

# Apostrophe Guide

The apostrophe is used:

1. to form possessives of nouns
2. to show the omission of letters
3. to indicate certain plurals of lowercase letters

1) Apostrophes are used to show letters left out of contractions.

- Example 1: *Sam can't go to the mall because she didn't do her homework.*
- Example 2: *I would've done my homework, but I forgot my book at school.*

Remember, for academic or formal writing, avoid using contractions. Use a full phrase:

- Informal: *The dendrite isn't a factor in this experiment.*
- Formal: *The dendrite is not a factor in this experiment.*

Examples of informal writing are messages to friends or unofficial documents. Examples of formal writing are writing for class, resumes and cover letters, etc.

Nouns and pronouns can also be made into contractions by using different forms of the verb “to be.”

- Example 1: *I'm going to the mall today.*
- Example 2: *I think it's going to snow today.*

In Example 2, *it's* is a combination of “it” and “is.”

## When to use *its* and *it's*.

The general rule is, to say *it is*, use the contraction *it's*.

If you do not mean *it is*, then use *its*.

- Example 1: *It's raining today.* This can also be written as *it is raining today.*
- Example 2: *The book's pages are falling out.* The form *its* can replace *the book's* in this sentence and can be written as *its pages are falling out.*

The form *its* can be confusing because when possession is indicated, an apostrophe is used. However, *its* is an exception to this rule.

## Using *whose* and *who's*.

The form *who's* is a contraction that means *who is*.

- Example 1: *Who's* there?

The form *whose* is a possessive.

- Example 1: *Whose* dog is in my yard?
- Example 2: *I don't know whose* dog that is.

Remember, *who's* is a contraction and is not used in academic writing. However, using *whose* does not depend on who you are speaking or writing for, and so *whose* can use this in academic writing. *Whose* is used only for ownership and possession.

2) Apostrophes are also used to display a single noun as possessive.

- Example 1: *The teacher's* lesson plans were revised this year.
- Example 2: *The book's* pages are falling out.

Remember, when using an apostrophe to show that something *belongs to* or is *owned by* something else, it is not meant in the actual sense of owning. The book mentioned in Example 2 does not actually *own* its pages, but the pages do belong to the book.

**Exception:** If a singular noun ends in 's', do not add another 's' to show the possessive. Instead, add an apostrophe after the singular noun in order to show possession.

- Example 1: *The weather is too hot for the circus' animals to perform.*
- Example 2: *The octopus' tentacles are covered with tiny suction cups.*

The animals in Example 1 belong to that particular circus, so possession here is indicated by the apostrophe after the word. Similarly, Example 2 is describing the tentacles of a single octopus, so ownership is presented by the apostrophe after the singular noun.

3) Apostrophes are also used to display a plural noun ending in 's' as possessive.

- Example 1: *The circus performers' costumes were destroyed in the fire.*
- Example 2: *The trees' leaves are covering my entire lawn.*

Because these nouns are plural and already end in 's,' do not add another apostrophe 's' to show possession. Because of this, do not make any changes to the word itself, but add an apostrophe after the 's' to signify the noun as possessive.

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Source: Purdue Online Writing Lab, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/606/1/>