

# Apostrophes: Top Tips

## Types of apostrophes

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

### 1. 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.

## 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.

## 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.

## 2. 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.