

Grammar & ESL: Apostrophes

Apostrophes usually indicate possession.

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

- “The rhythm of a poem” becomes “The poem’s rhythm.”
- “The book that belongs to Alison” becomes “Alison’s book.”
- “The musician’s violin.”
- “The teacher’s notes.”

What’s an exception? The possessive form of “it” is “its.”

- Do not add an apostrophe to form the possessive of it.
 - “The rattlesnake shed its skin.”
- “It’s” is the contraction of “it is” or “it has,” not the possessive of it.
 - “It’s important that you remember your car keys.”

To form the possessive of an irregular plural noun not ending in *s*, add an apostrophe and an *s*.

- “I am interested in women’s studies.”
- “I listen to people’s opinions.”
- “Those are men’s coats.”

To form the possessive of a plural noun that already ends in *s*, add an apostrophe.

- “The senators’ votes.”
- “The books’ titles.”
- “The horses’ hay.”

Apostrophes can also be used to form contractions.

A contraction is formed by placing an apostrophe where the letter(s) has been omitted. This is not always the same place where the original two words are joined.

- “I am” becomes “I’m.”
- “She is” becomes “She’s”
- “I had” becomes “I’d”
- “I will” becomes “I’ll”
- “Do not” becomes “Don’t”
- “Will not” becomes “Won’t”
- “You would” becomes “You’d”
- “You will” becomes “You’ll”
- “Let us” becomes “Let’s”
- “It is” or “It has” becomes “It’s”

Contractions are informal and often are not used in school assignments.