



Illinois Valley Community College
Writing Center

APOSTROPHES

The main function of apostrophes is to indicate possession. Possessives usually indicate ownership, as in *Sam's boat* or *the tree's roots*. If you are not sure whether a noun or indefinite pronoun is possessive, turn it into an *of* phrase: *the roots of the tree = the tree's roots*.

Possession

- To form the possessive of a *singular noun*, add an apostrophe and an *s*.
 - My sister's car was very clean.
- To form the possessive of a *plural noun ending in s*, add only an apostrophe.
 - The firefighters' trucks sped down the highway.
- To form the possessive of an *irregular plural noun not ending in s* (such as *women* or *fungi*), add an apostrophe and an *s*.
 - The field of women's studies is becoming very popular.
- To form the possessive of *nouns in a series*, add a single apostrophe and an *s* if the ownership is shared.
 - Medina and Smith's book on the history of China is very interesting.
- If the *ownership is separate*, place an apostrophe and an *s* after each noun.
 - John's and Eliza's books on Italian history are very boring.
- To form the possessive of *any singular proper noun*, add an apostrophe and an *s*.
 - Dickens's reputation is above reproach.
- To form the possessive of a *plural proper noun*, add only an apostrophe.
 - The Vanderbilts' estate fell into disrepair.
- To form the possessive of an *indefinite pronoun* (such as *someone*, *everyone*, and *no one*), add an apostrophe and an *s*.
 - This diet will improve anyone's health.

Contractions

In a contraction, the apostrophe takes the place of missing letters.

- It's understandable that you can't do it. (It's stands for *it is*; can't stands for *cannot*)

Common misuses of apostrophes

- Do NOT use an apostrophe to form *the plural of an abbreviation or a number*.
 - Correct—PhDs, 1990s, fours, MAs, TVs
 - Incorrect—PhD's, 1990's, four's, MA's, TV's
- *Possessive pronouns* (its, his, and so on) do NOT use an apostrophe.
 - Bob's pie was finished and its fragrance enticed his family to the kitchen.

It's= It is

You're= You are

Its= belonging to it

Your= belonging to you