

FINDING AND FIXING APOSTROPHE ERRORS

What is an Apostrophe Error?

Apostrophes are used to show ownership and are used to show that one or more letters are missing in a contraction. An apostrophe error occurs when an apostrophe is needed to show possession or contraction, but it is not there or is in the wrong place.

Apostrophes have two main uses: contractions and possession. If you can learn these rules, you can master apostrophe usage!

Contractions: Contractions are shortened forms of words which add an informal tone to academic writing. An apostrophe indicates that one or more letters have been left out.

To assess whether you need an apostrophe or not, re-read the sentence to see if you can expand the shortened contraction words by filling in the missing letters. Place an apostrophe where letters are missing.

- Thao **wasn't** in class today. (The apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter "o").
- Thao **was not** in class today. (Note that you can expand the shortened word "wasn't" by just filling in the missing letter "o").

These are some of the most common contractions:

I am = I'm
She is = She's
He is = He's
Let us = Let's

It is = It's
She would = She'd
He would = He'd
You are = You're

Who is = Who's
She would have = She would've
He would have = He would've
They had = They'd

When to Use It's vs. Its

It's is a contraction of the words it and is, while **its** shows possession, a relationship between nouns.

Error: Its raining heavily today. (Note that there is no apostrophe here, so this should not be a contraction of "it is." The word "its" with no apostrophe is a possessive pronoun, so it's always used to show possession, for example: "The cat licked its paws." In this example, though, "Its" is not showing possession—this is an error because "Its" is meant to be a contraction but does not have an apostrophe).

Correction: It's raining heavily today. (Note that the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter "i," so this is the correct contraction of "it is.").

Possessives: Singular and Plural

Apostrophes are also used with nouns to show ownership. With singular and plural nouns that do not end in the letter **s**, possession is usually shown by adding **'s** to the end of the noun.

- The **student's** book was left in the car. (Singular possession—one student left her book).
- The **audience's** laughter lasted for over ten minutes during the performance. (Plural possession—the audience laughed as a group).
- **Children's** toys are sold everywhere. (Plural possession—children is a plural noun, just like women or men).

For singular or plural nouns that end in the letter **s**, add EITHER a final apostrophe OR **'s** to show possession. Whichever you choose, make sure you do the same thing consistently.

- The **students' / students's** club meeting was held in the library conference room. (Plural possessive ending in **s**—many students had a meeting together).
- My **boss' / boss's** office looks like an art gallery. (Singular possessive ending in **s**—one boss with one office).

For possessive proper nouns ending in the letter **s**, add EITHER a final apostrophe OR **'s** to show possession.

- **Agnes' / Agnes's** new laptop weighs only eleven ounces.
- **Pat Marks' / Pat Marks's** car smoked the competition at the racetrack this weekend!

TIPBOX

To test for ownership of possessions, rephrase the sentence to add “of.” If the sentence still makes sense, you will know your possessive apostrophe was correct. If it doesn't make sense, your possessive apostrophe was incorrect!

- **Miguel's textbook** was very expensive.
- **The textbook of Miguel** was very expensive. (The apostrophe above shows that the textbook does belong to Miguel, so it is correct).
- **The students' books** were very expensive.
- **The books of the students** were very expensive. (The apostrophe above shows that the textbooks do belong to the students, so it is correct).

Apostrophes Can Show Expressions of Time or Measure

Apostrophes can also be used to show amounts or periods of time. For example:

- Last year's schedule
- Your money's worth

Possessive Pronouns

Possessive pronouns never need an apostrophe to show possession—here’s a list to reference:

Its	Their	Our
Hers	Theirs	Ours
His	Your	My
	Yours	Mine

Sentence Practice

Please identify and correct the apostrophe errors below:

1. Information about Students Rights and Responsibilities at the college can be found in the Student Handbook and Planner provided each year by the Office of Student Life.
2. My dad says it would be beneficial to my brothers future if he got an internship.
3. Social media has become an important part of todays society.
4. Everyone needs to do his or her part to help prevent the destruction of salmon and it’s natural habitat.
5. Its true that the Learning Support Center is open on Saturday.

For More Practice

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University has several resources—try them out!

- [An Introduction to Apostrophes](#)
(click the link above or go to owl.purdue.edu/owl, click on **General Writing**, then **Punctuation**, then select **Apostrophe Introduction**)
- [Apostrophe Sentence Exercises](#)
(click the link above or go to owl.purdue.edu/owl_exercises, click on **Punctuation Exercises**, select **Apostrophes**)