



# Appropriate Apostrophes

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This one item of punctuation probably confuses more people than any other. It is possible, however, to learn to use apostrophes correctly, and to do so without getting a headache—or worse. Although there is some flexibility in their use, we’ve outlined a few rules here.

**Rule 1:** Use an apostrophe to indicate a missing letter, as in contractions. (But remember: You should generally avoid contractions in most academic or business writing.)

I *don't* know *what's* wrong today. (I *do not* know *what is* wrong today.)

*It's* hot in here. (*It is* hot in here.)

An early hit by Little Richard was *Slippin' and Slidin'*.

**Rule 2:** Use apostrophe and *s* ('*s*) to indicate possession if the “owner” (the possessor) does not already end in *s*.

That is the *dog's* toy. (That is the *toy that belongs to the dog*.)

He is the *people's* candidate. (He is the *candidate of the people*.)

There goes *Mrs. Smith's* brother. (There goes the *brother of Mrs. Smith*.)

Have you seen *yesterday's* newspaper? (Have you seen the *newspaper for yesterday*?)

Where is my *brother-in-law's* wallet? (Where is the *wallet that belongs to my brother-in-law*?)

**Rule 3:** Use only an apostrophe after the *s* if the possessor already ends in *s*.

That is the *dogs'* toy. (That is the *toy that belongs to the dogs*.)

He is the *senators'* choice as chair. (He is the *choice of the senators* as chair.)

There goes *Mr. Jones'* sister. (There goes the *sister of Mr. Jones*.)

Isn't that *Prince Charles'* top hat? (Isn't that the *top hat of Prince Charles*?)

**Rule 4:** Use an apostrophe and *s* with plurals of numerals, letters, and words that are used as example words.

You used too many *and's* and *but's* in your essay.

It's hard to tell his *1's* and *7's* apart.

There were 4 *A's*, 6 *B's*, 8 *C's*, and 2 *D's* on the test.

## Common Mistakes with Apostrophes:

- ♣ Using an apostrophe when indicating the plural in a case not covered by Rule 4.

Correct: The foxes were running from the dogs.

Incorrect: The fox's were running from the dog's.

Correct: The genie gave Aladdin three wishes.

Incorrect: The genie gave Aladdin three wish's.