

The Apostrophe

The apostrophe has three uses: 1) to show the omission of letters and numbers; 2) to form possessive nouns; and 3) to indicate plurals of letters. Do not use apostrophes to form possessive pronouns or noun plurals that are not possessives.

To show omission

Contractions occur when an apostrophe is used to indicate missing letters in the abbreviated forms of many short phrases. Avoid using contractions in academic writing as they are too informal. An apostrophe can also indicate numbers that have been omitted (see below).

I'm (I am)	They're (They are)	Can't (Cannot)	Could've (Could have)
She's (She is/she has)	You're (You are)	He'll (He will)	Won't (Will not)
He'd (He would/he had)	We've (We have)	Doesn't (Does not)	Didn't (Did not)
Class of '08 (2008)	In the '60s (1960s)	It's (It is)	Who's (Who is)

To form possessive nouns

1. Use an apostrophe before the s to show ownership.

The boy's hat	The dog's tail	Jane's DVD	The boss's office
Men's ties	Women's shoes	People's choice	Children's toys

EXCEPTION: Possessive pronouns already indicate the notion of ownership, so no apostrophe is required (his, hers, theirs, ours, yours, whose, its).

2. Use an apostrophe before s to show ownership of a noun that already ends in s.

James's hat (James' hat is also acceptable in <u>non-academic styles</u> .)

NOTE: Do not add another *s* for plural words ending in *s* and names from the ancient world.

Students' grades	Four pen pals' letters
Achilles' heel	Jesus' followers

Question: When do you use *it's* and *its*? Ask yourself if the sentence still makes sense if you replace *it's* with *it is*. (*It's* = *it is*; *its* = the possessive form.) Similarly, use *who's* as a contraction of *who is*, and use *whose* when you want to indicate possession.

Correct	The school closed its doors after 50 years.
Incorrect	The school closed it's doors after 50 years.
Correct	The student whose exam went missing will have to write it again.
Incorrect	The student who's exam went missing will have to write it again.

3. Add an apostrophe + *s* to the last noun in a series to show joint possession.

Correct	Todd and Anne's apartment.	Incorrect	Todd's and Anne's apartment.
Correct	My and my husband's dog.	Incorrect	My husband and I's dog.

To form plurals of lowercase letters

An apostrophe is only used to indicate plurals of alphabet letters so as to avoid confusion.

Correct	The word <i>Athabasca</i> has four a's in it.
Incorrect	The word <i>Athabasca</i> has four as in it.
Correct	Nita's mother constantly stressed minding one's p's and q's.
Incorrect	Nita's mother constantly stressed minding one's ps and qs.
Correct	Parents are invited to attend the council meeting.
Incorrect	Parent's are invited to attend the council meeting.

References:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/apostrophe_introduction.html

