Apostrophes: Top Tips

1. Types of apostrophes
There are only two uses for the apostrophe: possession (ownership) and contraction (letters or words omitted).

2. The possessive apostrophe
This comes directly after the person, people or thing/s that own/s something.

**Single possession** (one owner)
- The student’s book (one book belongs to one student)
- The student’s books (several books belong to one student)
- A year’s work (the work of one year)
- A person’s rights (the rights of one person)

**Plural possession** (more than one owner)
- The students’ book (one book belongs to several students)
- The students’ books (several books belong to several students)
- Three years’ work (the work of three years)
- People’s rights (the rights of all people)

**Plural nouns**, such as GPs, 1970s, do not need apostrophes.

**Whose** (Whose coat is this?) does not need an apostrophe.

**Who’s** (who is, who has) does need an apostrophe, but you should not use it in academic writing. It is too informal.

3. Possessive pronouns
These do not need an apostrophe. For example: her head, his book, your chair, their house, our relationship, its tail. Note: you should not use an apostrophe with the possessive pronoun, its.

✓ The river has burst its banks.  
X The river has burst it’s banks.
4. Indefinite pronouns

These *do* need an apostrophe.

(For example, somebody, one, everybody)

- One’s work must be done well.
- He is everybody’s friend.
- The smoke from somebody’s bonfire made him cough.

5. Contractions

These show letters missing, in order to shorten words. For example, didn’t for did not.

*Note:* You **should not** use these in assignments, unless they are part of a quotation or direct speech. They are too informal for academic writing.