

## Using Apostrophes

Apostrophes are often misused. Once you become familiar with their proper use, you will begin to notice mistakes all around you, particularly on signage.

*Two Pepperoni Pizza's for only \$7.99!*

*Office Giant Let's you Buy Two Ink Cartridges for the Price of One!*

*This door is for staff member's only*

*A New Ford Can be Your's for Only \$250 Down!*

When instant- and text messaging, people often involve omit apostrophes entirely, so the following begin to look normal and correct.

*ill bring it to you when I go to lunch*

*UR going to be surprised*

*tims a bit shy at times*

## Possession and Contraction

The easiest way to learn how to use apostrophes is to remember two words, possession and contraction. Except in rare cases, apostrophes are used *only* for possession and contraction.

*Possession: Singular nouns*

*We got our money's worth at that restaurant*

*Have you seen Maddie's laptop?*

*This year's budget is ten percent higher.*

*Possession: Plural nouns*

*My friends' plans were to drive to Florida.*

*The boys' misfortunes started when they forgot to bring raincoats.*

## Contraction: indicating the omission of letters

*Maddie didn't [did not] show up on Friday.*

*Let's [let us] all go together.*

*Spencer's [Spencer is] sorry they didn't come.*

*It is twelve o'clock [of the clock].*

The exception is “it,” which is only given an apostrophe in contraction, *not* in possession. When deciding whether to use “its” or “it’s,” ask yourself if you really mean “it is.” If you do, use the apostrophe.

*It's [it is] a great idea.*

*It's [it has] been three months since the election.*

*Do you see that dog? Its ear is torn.*

*The car lost its tire.*

## When Not to use an Apostrophe

Do not use apostrophes to form plurals of nouns

Incorrect: *The two pizza's belong to Chris.*

Correct: *The two pizzas belong to Chris.*

Do not use apostrophes before the –s conjugations of verbs

Incorrect: *Susan let's her children play video games.*

Correct: *Susan lets her children play video games.*

Do not add apostrophes to possessive pronouns

Incorrect: *her's, your's, it's, our's, their's*

Correct: *hers, yours, its, ours, theirs.*

Do not use apostrophes when referring to groups or families by their last names

Incorrect: *The Brown's stopped by yesterday.*

Correct: *The Browns stopped by yesterday.*

With concepts or inanimate objects, apostrophes are permitted, but writers often prefer to use “of” instead.

Correct: *The CD player's cost was too high.*

Preferable: *The cost of the CD player was too high.*

## Other (rare) Uses of Apostrophes

An apostrophe can be used to take the place of the first part of a year or decade.

*The '60s revolution created considerable upheaval. (the 1960s)*

*He lost his money in the stock market crash of '29. (1929)*

Apostrophes can be used for the plural form of the letters of the alphabet

*Sarah found ten Z's in her alphabet soup*

*Can you write a sentence without using any e's?*

Apostrophes can be used for the plural form when you're referring to a particular word.

*He used too many um's in his speech.*

The MLA and APA style guides prefer no apostrophes when pluralizing acronyms, abbreviations and numbers.

*MBAs IMs CDs the 1990s*

In some documents, however, you may notice such plurals written with apostrophes. The important thing is to be consistent in your usage.

### Accessing More Information

- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Ann Raimes, *Keys for Writers*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008). You can find this book at the Hamline University Bookstore.

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Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

### Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



**The Writing Center**  
Hamline University  
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# Using Apostrophes Correctly

