

# The Apostrophe

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The apostrophe is used to do the following:

- **show possession**
- **mark omissions in contracted words or numerals**
- **form plurals of letters, numerals, and words referred to as words.**

## SHOWING POSSESSION:

The apostrophe can show the possessive case of nouns (Sam, Sally, car, horse, love, etc.) and indefinite pronouns (everyone, someone, anybody, nobody, etc.).

The possessive case of nouns and indefinite pronouns shows ownership or a similar relationship and may be indicated by the use of **'s**, by the apostrophe alone, or by an **of-phrase**.

- **everyone's** friend                      or                      the friend **of** everyone
- the **girls'** laughter                      or                      the laughter **of** girls

A possessive noun or pronoun may be related to a word (or word group) that precedes it or one that is clearly implied.

- Is that old, broken down Chevy **Joe's** or **Linda's**? (*In other words, does the Chevy belong to Joe, or does it belong to Linda?*)

For singular nouns and indefinite pronouns, add **'s**

- **Frank's** idea / a **week's** work / a **nickel's** worth
- **anybody's** guess / **someone's** coat / **one's** choices

Option: If a singular noun ends in -s, add 's or only the apostrophe.

- **Keats's** poetry                      or                      **Keats'** poetry
- a **waitress's** tips                      or                      a **waitress'** tips

For plural nouns ending in -s, add only the apostrophe. For plurals not ending in -s, add **'s**.

- **girls'** dresses    (dresses for girls)
- **babies'** toes    (toes of babies)
- **men's** clothing / **women's** job / **children's** rights

For word groups, add **'s** only to the last word.

- my **brother-in-law's** house
- **George Orwell, Jr.'s**, reply
- the **Secretary of Defense's** idea

To indicate individual ownership, add **'s** to each name.

- **Frank's** and **June's** dogs (dogs belonging to Frank and dogs belonging to June)
- the **doctor's** and the **dentist's** offices (an office belonging to the doctor and an office belonging to the dentist)
- the **Joker's** and the **Penguin's** henchmen (henchmen belonging to the Joker and henchmen belonging to the Penguin)

To indicate joint ownership, add **'s** only to the last name.

- **Frank and June's** dog (dogs Frank and June share)
- The **doctor and the dentist's** office (an office that the doctor and dentist share)
- The **Joker and the Penguin's** henchmen (henchmen the Joker and the Penguin share)

### MARKING OMISSIONS:

Use an apostrophe to mark omissions in contracted words and omissions in dates.

- cannot = **can't** / he will = **he'll** / I am = **I'm** / they are = **they're** / I will = **I'll** / will not = **won't**
- class of 1991 = class of **'91**

Note : Contractions in writing mirror speech. As a rule, they are avoided in formal writing, but they are common (and often preferable) both in informal writing and in dialogue.

### FORMING PLURALS:

Use **'s** to form the plural of lowercase letters, of numbers, of abbreviations followed by periods, and of words referred to as words.

- His **b's** look like **6's**.
- **M.A.'s** / **Ph.D.'s**
- Her **I's** are illegible and her **miss's** look like **mess's**.

When needed to avoid confusion, use **'s** to form plurals of capital letters, of symbols, and of abbreviations not followed by periods. Either **'s** or **s** may be used to form such plurals as the following:

- the **1900's** or the **1900s**
- his **7's** or his **7s**
- two **B's** or two **Bs**.

NEVER use the apostrophe with the following pronouns: his, her, hers, its, our, ours, your, yours, their, theirs or whose.

Caution: Do not confuse **its** with **it's**, **whose** with **who's** or **your** with **you're**:

- **Its** motor is small. (the motor of it) / **It's** a small motor. (It is a small motor.)
- **Whose** is that? (Who owns that?) / **Who's** that? (Who is that?)
- **Your** hat, sir. (Here is your hat.) / **You're** joking, right? (You are joking.)