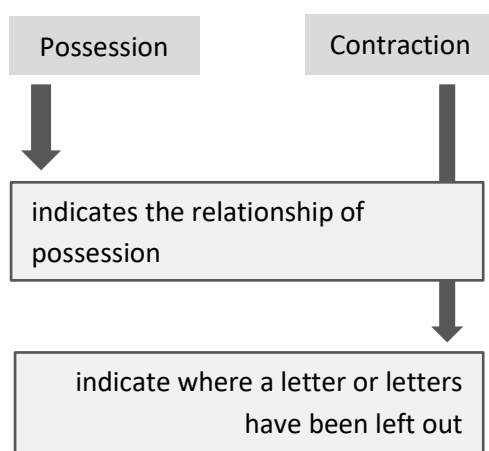


Using the apostrophe

This guide looks in more detail at apostrophe use. It builds on the comments in the related guide on *Common writing errors*. Misuse of the apostrophe is one of the most frequently occurring errors in written English (not just in student work). Although it is the cause of much confusion, the rules governing the use of the apostrophe are not that tricky. This guide will set out these rules and give you some examples to aid your understanding of them.

The apostrophe: when is it used?

There are two main contexts in which the apostrophe is used: possession and contraction.



If you are using the apostrophe when there is no need to indicate possession or there are no missing letters, it is likely that you are misusing it.

Possession

An apostrophe is used to indicate where something belongs to someone or something else.

Singular

In the singular, where there is only one possessor, 's is added at the end of this word.

The student's bicycle.

Smith's (2009) research study.

Plural

Where there is more than one possessor, only the apostrophe is added (') at the end of the word, which usually ends in 's'.

The students' bicycles.

In this example, there is more than one student who own the bicycles.

The researchers' data.

Again, in this example, the position of the apostrophe indicates that there is more than one researcher.

Ending in -s

Where the name of the possessor ends in 's', an 's is added if it is pronounced in spoken English.

James's textbook.

If no extra 's' is pronounced, just add an apostrophe on its own.

Andrews' (2012) research.

Plural nouns not ending in 's'

In the case of plural nouns not ending in the letter 's' (e.g. women, children), 's is used.

The people's politician.

Expressions of time

The apostrophe is also used in some expressions of time.

Two years' experience.

Contraction

An apostrophe is also used to show where letters have been missed out. This most commonly occurs with abbreviations of phrases like *do not*, which becomes *don't*. However, in academic writing, it is customary to write out these expressions in full.

For further information about apostrophe use, please visit our web pages on *Study*:

<http://study.cardiffmet.ac.uk/Pages/home.aspx>