

— A Guide to Utilizing — **APOSTROPHES**

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark that can be used in a variety of ways. Apostrophes are used in three main ways: to indicate when something is possessive, to indicate when a letter is intentionally missing in a word, such as in contractions, and to indicate when something is quoted inside of another quote, where use of two apostrophes is referred to as using “single quotes.” Using apostrophes correctly helps our writing feel polished and helps our readers better understand our writing.

Let’s look at some of the most common ways we use apostrophes:

To indicate a possessive:

An apostrophe is used, usually in combination with an “s” to indicate that someone or something possesses, or owns, something else. This is usually applied to nouns or proper nouns, and an apostrophe is not needed when this is applied to possessive pronouns like his, hers, theirs, its, my, or mine. When a noun ends in an “s,” whether plural or not, the apostrophe is included by itself, and a second “s” is not included.

Victoria’s favorite | Isaac’s parents’ house | the cat’s bowl | a children’s show | Ms. Giles’ reaction | the writers’ books

To replace missing letters:

When a word is a contraction of two or more other words, an apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter(s). For example, in the cases of “don’t” and “can’t,” the apostrophe takes the place of the “o” in the word “not.” Apostrophes can also take the place of letters in certain words, often variants of other words that change regionally, culturally, or over time as language evolves.

they are - they’re | “Where ya goin’?” | it was - ‘twas | until - ‘til | “Whatcha doin’?” | I would - I’d

To quote inside of an existing quote:

Sometimes, you will need to write a quotation that includes another piece of quoted information. In academic writing, this is most common in using direct quotes from a source that includes the source quoting their own research, a famous quotation, or what someone said in an interview. However, you can also easily encounter this in creative writing, as characters may refer to something specific or literal that requires a quote—or quote another character—inside their dialogue. In this case, an apostrophe is used at either end of the internal quotation and are referred to as “single quotes.”

“Do you know what a ‘single quote’ is?” she asked. “I do now,” he replied.

Here are some examples of ways apostrophes are often used **incorrectly**:

Apostrophes should not be used to indicate something is plural.

I love to see the **horse’s** in the parade | The **ride’s** at the park are so scary!

Apostrophes should not be used before the “s” when discussing a time period or decade.

Wrong: Wow! The **70’s** were so cool! **Correct:** The **1840s** Wild West was... wild. | I was born in the **’90s**.