

# All About Apostrophes

---

The apostrophe is a confusing punctuation mark, but a few simple guidelines can make using apostrophes less bewildering.

## When to Use Apostrophes

- Apostrophes are used to show possession. Typically, you add an apostrophe and an "s" after a possessive noun. If a noun is plural and ends in "s," add just the apostrophe.
  - President *Bush's* dog threw up last night.
  - My *parents'* car is big and ugly.
- Apostrophes are used in contractions to show where letters have been removed. They are also used to take the place of numbers when abbreviating years.
  - *It's* too bad that Bo is not the next American Idol.
  - I *can't* work tonight because I want to watch "Lost."
  - Tony Clark was obviously the best graduate of the class of *'92*.
- Apostrophes *may* be used in plural numbers/words and abbreviations. The following sentences include optional apostrophes:
  - Sasha Cohen needs to practice her figure *8's* better.
  - The killer slashed *Z's* all over the victim's body.
- In some instances, apostrophes are needed to show plural words. Here is an example of an apostrophe that is necessary for clarity:
  - John Kerry has said enough "*I'm sorry's*" to last a lifetime.

## Avoiding Common Apostrophe Mistakes

- Don't use apostrophes to pluralize decades.
  - Wrong: The *1950's* were the era of milkshakes and Eisenhower.
  - Correct: The *1950s* were the era of milkshakes and Eisenhower.
- Don't use apostrophes with plural nouns that are not possessive.
  - Wrong: The *soldier's* declared martial law and looted the museums.
  - Correct: The *soldiers* declared martial law and looted the museums.
- Don't use apostrophes in possessive pronouns like its, hers, ours, or yours. This is the only time when possession does not warrant an apostrophe.
  - Wrong: Bank One Ballpark even has *it's* own life support system
  - Correct: Bank One Ballpark even has *its* own life support system

# THE APOSTROPHE



## 1. TO SHOW **POSSESSION** TO A SINGULAR NOUN, ADD **APOSTROPHE - S**:

John **Lennon's** voice is iconic. (PERSON)  
The **city's** lights blurred in the rain. (PLACE)  
The **chair's** legs were uneven. (THING)

NOTE: to show that an inanimate object possesses something, use "its" as in:

"**Its** tattered cover made the textbook seem old and useless."

ALSO: when the word meant to carry possession ends in an -s, some writers use only an apostrophe following a singular noun ending in -s:

"**Socrates'** hair loss was attributable to too much thinking."

## 2. TO SHOW **POSSESSION** TO A PLURAL NOUN ENDING IN **-S**, ADD ONLY AN APOSTROPHE



My **sisters'** new hairstyles are trendy.

## 3. TO SHOW WHERE LETTERS OR NUMBERS HAVE BEEN REMOVED IN A **CONTRACTION**:

**It's** too bad that Frank Ocean did not release a new album on August 5th, 2016.

Tony Clark was the valedictorian of the class of **'92**.

NOTE (1): "it's" IS THE CONTRACTED FORM OF "it is." IT NEVER SHOWS POSSESSION.

NOTE (2): "It's wise to avoid using contractions in formal writing, including your academic writing, unless your professor says it's acceptable.

## 4. TO GIVE CLARITY TO CERTAIN PLURAL **NUMBERS/WORDS & ABBREVIATIONS**

Sasha needs to execute her figure **8's** better.

The bandit slashed **Z's** all over the wall.

John has said enough "**I'm sorry's**" to last a lifetime.

## 5. WHEN **NOT TO USE AN APOSTROPHE**

**When pluralizing decades:**

The **1950s** were a swell time.

**With non-possessive plural nouns:**

The **soldiers** sang while looting the museum.

**With possessive pronouns (its, hers, yours, ours):**

The ballpark even has **its** own life support system.