

## APOSTROPHES\*

The apostrophe (') has two uses:

- 1) to form the **possessive case** of nouns & indefinite pronouns
- 2) to mark the omitted material in **contractions**

### *Avoid these common mistakes!*

- use of apostrophe to form the possessive of a personal pronoun
- use of apostrophe to form the plural of a noun

<b>X Wrong</b>	<b>✓ Right</b>
The school earned it's reputation.	The school earned its reputation.
The book is your's.	The book is yours.
The Smith's drove away.	The Smiths drove away.

### Possessive case

- a) Add **'s** to singular nouns and indefinite pronouns:

Everyone's eyes followed the bouncing ball.

- b) Add **'s** even to singular nouns that end in **s** :

The boss's understanding made the job easier.

#### Exceptions:

- names with more than one **s** or **z** sound  
(Moses → Moses')
- names that sound like plurals  
(Rivers → Rivers')
- nouns ending in an **s** sound followed by a word beginning with an **s** sound  
(He reported the theft for his conscience' sake.)

- c) Add **'s** to plural nouns not ending in **s** :

The children's supper was served in the kitchen.

- d) Add only an apostrophe (') to plural nouns ending in **s** :

The Joneses' lifestyle is highly materialistic.

## Contractions

An apostrophe indicates a dropped syllable in spoken English.

Example: class of '13 (class of 2013) and don't (do not).

Contractions are generally **not used in academic writing** but may be used in informal writing and in written dialogue.

### **Common Contractions:**

it is, it has	→	it's	does not	→	doesn't
who is, who has	→	who's	were not	→	weren't
they are	→	they're	would not	→	wouldn't
you are	→	you're	of the clock	→	o'clock

***Don't confuse contractions with possessive pronouns!***

<b>Contraction</b>	<b>Possessive Pronoun</b>
it's (it is / it has)	its
they're (they are)	their
you're (you are)	your
who's (who is / who has)	whose

## Not Plurals

It was once common – but is no longer desirable – to include an apostrophe in forming the plural of abbreviations, dates, and words or characters named as words:

<u>Former practice</u>	<u>Preferred practice</u>
BA's	BAs
1980's	1980s
C's	Cs
no if's, and's, or but's	no ifs, ands, or but

\* Adapted from Fowler, H. Ramsey, and Jane E. Aaron, *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 10<sup>th</sup> Ed., New York: Pearson Longman, 2007, 461-468.