







### Exercise 3.1 – IT in BT: a case of discrimination

The next ten sentences make up a passage. Each sentence has some underlined words. You need to alter these words to possessive or plural forms, and introduce any required apostrophes (not all plurals will need apostrophes). Throughout the ten sentences, there are also some instances of its. Some of these – not all – need changing to it's.

Example: Its been 25 year since the personal computer birth. *It's, years, personal computer's*

1. The same quarter of a century has seen the typewriter death and the advent of blue chip in everything: camera, oven, radio, car and even chair.
2. No-one born in the western world after the 1980 knows a world without computer, but computer literacy is not universal.
3. Not all British home are wired up to a PC and its innumerable peripheral gadget, and not all person, particularly those who finished formal education before the mid eighty, have acquired the user skill to participate in the digital world.
4. This group cannot: access online banking and shopping service; surf the net for instant information; and, perhaps most distressing, relate to or participate in their children elaborate and fast-moving social network.
5. A more insidious impact of the digital divide, as its known, is its unintentional discrimination: those without access to the internet cannot access many company discount and deal available only online.
6. One of the worst perpetrator of online discrimination is British Telecom; its still effectively the national phone provider as many elderly people cannot access its alternative offline.
7. BT customer who have settled bill in cash or by cheque for decade, and who just do not want to set up direct debits, are now hit with what is effectively a fine of £4.50 per quarter.
8. The non-computer user woes from BT do not end with paying: those who cannot or do not want to access their bill online now pay an additional £1.50 per quarter for "paperless billing", so a year non-digital user punishment from BT amounts to £24.
9. BT tries to justify its action by claiming that the expense associated with postage and cashing cheques are "astronomical".
10. Meanwhile its unwanted junk mail pours through the front door of even its most computerised customer, presumably also at "astronomical" cost.

You know where to find the answers by now ...

### Section 4: let's talk ...

Single apostrophes can be used as single inverted commas in direct speech. These act identically to double inverted commas. Single inverted commas are most usual in published fiction. If you need to write direct speech, just be consistent, using either double or single inverted commas. All punctuation relating to the quote must be *inside* the marks and any interrupted sentence continued with a lowercase letter:

'I can't see the hole,' whispered Gregg, 'and the street-lamp isn't working.'

Sub-quotations will have to use whichever mark has not been used in the initial quotation:

'I don't get it,' continued Gregg. 'Harper told me distinctly: "The keyhole's tiny but it's under the flap." There's no keyhole even in this door, if you ask me.'

## Exercise 4.1 – talking through the keyhole

Put appropriate direct speech punctuation in this passage. Use single inverted commas where possible.

Yes there is, said a smaller voice nearer Gregg's feet. You need to look lower down, daddy.  
Scott, you're brilliant! Of course, this door's meant to be opened by a small child.  
Thanks dad, I'm not that small. Mum's always saying to you: He's tall for his age.

### Section 5: let's contract ...

Contractions marked with apostrophes occur when we want to shorten the second of a pair of words such as did not or will not in speech or informal writing. The most common shortened word is not: haven't, didn't, can't. Sometimes a spelling alteration occurs i.e. will not = won't. The other common contractions are will, is, are, were, has and have: I'll, she's, he's, you're, I've<sup>1</sup>. Rarer contractions such as had and would, which both appear as 'd in writing, are mainly a feature of spoken English, so we will not cover them here.

Double contractions are rare and they usually appear in direct speech or spoken language: 'I shan't [shall not] see him tonight' and 'He couldn't've [could not have] seen the accident.'

Contractions are the cause of quite a few confusions: we have already explored the it's vs. its problem. Look at this group of sentences: what's wrong with all of them?

- \*Theirs a log cabin in the woods.
- \*There going to leave on Saturday.
- \*They're house is on the other side of town.

Answer: all have confused the different uses of their/there/they're, principally because they *sound* the same. Words like this are called **homophones** (they sound the same but mean something different) and they are a characteristic of English. Like its/it's, the solution is to think through what each one means and does.

There refers to place, or introduces a statement:

There's a log cabin in the woods. The river is over there.

They're is a contraction of "they are".

They're an odd couple.

Their is a possessive:

Their house is on the other side of town.

Confusion frequently arises from who's and whose. We cover these, and other problems like your/you're in our worksheets on confusing words: meanwhile expand the contraction to understand the difference:

The man who's coming to dinner is a surprise guest. → Who's = who is

The man whose car is parked outside is the surprise guest. → Whose = the car is owned by the man

I hope you would not make the same mistake by trying to contract "who are" in

The women who are coming to dinner wear very few clothes and a lot of jewellery.

Let's sort out one more contraction confusion before the next exercise: let's is a contraction of let us. It is *not* correct to omit the apostrophe: \*Lets party is an error. You can usually rely on the Microsoft grammar checker to pick this up and correct it properly. We emphasise, however, that academic writing should avoid using contractions as these are features of informal and spoken English.

Again, try to do the next exercise without referring back to this page.

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<sup>1</sup> The Anglo-Irish playwright and linguist George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950) embarked on a lifelong campaign to rid English of apostrophes, and modernise English spelling to his version of it. His innumerable plays are published with no apostrophes on contractions, so you get used to reading dont, cant, shant etc. The plays are surprising fun to read.

## Exercise 5.1 – saving printing costs in Cardiff Met’s learning centres

You’re publishing this set of printing tips for starving Cardiff Met students on tight budgets. To come across as more friendly, introduce at least one contraction per tip. Set a good example by including apostrophes where needed in your contractions.

1. Do not just print entire websites: there is no point paying to print unwanted advertising. Cut and paste required text into a Word document instead so you are printing only what is needed.
2. If you cannot read articles online in the learning centre, save them on your memory pen so you can read them later on your laptop or offline, when you are not so pressed for time.
3. You have got huge margins on the pages of your printed and downloaded e-journal article? You could have used the two pages to a page feature on the printing menu.
4. Who is in charge of your budget? You are! Be mean: learn to read on screen and take proper notes, or just do not print out at all.
5. “A problem shared is a problem halved.” It is easy to set up a reading group with students from your module. Print the reading list just once, split up the reading, each do some, then meet to discuss. You would save a fortune, as well as engaging in valuable discussion and feedback.

### Conclusion and revision

I hope that’s sorted out the apostrophe for you. You’ll encounter countless exceptions which will leave you either curious or just plain annoyed. Half the fun of English is its continual (apparent) contradiction of itself. Here’s a private bugbear of mine. How often have you see lists like these?

DOS and DONTs  
DO’S and DONT’S  
DO’s and DON’T’S

If you haven’t got eye-ache, I certainly have. Would you create a heading called PRO’S and CON’S? If you must use awkward pluralised words in capitalised headings, do the logical thing and treat words as objects:

DOs and DON’Ts

After the references and further resources section, you can find additional revision exercises challenging you to extend the knowledge you have so far gained.

### Author’s challenge: let’s cure Cardiff Met of its apostrophe errors

Are you fed up with badly punctuated, careless signs? War is declared on illiterate English. If you see an official Cardiff Met sign with an apostrophe mistake – in fact, any misuse of grammar or spelling – let me know: [sjwilliams@cardiffmet.ac.uk](mailto:sjwilliams@cardiffmet.ac.uk). I’ll consult the team; if you’re right you get a Dolc<sup>h</sup>e Vita<sup>2</sup> coffee on us.

### References and further resources

Go to our website for a huge range of language resources: [student.uwic.ac.uk/academicsskills](http://student.uwic.ac.uk/academicsskills). There are links to many online sites and quizzes where you can practise using apostrophes.

Woods, Geraldine (2006) *English Grammar Workbook for Dummies* Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing Chapter 7 pp90-99 ‘One Small Mark, a Whole New meaning: Apostrophes’

Woods’ book is probably the best hands-on apostrophe practice we have found. She doesn’t bombard with terminology but provides you with entertaining exercises to find out for yourself how English works. The book’s greatest virtue is the lengthy explanation given in the answer keys.

<sup>2</sup> In case you’re asking, I’ve already pointed out that Italian does not spell ‘dolce’ with an h.



## Section 6: revision exercises

### Exercise 6.1 – the British and the apostrophe

Put in the apostrophes needed to make sense of the following passage.

To account for the British public's exasperating inability to know where (and where not) to put an apostrophe in written English, it's not a bad idea to start with education: we've had 40 years teaching since the 1960s which hasn't paid attention to punctuation and grammar, with many English teachers just telling pupils: write as you speak! We know now that written languages conventions are very different to speaking. Many people also wrongly flaunt ignorance: I'm rubbish at spelling and punctuation is frequently voiced as an excuse for carelessness amongst students whose written work looks like a dog's breakfast. The internet and mobile telephony haven't helped: search engines, such as Google, ignore apostrophes, and text-messaging's lack of punctuation has also negatively reinforced the idea that apostrophes are only for the fussy.

For students, apostrophe errors give a terrible impression in important documents such as CVs and job application statements. Like most punctuation, the apostrophe's role *can* be critical for clear meaning. Imagine you've written this sentence: My team's budgets were equally divided. If the apostrophe precedes the s then it's just one team with many budgets: after the s and it's many teams sharing many budgets.

The rules for apostrophe use, unlike spelling, are almost entirely unambiguous and within anybody's grasp. While it's always useful to get an objective reader to look over a final essay draft, at the end of the day *you're* responsible for your own language! It's not your teachers, parents, friends or partners' job to be a constant sub-editor or proof-reader.

### Exercise 6.2 – the corrections

Correct the apostrophe use in the sentences below (there may be more than one possibility).

1. The gentleman who's car was impounded last week complained to the police.
2. Her hairs' ghastly in that style.
3. The National Health Services need is for urgent overhauling but it's social significance is'nt in doubt.
4. Brown's and Jones's evaluation of the governments policy is flawed.
5. 1970's style is characterised by clashing colour's and loud print's, such as leopard's paws.

### Exercise 6.3 – location location location

3. How does the position of the apostrophe change the meanings of the sentences below?

This is a painting of our son's.

This is a painting of our sons'.

This is a painting of our sons.



## Answers to exercises

### Exercise 2.1 – possessive apostrophes

1. The Head **Teacher's** study is over there.
2. The geography **teachers'** staffroom is on the left.
3. Jack **Davies'** class was the best in the school.
4. The **twins'** teacher despaired of ever telling them apart.
5. Sadie lost two **terms'** work due to a car accident.
6. A surprise hit song of the late **1970s** was *Wuthering Heights*.
7. **1978's** hit song *Wuthering Heights*, by Kate Bush, triggered a craze for dance-based pop videos.
8. The **Beatles'** stock repertoire was established quickly but **its** popularity nearly proved the **band's** undoing when their own **repertoire's** popularity overtook their **attempts** at new work.
9. *Yesterday* is the **world's** most covered song with **hundreds** of versions circulating.
10. John Lennon was the first of the **Beatles** to die.
11. **Jack's** family is large and far-flung. His many aunts live dotted all over the world, but his immediate family lives in a small Cotswolds village. **Jack's dog's** home is a large kennel and his twins often joke that the kennel is larger than their house. The **twins'** mother is always threatening to move out unless Jack builds on an extra room. The younger twin wants to be an actor while the elder **twin's** hobby is playing with model trains on elaborate sets: these consume lots of space and, with the younger **twin's** agreement, the pair has chosen to share a bedroom, giving up the second bedroom to the trains. The aunts are gathering soon for a special occasion: **Jack's** silver wedding anniversary. As he is the **aunts'** only nephew, he is used to dealing with these mass invasions. The twins are hoping that their presents will not be yet more model trains and editions of **Shakespeare's** plays!

### Exercise 3.1 – IT in BT: a case of discrimination

1. The same quarter of a century has seen the **typewriter's** death and the advent of **blue chips** in everything: **cameras, ovens, radios, cars** and even **chairs**.
2. No-one born in the western world after the **1980s** knows a world without **computers**, but computer literacy is not universal.
3. Not all British **homes** are wired up to a PC and **its** innumerable peripheral **gadgets**, and not all **people/persons**, particularly those who finished formal education before the mid **eighties**, have acquired the user **skills** to participate in the digital world.
4. This group cannot: access online banking and shopping **services**; surf the net for instant information; and, perhaps most distressing, relate to or participate in their **children's** elaborate and fast-moving social **networks**.
5. A more insidious impact of the digital divide, as **it's** known, is **its** unintentional discrimination: those without access to the internet cannot access many **company discounts** and **deals** available only online.
6. One of the worst **perpetrators** of online discrimination is British Telecom; **it's** still effectively the national phone provider as many elderly people cannot access **its alternatives** offline.
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'Yes there is,' said a smaller voice nearer Gregg's feet. 'You need to look lower down, daddy.'  
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'Thanks dad, I'm not that small. Mum's always saying to you: "He's tall for his age."'

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## Revision

### Exercise 6.1 – the British and the apostrophe

Please note this passage is not in academic English, as it uses many contractions. There are also some alternative answers where both options are right: however, consider how the meaning is changed with each choice.

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### Exercise 6.2 – the corrections

1. The gentleman **whose** car was impounded last week complained to the police.
2. Her **hair's** ghastly in that style.
3. The National Health **Service's** need is for urgent overhauling but **its** social significance **isn't** in doubt.
4. **Brown** and **Jones'** evaluation of the **government's** policy is flawed.
5. **1970s** style is characterised by clashing **colours** and loud **prints**, such as **leopards'** paws.

### Exercise 6.3 – location location location

The apostrophe placement changes the meaning entirely in each case. This is a painting of our son's. = the son is in fact the painter. This is a painting of our sons'. = two or more sons were the painters. This is a painting of our sons. = now two or more sons are the subject of the painting.

