

Apostrophes

Generally speaking, the apostrophe has three uses:

1. To show the omission of letters
2. To indicate certain plurals of letters and numbers
3. To form possessives of nouns

Rule 1: To show the omission of letters (contractions)

Do not = don't
Did not = didn't
1990s = '90s

Rule 2: To indicate certain plurals of letters and numbers. There is no need for apostrophes indicating a plural on capitalized letters, numbers, and symbols (though some teachers still prefer them).

Watch your p's and q's
She consulted with three M.D.s
I made straight As in school
My sister lived through the 1960s.

Rule 3: To form possessives of nouns. First determine if the noun is singular or plural. If it's singular, add an apostrophe and s; if it's plural, add the apostrophe after the s. *This is a flexible rule that changes depending on the source and teacher. Check with your audience!!*

I ate Billy's pizza.
Sally borrowed Tom's car.
She talked to my boss' husband; she talked to my boss's husband.

Check ownership. If there is more than one person owning more than one item, each person gets an apostrophe. But if two people possess the same item, put the apostrophe + s after the second name only.

Sally borrowed Tom and Jean's car. (one car shared by Tom and Jean)
I love Sally's and Tom's outfits. (two outfits, one each for Sally and Tom)

What about plurals? This is one you need to pay attention to! If the noun is plural, determine the form of the plural and THEN add the 's. Just because something ends in an "s" doesn't mean it's possessive!!

I ate the Jones' pizza. (one family unit named Jones)

I took the child's sock. (one child)

I took the children's socks. (more than one child—the plural of children is not "childrens")

The teeth's roots are rotten (more than one tooth—the plural of tooth is not "teeths")

Singular: the fish's gills are cool.

Plural: the fishes' gills are cool.

Finally, here's when you will **NEVER** use an apostrophe: for *possessive* pronouns (they are already possessive so to add the apostrophe would be repetitively redundant): his, her, its, my, your, ours. However, *indefinite* pronouns such as one, anyone, other, no one, and anybody can be possessive:

Is that his book? (not his' book)

Is that book yours? (not your's)

One should always carry one's book.

Attention!!

Here's the weird one that gives everyone pause:

It's = it is; its = possession

The dog wagged its tail; it's very happy.

Much of this information was taken directly from the Purdue Owl.