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Literacy

The Apostrophe

THE APOSTROPHE

Rule 1

Use the apostrophe with contractions. The apostrophe is always placed at the spot where the letter(s) has been removed.

Examples:

I don't like Maths

Isn't it a very cold day?

You're right.

He's a great teacher.

Rule 2

Use the apostrophe to show possession. Place the apostrophe before the s to show singular possession.

Examples:

This boy's coat

One woman's dog

This actress's worst movie.

A child's toy

Ms. Ward's English class

NOTE: Although names ending in s or an s sound are not required to have the second s added in possessive form, it is possible to add an extra s.

Examples:

DavyJones's locker

Davy Jones' locker

Yeats' best poem

Yeats's best poem

Rule 3

Use the apostrophe where the noun that should follow is implied.

Example:

This was his father's, not his, jacket.

Rule 4

When plural nouns are possessive, make the noun plural, then immediately use the apostrophe after it.

Examples:

Two friends' school bags

two women's houses

two actresses' movies

two children's toys

the Murphys' houses

Rule 5

Do not use an apostrophe for the plural of a name.

Examples:

We visited the Murphys in Cork.

The Mullens have two fish and a dog.

Rule 6

With a singular compound noun, show possession with 's at the end of the word.

Example:

My mother-in-law's wig

Rule 7

If the compound noun is plural, form the plural first and then use the apostrophe.

Example:

My two brothers-in-law's company.

Rule 8

Use the apostrophe and s after the second name only if two people possess the same thing.

Examples:

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's crime.

Stephen's and Anna's test results are awful.

In the above sentence there is separate ownership.

Stephen and Anna's test results were better.

Indicates joint ownership of more than one identical test.

Rule 9

You never use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns: *his, hers, its, theirs, ours, yours, whose*. They already show possession so they do not require an apostrophe.

Correct:

This car is hers, not yours.

Incorrect:

Your's Sincerely.

Rule 10

The only time an apostrophe is used for *it's* is when it is a contraction for *it is* or *it has*.

Examples:

It's a beautiful day.

It's up to you.

It's been great meeting you.

Rule 11

The plurals for capital letters and numbers used as nouns are not formed with apostrophes.

Examples:

She consulted with three T.D.s.

BUT

She went to three T.D.s' clinics.

The apostrophe is needed here to show plural possessive.

She learned her ABCs.

*the 1990s **not** the 1990's*

*the '90s or the mid-'80s **not** the '90's or the mid-'70's*

She learned her times tables for 6s and 7s.

Exception:

Use apostrophes with capital letters and numbers when the meaning would be unclear otherwise.

Examples:

Please dot your i's.

Ted couldn't distinguish between his 6's and 0's.

You need to use the apostrophe to indicate the plural of zero. Without the apostrophe it would look like the word Os. To be consistent within the sentence, you also use the apostrophe to indicate the plural of 6's.

Rule 12

Use the possessive case in front of a present participle(-ing word).

Examples:

Sophia's dancing was a joy to behold.

This does not stop Mr Hogan's putting us all on detention.

Rule 13

If the present participle has a pronoun in front of it, use the possessive form of that pronoun.

Examples:

I appreciate your inviting me to dinner. I appreciated his working with me to resolve the conflict.

"As chairman of the Apostrophe Protection Society (www.apostrophe.org.uk), I had to write and express my pleasure at seeing your view on the apostrophe and names ending in an s." —John Richards