



The Apostrophe

Apostrophes are commonly misused by writers. The most common mistake writers make with apostrophes is to put them into plural nouns which are not possessive. Apostrophes should be used in contractions (don't) and possessive nouns (Bob's), but not in simple plurals or possessive pronouns.

Apostrophes in contractions

Use an apostrophe for a contraction, in which two words are combined and shortened into one word. Consider the following examples.

1. Example:

Jackson Lake is not my favorite place to go water skiing anymore.

When you use an apostrophe to make a contraction, the sentence becomes

Jackson Lake isn't my favorite place to go water skiing anymore.

- The phrase *is not* becomes the contraction *isn't*, and the apostrophe replaces the *o* in *not*.

2. Example:

I promised I would finish the report by tomorrow, but I am afraid it is going to be late.

When you use apostrophes to make contractions, the sentence becomes

I promised I'd finish the report by tomorrow, but I'm afraid it's going to be late.

- The phrase *I would* becomes the contraction *I'd*, and the apostrophe replaces the *w-o-u-l* in *would*.
- The phrase *I am* becomes the contraction *I'm*, and the apostrophe replaces the *a* in *am*.
- The phrase *it is* becomes the contraction *it's*, and the apostrophe replaces the *i* in *is*.

3. Example:

They had not met the new manager yet.

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When you use apostrophes to make contractions, the sentence becomes,

They hadn't met the new manager yet.

- The phrase *had not* becomes the contraction *hadn't*, and the apostrophe replaces the *o* in *not*.

Apostrophes in Possessives

Use an apostrophe to make a noun possessive and let your reader know that the noun owns or has something.

1. For singular possessive nouns, in which just one noun owns or has something:

- I really like Juanita's new haircut.
- Omar's is my favorite North African restaurant.
- Where is the police officer's badge?

2. For plural possessive nouns, in which more than one noun owns or has something:

- If the word becomes plural when you add an *s* to the end, add an apostrophe after the *s* to make the word possessive as well. For example,
 - They bought their daughters' clothes at the mall.
 - The professor wrote comments on her students' papers.
- If the noun is plural without an *s*, add an apostrophe and then an *s*. For example,
 - This vote reflects the people's decision.
 - You can find men's, women's and children's shoes at this store.

Common mistakes with apostrophes

1. Simple plurals

Because the sentence below is about more than one potato, and there is no indication that the potatoes own anything, no apostrophe is necessary.

Put the potato's over by the stove.

This sentence should read,

Put the potatoes over by the stove.

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2. Singular possessives

Consider the following example:

Which countries flag is that?

First, *countries* is the plural form of country, and this sentence is only about one country. Second, because this sentence is about a flag that belongs to a single country, an apostrophe is necessary.

This sentence should read,

Which country's flag is that?

3. Possessive adjectives

In the examples below, no apostrophe is needed in the case of a possessive pronoun such as its, hers, his, yours, ours, or theirs.

The cat twitched its whiskers.

This potato is hers.

We should try his new restaurant.

I believe these clothes are yours.

This report is ours.

These water skis are theirs

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