

FINDING AND FIXING APOSTROPHE ERRORS

Understand the problem.

Although the apostrophe (') might look like a comma defying gravity, this mark of punctuation has three distinct jobs: to show possession, make contractions, and form odd plurals.

Use the apostrophe to make words possessive.

You can show possession the long way or the short way. The long way requires a **phrase** using a word like **belong** or **own**. A **preposition** such as **of** will also do the trick.

The doughnut **belonging** to Vince

The candy belonging to the children.

The hot sports car **owned** by Sylvia

The home **of** the ^{Plural!}Watsons

The restroom for men.

Showing possession with an apostrophe (and often an added **s**) simplifies the phrasing:

Vince's doughnut

Sylvia's hot sports car

The **Watsons'** home

PLURAL but does not end w/ s!

the children's candy

the men's room

More than 1 Watson!

To use the apostrophe to show possession, follow these guidelines:

NOUNS WITHOUT A FINAL S

When a **noun** does not end in **s**, use **APOSTROPHE + S**.

The lollipop belonging to Elena = **Elena's** lollipop

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The dictionary owned by the grammar whizz = The grammar **whiz's** dictionary

The shoes of the childrenn = The **children's** shoes

NOUNS WITH A FINAL S

Nouns that *do* end in *s* require more thought. If the noun is *plural*, just attach an apostrophe. — Job #1 — make it plural. Job #2 — add "s"

The leashes for the dogss = The **dogs'** leashes

The grades of the studentss = The **students'** grades

The wages earned by the workerss = The **workers'** wages

The location of the apostrophe clues an educated reader about numbers. Take the noun **dog**, for example. If the apostrophe comes before the *s*, we know that *one* dog has *multiple* leashes:

The **dog's** leashes



But if the apostrophe comes after the *s*, we understand that *many* dogs have a *variety* of leashes:

The **dogs'** leashes



If the noun ending in *s* is singular, most sources recommend adding both the apostrophe and an additional *s*.

The bad luck that plagues Odysseuss = **Odysseus's** bad luck

The strong tentacles of the octopuss = The **octopus's** strong tentacles

The directive given by the bosss = The **boss's** directive

In these cases, the **APOSTROPHE + ADDITIONAL S** adds another syllable to the pronunciation. If the extra syllable sounds unnatural, add just the apostrophe.

So you can write ...

Odysseus's bad luck

If you SAY it,
Write it.

because Odysseus-ES sounds okay, but you just need ...

Achilles' hot temper

because Achilles-EEZ sounds weird.

*If you SAY it,
write it.*

Since "sounds natural" can be a matter of region or opinion, your best bet in these cases is to consult the textbook or handbook assigned to your class, the teacher or professor who will be evaluating your assignment, or your supervisor or the style manual that your industry uses. Then follow the advice that you get.

Use the apostrophe to make contractions.

The apostrophe indicates when a writer has combined two or more words into a single word.

Here are examples:

Cannot = **Can't**

Does not = **Doesn't**

Let us = **Let's**

I am = **I'm**

It is = **It's**

We have = **We've**

They are = **They're**

He will = **He'll**

She has = **She's**

You had = **You'd**

They would have = **They'd've**



*I don't like
that ONE bit.*

If you are writing for a very formal audience—a teacher, a boss, an editor, a snotty group of intellectuals—you might want to err on the side of stuffy and spell out the words rather than contract them:

~~We'd've~~ **We would have** arrived on time if our car ~~hadn't~~ **had**
not gotten a flat tire.

Every word that ends in s does not require an apostrophe.

Some people get so used to seeing apostrophes with the letter **s** that they think every word that ends in **s** requires an apostrophe. Do not make this mistake!

For example, singular present tense verbs end in **s** but do not need any punctuation.

Sheila ~~know's~~ **knows** that Daniel does not have enough color sense to buy the house paint unsupervised.

Most plural nouns end in **s**, but unless they are possessive, you do not include an apostrophe.

The ~~monkey's~~ **monkeys** wanted the students' juice boxes.

Apostrophe abuse often occurs with **possessive pronouns**. Yes, you usually indicate possession with an apostrophe. **Pronouns**, however, are the exception.

Do not touch that cupcake. It is ~~her's~~ **hers**.

Can we borrow some pencils? We forgot ~~our's~~ **ours**.

These are Frank's camping supplies. ~~Their's~~ **Theirs** are still in the trunk.

* Verbs and plurals
DO NOT get apostrophes!

Ex. Our teachers^(NO) are nuts.

Ex. Mrs Nutter needs^(NO) a break.