

APOSTROPHES

Apostrophes are used in two main ways: to replace omitted letters in a word (don't, couldn't, cont'd) and to show possessives (Freud's theories, Nefertiti's subjects). To form apostrophes, use curly (aka smart, intelligent) quotes, like this ', not straight up-and-down ones like this '.

Possessive cases of singular nouns and plural and collective nouns not ending in s

Such words take 's:

<i>the researcher's laptop</i>	<i>Hitler's niece</i>	<i>time's fell hand</i>	<i>Freud's theories</i>
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Possessive cases of plural common nouns ending in s

Plural common nouns that already end in s simply have an apostrophe added after the s:

<i>the girls' mothers</i>	<i>the teachers' employers</i>	<i>critical theorists' writings</i>
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Possessive cases of singular and plural proper nouns ending in s

For both singular and plural proper nouns (i.e. the names of people, organizations and so on that are capitalized) that end in s or z add 's:

<i>Leibniz's Law</i>	<i>Descartes's argument</i>	<i>the United Nations's aim</i>	<i>Chalmers's view</i>
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<i>the Wilsons's holiday</i>	(plural of Wilson is Wilsons, + 's)
<i>the Joneses's plans</i>	(plural of Jones is Joneses, + 's)

—unless the singular noun is a Biblical or classical name, in which case the possessive takes only an apostrophe, as in *Jesus' parables*, *Herodotus' writings*.

Possessive cases where there is more than one person

Where the possessive governs the group as a whole, only the last name is apostrophized:

<i>John and Mary's wedding</i>	<i>Simon and Garfunkel's music</i>
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However, if the possessive does not govern the group as a whole (for instance, if John and Mary had both had weddings, but not to one another), then both or all names would require apostrophes to indicate separation:

<i>John's and Mary's weddings</i>	<i>Mozart's and Beethoven's music</i>
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Words that are both singular and plural, and end in s

Where words are both singular and plural and end in s, add an apostrophe only, after the s, to make the possessive:

the scissors' edge

Apostrophes of clarity

Rarely, apostrophes are used to create plurals as an aid to reading clarity:

Dot your i's and cross your t's.

Apostrophes and acronyms

For acronyms that are written in capitals, do *not* use an apostrophe to create a plural form. Merely capitalize the acronym and add the s:

<i>NGOs</i>	<i>MPs</i>	<i>URLs</i>	<i>PDFs</i>
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Apostrophes and dates

There is no apostrophe in full year dates, such as 1960s. However, where the years have been abbreviated there is an apostrophe to replace the missing numbers: *the '60s were good years* (make sure that the apostrophe is facing the correct way—i.e., that it looks like an apostrophe rather than an opening quotation mark).

Apostrophes in adjectival phrases

For the following, there is no apostrophe because the phrase is adjectival (descriptive) rather than possessive:

<i>girls school</i>	<i>travellers guide</i>
a school for girls	a guide for travellers

Gerunds

Gerunds are useful when one takes care to distinguish an event from a thing involved in the event. Gerunds take the possessive form: ‘His hitting the dog caused its death’, but ‘Gerald saw him hitting the dog’; cf. *c-fibres’ firing*, that is, the firing of c-fibres. Consider how the following differ:

I remember Russell rejecting the suggestion as an implausible response.

I remember Russell’s rejecting the suggestion as an implausible response.

Its and it’s

The word ‘its’ is already in the ‘possessive’ form, in the same way that ‘her’ or ‘their’ already indicate possession, so that an apostrophe is not needed to create a possessive:

<i>its house</i>	<i>her house</i>	<i>their house</i>	<i>your house</i>
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An apostrophe is used after ‘it’ only when the word is an abbreviation of ‘it is’:

It’s a sure sign = It is a sure sign

Ones and one’s

Plural	Possessive	Verb
<i>There are not many ones</i>	<i>a room of one’s own</i>	<i>one’s not obliged to read it</i>

Prime symbols

Be aware of the difference between an apostrophe (’) and a prime (′); don’t use the former as a substitute for the latter, for this confuses the typesetters. Example:

Instead of A, we can use A′ to represent Davidson’s . . . [*not A’*]