

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.