

Uses of Apostrophes

The apostrophe appears as part of a word to indicate possession or the omission of one or more letters, as when forming contractions. This often misused punctuation mark can also be used in forming certain plural forms, such as with plural lowercase letters and single-digit numbers expressed numerically.

- **Add an apostrophe and -s to form the possessive of singular nouns and indefinite pronouns not ending in -s.**
 - Examples: Kevin's dog, the defendant's statement, everyone's business
- **The apostrophe alone is placed after the -s to form the possessive of plural nouns ending in -s.**
 - Examples: the twin brothers' horses, the witnesses' affidavits, six weeks' pay

For plural nouns not ending in -s, add an apostrophe and -s to form the possessive. Examples: the men's retreat, the children's musical, the geese's eggs

NOTE: For proper nouns ending in -s, the major style guides specify adding an apostrophe and -s. Always defer to the requirements stated in your field's particular style guide. E.g., Henry James's novels, Mississippi Rivers' banks, Moses's staff
- **To reflect joint possession, add the apostrophe only to the final noun; however, to indicate individual possession, add an apostrophe to all nouns.**
 - Examples: Todd and Alyssa's new house is in the city. The parents' and teacher's goals were at odds.
- **For compound words, add the apostrophe to the last element.**
 - Example: Pam's mother-in-law's visit was cut short.
- **Use an apostrophe to indicate omission of letters (contractions) and numbers (first two digits of a year).**
 - Examples: isn't, don't, it's, we're the class of '25
- **Use an apostrophe to form the plural of lowercase letters and single-digit numbers expressed numerically.**
 - Example: dotting your i's and crossing your t's, rubric scores of all 3's

Common Misuses

- **Do not use an apostrophe to make nouns plural.**
 - **Incorrect:** The magazine's are displayed on the entry table. The Thompson's live in the next building.
 - **Correct:** The magazines are displayed on the entry table. The Thompsons live in the next building.
- **Do not add an additional -s to plural possessive nouns ending in -s.**
 - **Incorrect:** The cars's horns were blasting all around the intersection. The piano keys's hammers needed adjusting.
 - **Correct:** The cars' horns were blasting all around the intersection. The piano keys' hammers needed adjusting.

- **Do not add an apostrophe to possessive personal pronouns.**
 - **Incorrect:** That sweater is her's. The dog never obeys it's owner.
 - **Correct:** That sweater is hers. The dog never obeys its owner. (**Note:** *It's* is always a contraction of *it is*. *Its* is the possessive personal pronoun.)
- **Do not add an apostrophe to dates (decades), acronyms (uppercase letters), or numbers 10 and above.**
 - **Incorrect:** Most of the audience members were born in the 1980's. Accountants are not always CPA's.
 - **Correct:** Most of the audience members were born in the 1980s. Accountants are not always CPAs. (**Note:** When using only the last two numerals to reference a decade, an apostrophe takes the place of the omitted numerals, as in "the '50s." No apostrophe is needed before the –s.)

Practice

Place the missing apostrophes in the correct locations.

1. the cats tail
2. Jesus miracles
3. everybodys prayer
4. Billys talents
5. the swimmers kickboards
6. the birds cages
7. the corporations policies

Use an apostrophe to form the correct contractions.

8. we are
9. do not
10. should not
11. it is
12. are not

Answers: 1. cat's 2. Jesus's 3. everybody's 4. Billy's 5. swimmers' 6. birds' 7. corporations' 8. we're 9. don't 10. shouldn't 11. it's 12. aren't

Insert an apostrophe and an –s (if required) wherever needed in the following sentences. Mark as "correct" if no apostrophe is needed.

1. Following the pandemic, children educations are at stake.
2. Politicians need to attract the media attention.
3. Two 3s end the zip code.
4. Workers net incomes have fallen over the past year due to inflation.
5. Students often benefit from several years work after high school.
6. The words *macadamia* and *catamaran* are both spelled with four a and have nine letters.
7. Some of the earth forests are regenerating.
8. Everyone fitness can be improved through regular exercise.
9. The three brother-in-law business failed during its first year.
10. The investment firm hired four MBAs from Wharton this year.

11. After meeting about the book, the publishers decided its cover should be black and white.
12. The stage manager wondered whos coming to the premiere from the list of invited critics.
13. The 1950s are often referred to as the roaring 50s.
14. To save his life, baby Moses basket was floated down the Nile River by his mother.
15. The adopted child thrived because of her new mother and father unconditional love.
16. Its difficult to manage full-time work and school schedules.
17. Many companies monitor their employees outbound e-mails.
18. Although athletes abilities can be honed in training, they cant reach their optimal levels without healthy diets and their coaches guidance.
19. Some readers interpretations of the book may be different based on the author use of alternate endings in the books different editions.
20. It isnt uncommon for mens blood pressures to run higher than womens.

Answers: 1. children's 2. media's 3. 3's 4. Workers' 5. years' 6. a's 7. earth's 8. Everyone's 9. brothers-in-law's 10. correct 11. correct 12. who's 13. '50s 14. Moses's 15. father's 16. It's 17. employees' 18. athletes', can't, coaches' 19. readers', author's, book's 20. isn't, men's, women's

References

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