

THE APOSTROPHE

From Gary Olson's *Punctuation Made Simple* and

Harbrace College Handbook, edition 10, chapter 15.

Writing Center

Weber State University

<http://departments.weber.edu/writingcenter>

Indicating possession

For singular nouns (including acronyms) and indefinite pronouns, add the apostrophe and s:

<i>Sue's idea</i>	<i>a day's work</i>	<i>NASA's aim</i>	<i>anyone's guess</i>
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For plural nouns ending in s, add only the apostrophe, BUT for plurals not ending in s, add the apostrophe and s:

<i>her two sons' room</i>	BUT:	<i>men's watches</i>
<i>ten dollars' worth</i>	BUT:	<i>women's names</i>
<i>the Ameses' home</i>	BUT:	<i>children's rights</i>

For compounds, add the apostrophe and s only to the last word:

<i>my sister-in-law's dog</i>	<i>someone else's turn</i>
<i>the Secretary of Labor's idea</i>	<i>George W. Bush, Jr.'s reply</i>

Occasionally, the idea of the possessive is indicated by the use of both an of-phrase and 's:

<i>this description of Alex [Alex is described]</i>	<i>this description of Alex's [Alex does the describing]</i>
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The following phrases have been changed to the possessive form.

<i>the cheering of the crowd</i>	CHANGES TO:	<i>the crowd's cheering</i>
<i>suggestions made by Gus</i>	CHANGES TO:	<i>Gus's suggestions (or Gus' suggestions)</i>

Indicating Contractions

<i>Did not...</i>	BECOMES:	<i>didn't</i>
<i>He will</i>	BECOMES:	<i>he'll</i>
<i>They are</i>	BECOMES:	<i>they're</i>
<i>There is</i>	BECOMES:	<i>there's</i>
<i>She did</i>	BECOMES:	<i>she'd</i>
<i>Class of 1999</i>	BECOMES:	<i>class of '99</i>
<i>Of the clock</i>	BECOMES:	<i>o'clock</i>

Indicating Something Else

Use the apostrophe and s for the plural forms of lowercase letters and of abbreviations followed by periods.

his e's and o's	no more ibid.'s	two V.P.'s
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When needed to prevent confusion, the 's is used for plural of capital letters and of words referred to as words.

too many I's	several A's	two plus's	the ha ha's
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Cautions

Do not use the apostrophe with the pronouns *his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs, whose*, or with plural nouns not in the possessive form.

A friend of theirs knows a cousin of yours.
My three sisters-in-law design clothes for babies.

Do not confuse *its* with *it's* or *whose* with *who's*.

Its motor is small.	IS DIFFERENT FROM:	It's [It is] a small motor.
Whose responsibility is it?	IS DIFFERENT FROM:	Who's [Who is] responsible?

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