**

We can say:

*That dog belongs to Raju.*

But we can also say:

*It is **Raju's** dog.*



When we want to say that something belongs to something or someone else, we can use the apostrophe (') + "s" to indicate this.

**For example:**

The above example tells us how to show possession with an apostrophe if there is only one possessor and it is in the singular. But as we have learned from the previous chapters, things are often more complicated than this.

1. It is Malinda, Suzie and Chen Li's apartment.
2. It is Malinda's, Suzie's and Chen Li's apartment.



Below are some useful guidelines to help you.

- (a) If more than one singular possessor is indicated, we only need to place the apostrophe + "s" after the last possessor.

**Example:**

Both are correct, but the first example is more acceptable form today.

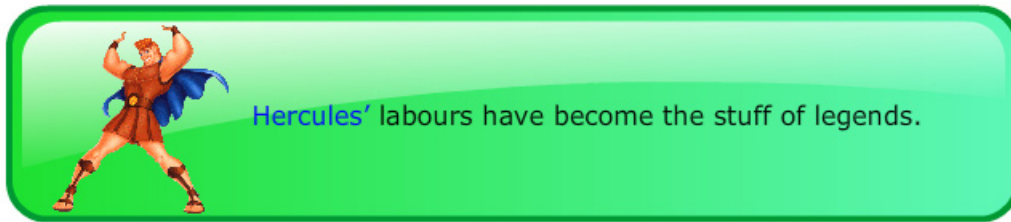
- (b) If the singular possessor ends with the letter "s", we indicate the possession by placing the apostrophe + "s" after the word.

This is **Chris's** book.



However, if the name is Greek or Latin in origin, do not add "s" after the apostrophe.

**Thaddeus'** task was to slay the evil beast with a thousand eyes.

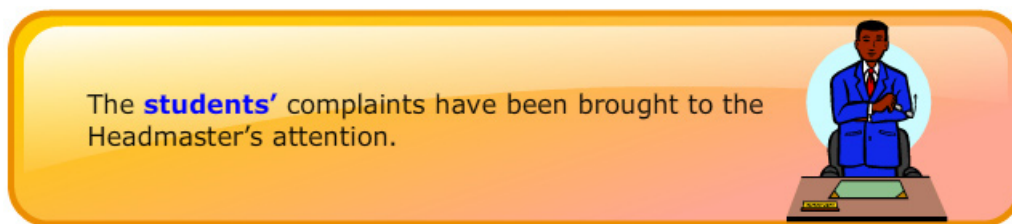


However, if the name is Greek or Latin in origin, do not add “s” after the apostrophe.

**For example:**

- (c) If the possessor is a plural noun that ends with an ‘s’, we place the apostrophe after the possessor, but we do not need to add an “s” after the apostrophe.

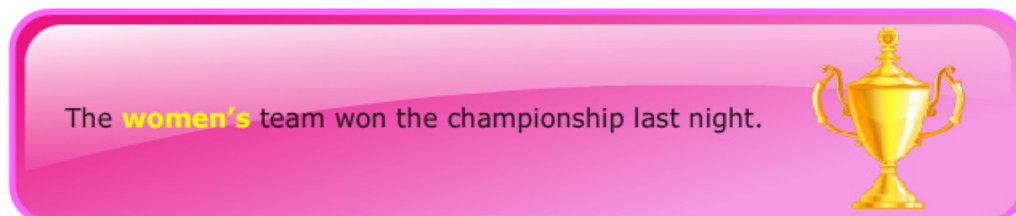
**Example:**



Don't be confused! We **only** put an apostrophe after a plural noun that ends with “s” if we want to show ownership.

- (d) If the possessor is a plural noun that does not end with an ‘s’, we place the apostrophe + “s” after the possessor.

**Example:**



- (e) The apostrophe is never used with the possessive pronouns (his, hers, theirs, etc.) because these pronouns already indicate possession. The only possessive pronoun that requires the apostrophe + “s” is the pronoun one.

**Example:**

It is **one's** duty to ensure that the school compound is kept clean at all times.



- (f) With some sentences, it is not clear what or who the possessor is. This is especially the case when we are talking about time.

**For example:**

It will take us one week of hard work to find the solution.



In this example, the “possessor” of the solution is “one week of hard work”; to show possession, place the apostrophe + “s” after one week.

It will take us **one week's** hard work to find the solution.

- (g) The apostrophe is not normally used after a noun which has an adjectival rather than a possessive sense.

**For example:**



Ladies toilet



Students union



**ACTIVITY**

Indicate which sentence applies the apostrophe correctly. Correct those which you think are wrong.

1. My wife's cooking is considered the best in town.
2. Malaysia boasts of many beautiful island's.
3. My uncle owns several expensive car's.
4. The two girls' friendship has blossomed in the last three years.
5. Rashad's pet fell sick last week. He sent him to the clinic's and it is all better now.
6. The busses's are due any minute now. Please do not be late.
7. The books in the towns' library are ruined by the flood last week.
8. The childrens' park was recently upgraded.
9. Did you hear that Mary and Dannys' mother passed away last week?
10. The sale is held during the year's end, with many items sold at bargain prices'.

## 9.2 APOSTROPHES FOR CONTRACTIONS

Apostrophes are also used to shorten a sentence by contracting certain words into a single word.

Instead of saying: **He is** stronger than me.

We can say: **He's** stronger than me.



In the second sentence, the words “he is” has been contracted (or combined) into a single word “he’s”; we use the apostrophe to indicate this, as well as to show the missing letter(s) that have been replaced by the apostrophe.

Figure 9.1 shown some familiar examples of contractions indicated by the apostrophe.

he/she is = he's/she's

it is = it's

I am = I'm

they are = they're

you are = you're

do not = don't

will not = won't

is not = isn't

would not = wouldn't

shall not = shan't

I would = I'd

you will = you'll

he/she/it will = he'll / she'll / it'll

he/she would = he'd / she'd

they would = they'd

we would = we'd

they have = they've

we have = we've

I have = I've

let us = let's

he/she/it has = he's / she's / it's

who is = who's

Figure 9.1: Examples of contractions indicated by the apostrophe

Contractions are normally used when speaking or in informal writing. You should avoid the use of contractions in academic essays and formal writing.

### ACTIVITY



Form one sentence each to reflect the examples listed in Figure 9.1.

For example:

- He's not sure he can pass the exams.
- Let's throw him a surprise birthday party.
- Who's coming with us to the football match?





For a full list apostrophe for contractions, visit the following URL:

<http://iamdriven.net/Contraction.html>



Indicate the apostrophe for contractions in the following sentences:

1. Its about time you clean up your room. Its a terrible mess.
2. Whats up with you today? You seem preoccupied about something.
3. I understand the hows but not the whys.
4. Hows it going?
5. This is its natural habitat.
6. Its price is fifty ringgit but Ill sell it to you for forty.
7. Whats interesting about the story is that the ending is unconventional.
8. Who couldve foreseen such an outcome?
9. I wouldve danced with him if he didnt have such a bad breath.
10. Its going to rain soon judging from the gray clouds.
11. Were worried because shes not feeling well.
12. Its not clear if theyre joining us for the camping trip.
13. Havent you finished eating yet? Youre going to be late.
14. Its your mission was to find their father.
15. When its available, Ill inform you.




### 9.3 APOSTROPHES: SOME COMMON ERRORS

#### (a) Its versus It's


Many users of English often confuse its with it's. Remember that we use the apostrophe to show either ownership or contraction. In the case of its, this is a possessive pronoun which indicates ownership. As such, it's is used only to indicate contraction.

Consider the following examples:



**Its** favourite food is chunks of meat mixed with carrots.

**It's** now three o'clock. What time did John say he is coming?



#### (b) Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns, by virtue of the fact that they already show possession, cannot carry an apostrophe. As such, there are no such forms as your's, her's, hers', its', etc.

#### (c) Confusion between the Plural and the Possessive

Apostrophes are used to indicate possession. Users of English often become confused when a plural noun ends with the letter "s".

Consider the following examples:



Tomorrow's  
appointment



In five days' time



One month's notice

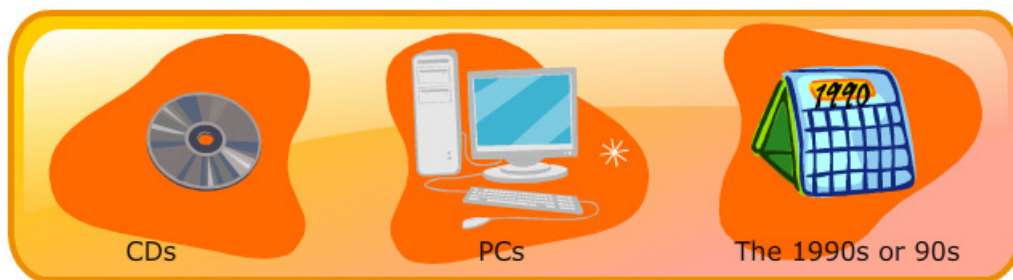
These three examples do not require an apostrophe because they do not show possession.



**(d) When Talking about Acronyms, a Particular Era or Examination Grades**

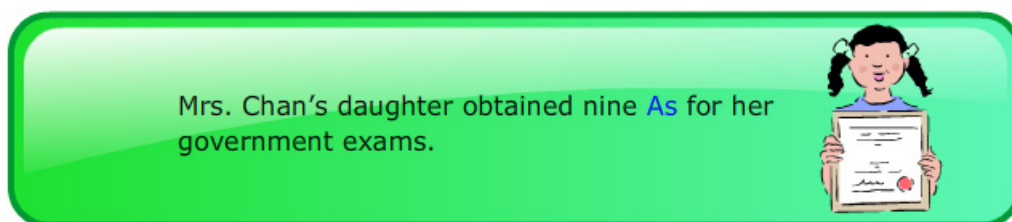
With words that are indicated by acronyms, or when discussing an historical era, we do not need to use an apostrophe.

Consider the following examples:



When we talk about the grades we obtained for our examinations, we do not need to use the apostrophe.

**For example:**



## SUMMARY

1. The apostrophe is a punctuation mark used to mark omissions and possessives of nouns and pronouns.

## KEY TERMS

Apostrophe for possession

Apostrophe for contraction

## REFERENCES

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