

Apostrophes

1. The apostrophe (') has two functions. It indicates both the **possessive case** and **contractions**. This might seem simple, but it causes a lot of problems.
2. **The Possessive Case**
We can say either *The whiskers of the cat*, or *the cat's whiskers*. This is the possessive case, when something belongs to somebody or something else.
3. When the possessor is single we indicate possession by using an apostrophe followed by the letter 's':
The man's coat my sister's hat.
4. When the possessors are plural, the apostrophe is placed *after* the final 's':
The girls' bicycles my cousins' parents.
5. When *names* end with the letter 's', either use is acceptable: -> *James' wife* or *James's wife*.
(It is often said that the choice between the two should be made on how the word is pronounced.)
6. The apostrophe is never used with possessive pronouns:
his, hers, its ours, yours, theirs
But it is used with 'one': *One must do one's best.*
7. Many shops and business concerns these days omit the apostrophe from their titles:
Barclays Bank Coopers Wines.
8. Note that the apostrophe is *not* required where a word has been formed by omitting its first part:
bus NOT *'bus* - *phone* NOT *'phone*
9. No apostrophe is required in the *plural* form of numbers and dates: -> *in the 1920s the roaring twenties*
10. The possessive of classical names ending in *es* is often formed by the apostrophe alone:
Demosthenes' speeches
Sophocles' plays
Xerxes' campaigns
11. French names ending in an unpronounced *s* or *x* follow the normal rule, taking an apostrophe and an *s*:
Rabelais's comedy - Malraux's novels

Contractions

In formal prose we would write *She has told him*, but when speaking we would say *She's told him*. The apostrophe is used to indicate the missing letters.

1. I am (*I'm*) - He is (*he's*) - You are (*You're*).
2. Note the difference between *it's* (it is) and *its* (belonging to it).
3. Notice too that the term **its'** does not exist.
4. **It's** may also be a contraction of 'it has' - *'It's been a pleasure meeting you'.*

General

1. With acronyms and abbreviations, there is no need to add an apostrophe to denote the plural:
MP (military police) - sixteen MPs - PC (personal computer) - a network of PCs - MB (megabyte) 100 MB
2. But the apostrophe should be used in any expression which includes an element of possession:
MPs' salaries - a PC's capacity
3. The apostrophe is not normally used after a noun which has an adjectival rather than a possessive sense
ladies toilet - Rates Office - students union
4. You should avoid the use of contractions in essays and formal writing.