

While apostrophes may seem confusing, using them correctly becomes easier when you keep these guidelines in mind:

- Use an apostrophe to show possession.
- Use an apostrophe to show contractions.
- Use an apostrophe to show plurals, but only when the plural is for numbers, letters, symbols, or specific/unusual words.

Use an apostrophe to show possession.

Use an apostrophe and the letter "s" to show ownership of something.

For example, if Janice bought a new car, her friends would call it *Janice's new car*.

After the original word (Janice), you would add an apostrophe "s" to show that the car belongs to Janice.

Exception 1: When a word already ends in "s," it is not necessary to add another "s" to show ownership; you can simply use an apostrophe.

For example, if your bosses bought an office complex, you may refer to it as *my bosses' office complex*.

After the original word (bosses), the writer would add an apostrophe; this time, however, the writer would not add an "s" because it would be difficult to pronounce.

Yet, you do have the option of adding an "s" with the apostrophe if the word could still be pronounced.

For example, if your friend Cass owns a computer, you could describe it as *Cass's computer* because you can pronounce the possessive "s" at the end.

Exception 2: The word "its" already shows possession; therefore, you do not add an apostrophe.

For example, if you are referring to the collar missing from a stray dog, you may say, *The dog lost its collar*.

Even though "its" is showing possession, you do not add an apostrophe.

Note: "It's" ALWAYS stands for the contraction "it is."

Use an apostrophe to show contractions.

When you leave out a letter or two to combine two words into one, use an apostrophe

- Cannot=can't
- Do not=don't
- Will not=won't
- Should not=shouldn't
- You will=you'll

Use an apostrophe to show plurals, but only when the plural is for numbers, letters, symbols, or references to specific words.

One common mistake with apostrophes is to use an apostrophe to show more than one thing. Examples of this mistake include:

A week includes seven day's. (INCORRECT)

A week includes seven days (CORRECT)

The writer is talking about more than one day, but no possession exists. Therefore, this use of an apostrophe is incorrect.

However, in unusual words, an apostrophe is sometimes necessary to make the plural clear. For example, to avoid confusing the reader, the following situations would require apostrophes to show plural:

Mind your p's and q's. (Without the apostrophe to clear up confusion, your reader may stop for a moment to try and figure out what the words "ps" and "qs" mean.)

I typed #'s to indicate missing numbers. (Without the apostrophe, your reader may briefly wonder what #s means.)

Five their's are misspelled in the paper. (Without the apostrophe, your reader may stop for a moment to try and figure out what theirs means.)