Apostrophes

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Uses of Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used for:

- Possession with nouns
- Possession with indefinite pronouns
- Contractions
- A quote inside a quote
- Plural numbers and letters
- Missing parts of a slang word
Possession with Nouns

The words “of” and “belonging to” can show the possession (ownership) of one noun by a different noun.

The lights of the room illuminated a book belonging to Joe.
On the table were ten books belonging to the other students.

An apostrophe with an “s” also shows possession.

The room’s lights illuminated Joe’s book.
On the table were the other students’ ten books.
Possession with Singular Nouns

To show possession with singular nouns, an *apostrophe* and an “s” are added to the person or thing acting as the possessor.

The student’s book was on Mary’s desk.

Even if the objects being possessed are plural, as long as the possessor is singular, an *apostrophe* and an “s” are still used.

The student’s ten books were on the classroom’s largest desks.
Possession with Plural Nouns

To add *possession* to *plural* nouns, a writer can begin by first spelling out all of a sentence’s singular and *plural* nouns.

*The lights of the room illuminated the two books belonging to Joe.*

Then possession should be added:

1. If the *possessive* noun has no “s” for its last letter, both an *apostrophe* and an “s” should be added.

   *The room’s lights illuminated Joe’s two textbooks.*

   *Joe’s children brought their books as they walked into the room.*

   *Joe placed his children’s books next to his own textbooks.*

2. If the *possessive* noun has an “s,” just an *apostrophe* is added.

   *On a different table were some other students’ books.*
Possession with Indefinite Pronouns

An *apostrophe* and an “s” show possession for an *indefinite pronoun* (anyone, anybody, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, someone, somebody).

*Someone’s* book is on the shelf.

*Everyone’s* books are on the desk.
Possession with Personal Pronouns

Even though an *apostrophe* is used with possessive nouns, **no apostrophe** is used with possessive personal pronouns (my, your, his, her, its, our, your, their).

Singular possessive noun: **Joe’s** books are on the desk.

Singular possessive pronoun: **His** books are on the desk.

Plural possessive noun: Two **students’** books are on the desk.

Plural possessive pronoun: **Their** books are on the desk.
Contractions use apostrophes to show where a missing letter(s) could be placed in a more formal, longer version.

Mary and Joe can’t believe the fun they’ve been having while reading their textbooks.

They’re planning on reading more books over the summer.
A Quote Inside of a Quote

Single quotation marks can indicate a quotation inside of a quotation.

In his paper, Joe Smith wrote, “Ayn Rand must have been thinking about pictures and words when she said, ‘Words are a lens to focus one’s mind.’”
Plural Numbers and Letters

Both an apostrophe and an “s” are used to make numbers and letters plural.

4’s were added to the first line, and B’s were deleted from the second line.
Missing Parts of a Slang Word

An *apostrophe* can show where missing letters have been taken out of slang (an informal version of a word or phrase).

- formal:  *nothing for my birthday*
- informal:  *nothin’ 4 my b’day*
More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.
Contact Information

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