



Punctuation Rules: Apostrophes

There are three different ways to correctly use apostrophes:

1. To show possession (one noun belongs to another noun)

If the noun is singular and/or a plural noun not ending in 's,' add an apostrophe + s to show possession.

Grandma's house Sophie's paper children's pool sheep's wool

If a proper noun ends in an 's,' add an apostrophe + s to show possession.

Alexis's cat Lewis's novel St. Louis's Arch Memphis's music

If a plural noun ends in an 's,' follow the 's' with an apostrophe.

drivers' cars students' books teachers' meetings tutors' tables

If using a list of nouns, placement of the apostrophe(s) affects the meaning:

Joe, Nick, and Kevin's songs (the songs belong to Joe, Nick, and Kevin together)
Joe's, Nick's, and Kevin's songs (the songs are unique to each of them)

2. To form a contraction (combining two words into one)

The contraction takes the place of the removed letter(s), which is usually a vowel in the second word.

cannot → can't do not → don't should have → should've

The difference with "it":

it's → it is its → the possessive of "it" (this does not follow the first apostrophe rule)

Note: Contractions are usually not acceptable in academic writing. You should spell out the two words in their entirety.

3. To indicate the letters of the alphabet

Plural forms of letters (A, B, C...) need apostrophes to indicate the plural.

I earned three A's and one B. There are two m's in the word "common."

Do not use an apostrophe to make a noun (including numbers and acronyms) plural.

CD's → CDs ~~Congratulation's~~ → Congratulations 1920's → 1920s

◆ An exception with acronyms: if the acronym uses periods, use an apostrophe (example: Ph.D.'s)

Do not use an apostrophe to pluralize a family name.

Happy New Year from the Barry's → Happy New Year from the Barrys