

Chapter 23

Apostrophes

Possessive Case, Contractions, Plurals

Apostrophes are necessary for expressing meaning clearly in written English. For instance, the difference in meaning between *shell* and *she'll* or *shed* and *she'd* is indicated in writing by the apostrophe (and, of course, the context in which the word appears).

If you sometimes forget to use apostrophes, or if you use them incorrectly, the rules in this chapter will prove helpful.

The possessive case of a noun or pronoun shows ownership or relationship. The nouns and pronouns printed in bold-faced type below are in the possessive case.

OWNERSHIP I borrowed Martha's mitt.

Julia's canoe needs painting.

Have you seen my scrapbook?

RELATIONSHIP Lydia's cousin is in town.

Cleaning up was a day's work

I appreciate your sending the gift.

23a. To form the possessive case of a singular noun, add an apostrophe and an s.

EXAMPLES	Mom's car	a hard day's work
	Nell's baseball	this morning's paper
	the governor's speech	a quarter's worth
	Mrs. Jones's briefcase	a dollar's worth

EXCEPTION A proper name ending in *s* may add only an apostrophe if the

name consists of two or more syllables or if the addition of *s* would make the name awkward to pronounce. Example: *Ulysses'* (not *Ulysses's*) *plan*; *Mrs. Rawlings'* (not *Rawlings's*) *car*.

EXERCISE 1. Form the possessive case of each of the following singular words. After each possessive word, write an appropriate noun.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------------|--------------|
| 1. dime | 5. friend | 9. Eloise |
| 2. week | 6. Ruth | 10. Mr. Ross |
| 3. child | 7. Aunt Margaret | |
| 4. cousin | 8. fox | |

23b. To form the possessive case of a plural noun ending in *s*, add only the apostrophe.

EXAMPLES both girls' behavior families' efforts
two weeks' vacation knives' edges
five dollars' worth heroes' stories

Most plural nouns do end in *s*. Some nouns, however, form their plurals somewhat irregularly. (See page 657.) To form the possessive case of a plural noun that does not end in *s*, add an apostrophe and an *s*.

EXAMPLES women's gloves teeth's cavities

EXERCISE 2. Write the possessive case of each of these plural words.

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. mice | 6. quarters |
| 2. magazines | 7. novels |
| 3. people | 8. dictionaries |
| 4. galaxies | 9. geese |
| 5. deer | 10. children |

Caution: Do not use an apostrophe to form the *plural* of a noun. Remember that the apostrophe shows ownership or relationship; it is nearly always followed by a noun.

INCORRECT Two girls' forgot their coats.

CORRECT Two girls forgot their coats. [simple plural]

CORRECT Two **girls'** coats are hanging in the hall. [The apostrophe shows that the coats belong to the two girls.]

EXERCISE 3. Revise the following phrases by using the possessive case.

EXAMPLE

1. the meetings of the athletes

1. *the athletes' meetings*

1. a lunch for sergeants

6. duty of the voters

2. absences of students

7. food for invalids

3. the shoes for women

8. the work of actors

4. salaries of teachers

9. uniforms for nurses

5. textbook for sophomores

10. spirit of the players

SUMMARY

The following examples illustrate **rules 23a and 23b**:

	<i>Singular</i>		<i>Plural</i>
<i>Singular</i>	<i>Possessive</i>	<i>Plural</i>	<i>Possessive</i>
friend	friend's home	friends	friends' homes
month	month's work	months	two months' work
dollar	dollar's worth	dollars	three dollars' worth
enemy	enemy's attack	enemies	enemies' attack
box	box's lid	boxes	boxes' lids
thief	thief's loot	thieves	thieves' loot
woman	woman's purse	women	women's purses
sheep	sheep's wool	sheep	sheep's wool
ox	ox's yoke	oxen	oxen's yoke

23c. Possessive personal pronouns do not require an apostrophe.

Possessive personal pronouns are

my, mine our, ours your, yours their, theirs his, her, hers, its

Caution: The possessive form of *who* is *whose*, not *who's* (meaning “who is”). Similarly, do not write *it's* (meaning “it is”) for *its*, or *they're* (meaning “they are”) for *their*.

My, your, her, its, our, and their are used before a noun. *Mine, yours, hers, ours, and theirs*, on the other hand, are never used before a noun; they are used as subjects, complements, or objects in sentences. *His* may be used in either way.

EXAMPLES That is my book. That book is mine. Her answer was correct. Hers was the correct answer. Sandra has your hat. Sandra has a hat of yours. Janet has our tickets; Sally has theirs. Here is his report. Here is a report of his.

23d. Indefinite pronouns In the possessive case require an apostrophe and *B*.

EXAMPLES everyone's ideas neither's fault somebody's pencil another's
answer

EXERCISE 4. Number 1-10 on your paper. Choose the correct word in parentheses, and write it after the corresponding number.

The mistake is probably (ours, our's).

(Who's, Whose) dog is that?

(Yours, Your's) is more appropriate than mine.

Were (anyone's, anyones') boots left in the locker room yesterday?

That old car of (their's, theirs) has two flat tires.

The team was proud of (its, it's) good sportsmanship.

(Everybody's, Everybody's, Everybodys') suggestions will be considered.

Ms. Parker, (who's, whose) mother is a senator, takes part in all the campaigns.

(Eithers, Either's, Eithers') costume may win the prize.

(Ones, One's, Ones') emotions should not take the place of careful judgment.

REVIEW EXERCISE A. Using the following words, make four columns on your paper. Head the columns *Singular*, *Singular Possessive*, *Plural*, and *Plural Possessive*, and write those forms of each word. Add a suitable noun to follow each word in the possessive case. If you do not know how to spell the plural form of any of these words, use your dictionary.

cousin 6. woman

lady 7. jockey

salmon 8. penny

doctor 9. umpire

guard 10. her

REVIEW EXERCISE B. Some of the words in each of the following sentences are incorrect. After the number of each sentence, write correctly the incorrect words in the sentence.

EXAMPLE 1. Marie's mother is one of the judge's in

the Art Museums' contest.

1. judges, Museum's

Mrs. Macmillan, my best friend's mother, is a member of NOW, the National Organization for Women.

Who's turn is it to read aloud Elinor Wylie's poem "Velvet Shoes"?

Jill's mother bought twenty dollar's worth of camera equipment.

The firefighters' actions held the damage in yesterday's fire to a minimum.

Everybody's suggestions seem better than our's.

The children's report cards were signed by all their teachers'.

In six month's time, those student's behavior has greatly improved.

Mrs. Smith's banquet honored her employees' wives and husbands.

One of Hercules' labors was to capture Diomedes' mares.

My oldest sister's twin daughters say that the new reading room is a favorite meeting place of their's.

23e. In compound words, names of organizations and business firms, and words showing joint possession, only the last word is possessive in form.

Compound words school board's decision nobody else's business mother-in-law's house secretary-treasurer's report

Organizations American Medical Association's endorsement *Business firms* Wizard Freight Company's moving vans *Joint possession* Bess and Marie's room

parents and teachers' aims Rodgers and Hart's musical *Pal Joey*

EXCEPTION When one of the words showing joint possession is a pronoun, both words must be made possessive in form: Marie's and my room [not

Marie and my room].

- NOTE Use the *of* phrase to avoid awkward possessive forms.

AWKWARD the manager of the Greenville Appliance Center's daughter

BETTER the daughter of the manager of the Greenville Appliance Center

AWKWARD the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals'

advertisement BETTER the advertisement of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

23f. When two or more persons possess something Individually, each of their names Is possessive In form.

EXAMPLES Mrs. Wheeler's and Mrs. Stuart's children [the children of two different mothers]

Edith's and Gwen's shoes [individual, not joint, possession]

EXERCISE 5. Revise the following phrases by using the possessive case.

EXAMPLE 1. The boat owned by Sarah and Evan

1. Sarah and Evan's boat

1. the secret of Alison and Mary
2. the policy of Procter and Gamble
3. the feet of Alice and June
4. letters written by the editor in chief
5. the secrets of everybody else
6. the cooking of his brother-in-law
7. the party given by Acme Life Insurance Company
8. the car belonging to Mr. Montgomery and the one owned by Mrs. Osborn
9. the equipment shared by Leslie and me
10. the employees of the Kurtz Novelty Corporation

REVIEW EXERCISE C. Copy and correctly punctuate the following phrases. If a phrase does not need an apostrophe, write C (for *correct*) after its number on your paper.

1. Vickys car keys
2. the keys to the car
3. a womans career
4. the firefighters dance
5. an hours drive
6. forty cents worth
7. worth forty cents
8. letters from friends

9. several friends advice
10. Sandy and Ellens bicycle
11. a months salary

12. last weeks score
13. six weeks vacation
14. J essicas and Beryls posters
15. Randolph Companys sale
16. the men at work
17. childrens wisdom
18. from the mouths of babes
19. in two years time
20. suggestions of theirs

REVIEW EXERCISE D. From the following sentences, list in order on your paper all words requiring apostrophes, and insert the apostrophes. After each word, write the thing possessed or related. Number your list by sentences.

1. One Saturday afternoon, coming out of Millers Shoe Store on my way to Hardin and Crawford's Cafe, I saw two little girls selling the next morning's paper.
2. One girl's name was Mona, and the other's name was Clara.
3. "Read tomorrow's news tonight!" yelled Mona.
4. "Read all about Colorado's blizzard, the Mayor's operation, the high school's championship swimmers, and the Charity Fund's progress!"

All the while, Clara was silently watching the sun's disappearance behind dark clouds overhead; she made no effort to catch a customer's attention.

Mona's yelling, however, was not getting much better results than Clara's silence; neither girl had sold one cent's worth of the Cloverville Publishing Company's newspapers.

7. In fact, everyone rushed past the two girls' newsstand as though neither girl was there.

8. Angry because of her partners attitude, Mona scolded, "Clara, are you going back to Mrs. Long's office without selling any of the companys papers? 9. Ones job out here is to advertise each days news and to sell at least three dollars worth in an hours time." 10. Claras face was still turned upward; she seemed indifferent to her friends anxiety.

11. Walking back and forth, Mona waved her papers under cab drivers noses and pedestrians chins. 12. Trying to get the peoples interest, she yelled, "Read about your citys crime wave! Robbery at Rich and Thompsons stationery store! Arson in Baileys hardware store! 13. Buy your childrens favorite comics -Brenda Starrs adventures, Supermans victories, Dennis the Menaces crazy doings, Lucys wise words!" 14. The girls words sold only thirty cents worth of news; no one cared about "tomorrows news tonight."

15. In a few minutes time it began to rain, and Monas hopes for good sales completely vanished. 16. But Claras hopes were high! 17. Dashing forward, she had in an instant every passerbys full attention. 18. "Step right this way, folks!" she barked. "Umbrellas for sale! Buy yourselves fifteen cents worth of umbrella. 19. These eight sections of Sundays paper can cover your heads!"

20. In ten minutes time Mona and Claras newsstand had sold all its papers, and two very wet little girls were happily racing toward Mrs. Long's office. 23g. Use an apostrophe to show where letters or numbers have been omitted in a contraction.

A contraction is a shortened form of a word or figure (*can't* for *cannot*, '81 for 1981) or of a group of words (*she'll* for *she will*, *let's* for *let us*, *o'clock* for *of the clock*). Contractions are used chiefly in conversation and in informal writing. The apostrophes in contractions indicate where letters have been left out.

EXAMPLES She is not here. She isn't here. You are right. You're right. Marian is late. Marian's late. She has gone home. She's gone home. I had forgotten. I'd forgotten.

Ordinarily, the word *not* is shortened to *n't* and added to a verb without any change in the spelling of the verb:

is not isn't were not weren't are not aren't has not hasn't does not doesn't have not haven't do not don't had not hadn't did not didn't would not wouldn't was not wasn't should not shouldn't

EXCEPTIONS will not won't cannot can't

Remember: do not confuse contractions with possessive pronouns. Study the following lists.

CONTRACTIONS POSSESSIVE PRONOUNS

Who's playing? [*Who is*] Whose play is it? It's frowning. [*It is*] Watch its growth. You're the boss. [*You are*] Your boss telephoned.

are]

EXERCISE 6. Write ten sentences of your own, using correctly each of the words listed below.

it's 6. there

you're 7. whose

their 8. its

who's 9. they're

your 10. theirs

EXERCISE 7. Number 1-10 on your paper. If a sentence below has a contraction without an apostrophe, copy the contraction and add a correctly placed apostrophe. If a sentence is correct as it stands, write C after the number.

Well be there on time.

Well, be there on time.

Didnt you know that?

"Schools out!" she yelled.

Schools were notified.

She lets us win.

Lets win this game.

Its four oclock.

Whos calling, please?

The gold rush was in 49.

EXERCISE 8. Number 1-10 on your paper. Choose the correct word in parentheses, and write it after the corresponding number.

1. (*It's, Its*) is a contraction of *it is* or *it has*.

2. (*It's, Its*) been lost for months.

3. (*Who's, Whose*) is a contraction of *who is* or *who has*.

(*Who's, Whose*) that beautiful girl?

(*Who's, Whose*) bracelet is this?

(*Your, You're*) my best friend.

(*There, Their, They're*) not very happy.

Our speaker is Dr. Morgan, (*whose, who's*) just returned from France.

(*Theirs, There's*) no time like the present.

I think that (*theirs, there's*) is the best exhibit

23h. Use the apostrophe and *s* to form the plural of letters, numbers, signs, and of words referred to as words.

EXAMPLES The word grammar has two *r's*, two *a's*, and two *m s*. Grades on this test ran from the low *70's* to the upper *90's*. Circling the *&'s* in my composition, the teacher said to spell out all *and's*.

EXERCISE 9. Number 1-10 on your paper. Correctly form the plural of each of the following italicized items:

learning her *ABC* 6. writing *Z*

cross your *I* 7. to pronounce the *r*

no *if* about it 8. the early *1980*

+ and -9. no 6 or 7 in the answer

p and *q* 10. his *oh* and *ah*

REVIEW EXERCISE E. List in order the words that require apostrophes in the following sentences. Be sure that you insert the apostrophes exactly where omissions occur in contractions and after the *s* in possessives of plural words.

1. I'm still working on today's assignment 2. After two hours hard work, I'm not through revising it, although I've certainly taken time to dot my *is* and

cross my *IS*. 3. Now III need to go back

and strike out some *ands* and *sos*. 4. If Id followed my teachers instruction, Id have added some action verbs to replace too many weak *weres*.

Its a job to write a composition on “My Familys Most Remarkable Character.”

My papers purpose is to describe my dog Frodos main characteristics. 7. To begin with, hes remarkably clever in devising ways to get my sisters or my attention so that well play ball with him. 8. If were busy, hell roll the ball under the furniture with his nose and stand there growling or whining until weve retrieved it. 9. One day we thought wed found a way to prevent this: we blocked up all openings with strips of wood. 10. No doubt Frodos first thoughts were, “This wont do at all. 11. III just have to find some other method. “ 12. So he carried the ball to the bathroom and dropped it into the tub, convinced hed found a new opening. 13. I thought Id break this habit by drenching him with shower water as I put him into the tub near his ball, but no luck. 14. Now hes frantic to take showers with me.

15. Frodos ability to learn new commands depends on what he feels he should or should not be expected to do: hell roll over, sit up, talk, even walk backwards at a moments notice for a mere toss of the ball. But he considers it beneath a dogs dignity to walk slowly and in a straight line when hes taken out at eight oclock for his mornings walk. 16. Hes determined to explore the delights of the citys streets, always chasing leaves, sniffing cars tires, and examining passersby, human and canine. 17. Though I ve told him often he shouldnt chase cars, hes still in the habit of barking at passing autos. 18. The walks weve shared have sometimes been harrowing experiences. 19. Im convinced, however, of Frodos charmed life. 20. Hes been nearly hit by several cars, but Frodo still dashes down the streets center lane, hotly pursuing the car thats nearest to him.