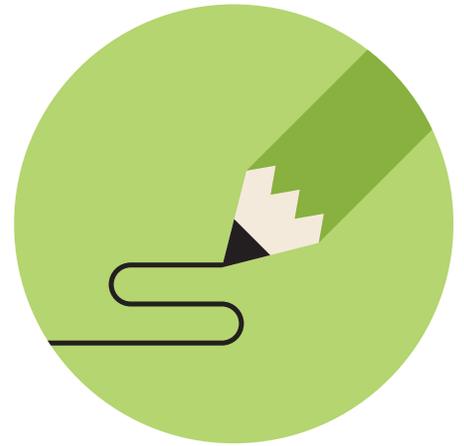


How to Use an Apostrophe

Lesson Objective

Apostrophes may be small, but they are important punctuation marks. In this lesson, you will learn how to use an apostrophe correctly. You'll also learn some common errors that learners and native speakers make with apostrophes. Let's start by going on an apostrophe hunt. How many apostrophes can you find?



Warm-Up

A. Writing

1. Fill in the blanks below to make a list of words that you find while looking for apostrophes. Your teacher will give you a location and a set an amount of time to search. Go!

• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____	• _____

2. Compare your list with your classmates' lists. How many words did you find that others didn't have?

Warm-Up cont.

B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to the correct definitions.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. let's | a) use one instead of another |
| ___ 2. possession | b) the other way around |
| ___ 3. contraction | c) short for "let us," used for making a suggestion |
| ___ 4. abbreviated | d) to avoid confusion |
| ___ 5. vice versa | e) shortened |
| ___ 6. substitute | f) leave out, not use |
| ___ 7. identical | g) considered together with the surrounding words |
| ___ 8. for (the sake of) clarity | h) the exact same |
| ___ 9. omit | i) a shorter version |
| ___ 10. in context | j) ownership |

The Two Main Uses for Apostrophes

There are two main reasons for using an apostrophe:

To Show Possession

- My **mom's** hair is brown.
(The hair belongs to my mom.)

To Form a Contraction

- (an abbreviated form of a word, informal)
- **I'm** on my way home. (I am)



The Two Main Uses for Apostrophes cont.

A. To Show Possession

	Rule	Examples
Singular Noun	Add 's.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the man's car my dad's brother Lisa's homework Chris's pen the sun's rays Tokyo's school system
Plural Noun (ending in s)	Add an apostrophe after s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the dogs' leashes (more than one dog) the Smiths' cottage (members of a family with the last name "Smith") the teachers' room (many teachers share the room)
Plural Noun (not ending in s)	Add 's (just as you would for a singular noun).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> men's clothing mice's cage people's dreams

Task 1

Write five sentences that use apostrophes to show possession of a noun.
Be sure to write sentences for singular nouns as well as plural nouns.
Use examples that end in s and don't end in s.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The Two Main Uses for Apostrophes cont.

B. To Form a Contraction

In speaking, we use many contractions to shorten words and sentences. In informal writing or transcripts/dialogues, you will notice many contractions. Here are some of the most common contractions in English.

Word(s)	Contraction
is	's
has	's
are	're
would	'd
had	'd
have	've
will	'll
not	n't
of	o' (very informal)
madam	ma'am
will not	won't

Examples:

- I **cannot** sleep. → I **can't** sleep.
- We **have** come for dinner. → We **ve** come for dinner.
- It **is not** time to go yet. → It **'s not** time to go yet. / It **isn't** time to go yet.
- Who **is** coming to the party? → Who **'s** coming to the party?
- I **would** buy that car if I were you. → I **'d** buy that car if I were you.

Note #1

The contraction *it's* may mean "it has" or "it is." The contraction *'d* may mean "had" or "would." Look at the word in context to figure out which two words are being used.

- **It's** dark out. Please come inside. (*It is*)
- **It's** been three hours since they left. (*It has*)
- **I'd** like a coffee. (*I would*)
- **I'd** better call my mom. (*I had*)

Note #2

Be careful with the contraction 's for "is" in front of a noun. This structure is very informal and can also cause confusion.

- The dog's home.

For clarity, it's better to write "The dog is home" so people know you don't mean "The home of the dog."



The Two Main Uses for Apostrophes cont.

B. To Form a Contraction cont.

Task 2

Form a contraction for each of the following and write an example sentence.

#	Words	Contraction	Sentence
1	who is		
2	cannot		
3	he would		
4	they have		
5	we are		
6	you had		
7	I am		
8	should not		
9	will not		
10	could have		

Note:

Remember that contractions are informal. In formal writing, such as essays or business letters, avoid using too many contractions.

Common Apostrophe Errors

English learners aren't the only ones who make errors with apostrophes. People whose first language is English (teachers and writers included) also make these mistakes. Many writing errors are made subconsciously. Writers may know the rule, but they type or write the word as it sounds without thinking about the apostrophe. Here are some common cases to watch out for. Careful proofreading can reduce these common errors.

A. It's Vs. Its

One of the most common apostrophe errors people make is writing "it's" instead of "its" (or vice versa).

If you can substitute "it is" or "it has," use "it's."

- **It's** a nice day outside. (*it is*)
- **It's** been a nice summer. (*it has*)

If you can't, you need the possessive pronoun "its."
There is no such word as "its'."

- The dog licked **its** paws.

Task 3

Complete the following sentences using "its" or "it's."

1. I like the color of _____ fur.
2. _____ already six o'clock.
3. Why don't you check _____ collar?
4. I think _____ going to rain tomorrow.
5. This city is known for _____ tulip festival.
6. _____ got to be here somewhere.
7. _____ quarter to four.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

B. Words Ending in s

Many people accidentally add an apostrophe to words ending in the letter s when one is not needed.

- ✗ There are three **door's** to this house.
- ✓ There are three **doors** to this house.
- ✗ The **dog's** barked at the mailman.
- ✓ The **dogs** barked at the mailman.
- ✗ The weather man **say's** it's going to be cold.
- ✓ The weather man **says** it's going to be cold.
- ✗ The **apple's** are on sale.*
- ✓ The **apples** are on sale.

***Note:**

This error is sometimes referred to as the "grocers' apostrophe." Watch for incorrect apostrophes on signs in grocery stores!

Task 4

Circle the error(s) in each sentence below and make the necessary correction.

1. It's a busy house because there are three cat's and two dogs.

2. My husband is working day's, not nights, this week.

3. Jerry's grandpa fly's here on Wednesday's.

4. Are your parent's vegetarian's, Anna?

5. Sarah's frog's need a bigger aquarium.

6. Adrian's dad said that the carrot's are on sale this week.

7. My father's restaurant has great fish and chip's.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

C. Who's Vs. Whose

The word "who's" is a contraction of "who is." Many people mix it up with the pronoun "whose" because of the identical pronunciation.

If you can substitute "who is," use "who's" in informal situations.

- **Who's** coming to the party? (*who is*)

If you can't substitute "who is," you need the word "whose."

- **Whose** shirt is this?

Task 5

Write three sentences using "who's" and three sentences using "whose."

Write one sentence using both "who's" and "whose."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

D. Possession of Nouns Ending in s

To show possession of a plural noun that ends in s, the apostrophe goes after the s.

- The **nurses'** charts got all mixed up.
(two or more nurses)
- The **cats'** beds need to be vacuumed.
(two or more cats)
- The **students'** goals were not met.
(two or more students)
- It's **ladies'** night at the nightclub.
(the word "ladies" is already plural)

In cases when a plural noun does not end in s, the apostrophe goes before the s.

- The **children's** toys are all over the floor.
- The **men's** washroom is on your right.

Task 6

Circle the error(s) in each sentence below and make the necessary correction.

1. We have three cats. The cats litter box is in the basement.

2. All of the teachers went to the restaurant. The teachers bill was over five hundred dollars.

3. It's lady's night at the bowling hall.

4. The kids rooms are very messy right now.

5. The boxes labels are mixed up.

6. The last time I saw Dr. Jones, he was at the nurses station.

7. The childrens book section is on the third floor.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

E. You're Vs. Your

The word "you're" is a contraction of "you are." Many people incorrectly use it for "your" because of the identical pronunciation.

If you can substitute "you are," use "you're."

- **You're** coming with us, right? (*you are*)

If you can't substitute "you are," you need the word "your" (possessive pronoun). "Your" is always followed by a noun.

- Where is **your** pen?

Task 7

Complete the sentences below using "you're" or "your."

1. Where have you put _____ passport?
2. _____ going to the concert, aren't you?
3. _____ clean laundry is folded in the basket.
4. Why don't you invite some of _____ friends?
5. Tell _____ boss _____ sick!
6. Where you do you think _____ going?
7. This is not _____ decision.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

F. They're / Their / There

The word "they're" is the contraction of "they are." Many people incorrectly write "their" or "there" when they mean "they're" because of the identical pronunciation.

If you can substitute "they are," use "they're."

- They're going downtown today. (*they are*)

To show possession, use "their."
"Their" is always followed by a noun.

- Their house is for sale!
- I wonder where their car is.

In a short, **positive** response, do not respond with a contraction.

- Is there any water in the fridge?
 - ✓ Yes, there is.
 - ✗ Yes, there's.
 - ✓ No, there is not.
 - ✓ No, there isn't.

Tip #1

Do not contract any short positive response.

Tip #2

There is no such word as "there're"
(because it would be too difficult to pronounce).

Task 8

Circle the error(s) in each sentence below and make the necessary correction.

1. I have there phone number in my purse.

2. There're a few crackers left in the box.

3. Do you know if their coming for dinner or not?

4. I won't buy there products anymore.

5. A: Is there an onion in the fridge?
B: Yes, there's.

6. Have you been swimming in they're pool yet?

7. Their is a snake in the garden!

8. A: Is he their?
B: Yes, he's.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

G. Apostrophes with Pronouns

Apostrophes are NOT used with possessive adjectives. The words *my, your, his, her, its, our,* and *their* already show possession.

- ✗ Let's go to **his'** house.
- ✓ Let's go to **his** house.

Apostrophes are also NOT used with possessive pronouns. The words *mine, yours, his, hers, ours,* and *theirs* already show possession.

- ✗ This book is **your's**.
- ✓ This book is **yours**.

Task 9

Use an ✗ or a ✓ to indicate whether the sentence is correct or incorrect:

#	Sentence	✓ or ✗?
1	I introduced Juan to his' girlfriend.	
2	The dog chewed on it's leash.	
3	Is anybody elses screen frozen?	
4	Why is nobody's work completed?	
5	Everyones kids got along well together.	
6	I think this is your's water bottle.	
7	Is this chair our's or theirs?	

Apostrophes are used with indefinite pronouns. The words *one, anyone, anybody, everyone, everybody, no one,* and *nobody* can be possessive:

- **Everyone's** dogs were well behaved.
- **No one's** homework was checked.

In sentences with "else," the 's goes after the word "else."

- Why is **everybody else's** phone working?
- I'll check **someone else's** work first.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

H. Plural Nouns Ending in *ies*

People often accidentally write 's instead of *ies* when spelling a plural noun .

- ✗ He has three **company's**.
- ✓ He has three **companies**.
- ✗ We invited a few **family's** to join us for dinner.
- ✓ We invited a few **families** to join us for dinner.

Hint:

Write the plural form first before you try to form the possessive of a tricky word like this:

- the plural of family = families ✓
- the families' tents got soaked. ✓

Task 10

Write two sentences for each word in the list.
The first sentence should use the word in a plural form.
The second sentence should use the word in a possessive form (plural or singular).

Word List:

- company
- family
- butterfly

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

Reference

A. Apostrophes with Names

Names can be tricky when it comes to apostrophe use. Review these rules regularly to make sure you know how and when to use apostrophes with first and last names.

Apostrophes with first names ending in s

When a first name ends in s and you want to show possession, add 's.

First Name	Example
Chris	Where are Chris's socks?
Mavis	Mavis's dream is to become a movie star.

Note:

Some teachers, editors, and style guides may suggest omitting the second s.

No apostrophe when referring to two or more people with the same name

When you want to refer to two or more people with the same name, add s.

- There are two **Lisas** in my class.
- Are both **Alexanders** coming to the party?



Reference cont.

A. Apostrophes with Names cont.

Apostrophes with last names

When a last name doesn't end in *s*, but you want to talk about possession in relation to family members (plural), add an apostrophe after the *s*.

Last Name	Example
Smith	The Smiths' car was broken into last night.
Wallace	Are you coming to the Wallaces' for dinner? (the Wallaces' house)

Apostrophes with last names ending in *s*, *ch*, or *z*

Now things get really tricky. First, you must learn the rule about pluralizing last names that end in *s*, *ch*, or *z*.

Because these words are tricky to pronounce as plurals, an "es" is added to make them plural. When a last name ends in *s*, *ch*, or *z* (e.g., Jones), and you want to show plural possession, add *es'*.

Last Name	Plural	Plural Possessive
Jones	Joneses	Joneses'
Sanchez	Sanchezes	Sanchezes'
Church	Churches	Churches'

- Did the **Joneses'** roof leak?
- Welcome to the **Churches'** household.

Reference cont.

B. Apostrophes with Numbers & Letters

Forming contractions and showing possession are the two main uses of apostrophes. Apostrophes may also be used with numbers and letters.

Different style guides have different rules about whether or not to use apostrophes with numbers and letters. The current trend is to omit apostrophes, but some writers choose to use them for the sake of clarity. Here are some ways you may see them used.

	Examples	Notes
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It's five o'clock. We need one day's notice. She owes me two weeks' pay. I have ten years' experience. We'll respond in a few days' time. 	The apostrophe goes before the s for a single reference (<i>one day's, one week's</i>), and after the s for a plural reference (<i>two weeks', three years'</i>).
Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I was born in the 1970s. The '30s were difficult times. 	The trend is to eliminate this unnecessary apostrophe: <i>1930s</i> , not <i>1930's</i> ; <i>'30s</i> , not <i>'30's</i> .
Plural Numbers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She was holding four 7's. I have two red 3's. They both have 2's on the back of their shirts. They walked out in twos and threes. 	<p>Many style guides recommend not using this apostrophe. Others feel it is necessary for clarity.</p> <p>When a plural number is spelled out, apostrophes aren't usually used.</p>
Letters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must learn your ABCs. He had mainly As on his report card. Don't forget to cross your t's and dot your i's. 	The trend is to avoid using apostrophes with capital letters, though some style guides suggest including them for clarity. Most style guides recommend using apostrophes with lowercase letters for the sake of clarity.

Reference cont.

C. Apostrophes with Compound Nouns, Hyphenated Nouns & Two Nouns

Here are a few more tricky rules to remember when it comes to forming the possessive with nouns:

	Examples	Notes
Hyphenated & compound nouns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • your sister-in-law's house • his ex-wife's kids • the Toronto School Board's rules 	The 's goes at the end of the hyphenated or compound noun.
Two nouns with joint ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lisa and John's house • the First Lady and President Obama's book 	The 's is only necessary on the second noun.
Two nouns without joint ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andy's and Ella's outfits were cute. (they have different outfits) • President Clinton's and President Obama's wives were in attendance. 	—

Review

Identify whether the apostrophe is used to show possession or a contraction.

1. Who's going to help me? _____
2. I need Charles's phone number. _____
3. It's on the kitchen counter. _____
4. The Joneses' driveway is freshly paved. _____
5. You'd better ask your father. _____
6. I'm never going to finish this work. _____
7. We shouldn't have bothered you. _____
8. Why is Lindsay's husband here? _____
9. My mom's coming home soon. _____

Editing Challenge

COMMON APOSTROPHE ERRORS

Write eight sentences containing common apostrophe errors.
 Challenge a partner to spot and correct the errors.
 Include some tricky ones with first and last names.

#	My Incorrect Sentence	My Partner's Correction
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What are the two main uses of an apostrophe?
2. What common error do people make with “who’s” and “whose”?
3. What does “its” mean?
4. Why does it make sense to write *t’s* and *i’s* instead of *ts* and *is*?
5. How do you form the plural of a last name ending in *s*, *ch*, or *z*?
6. In what situation might “Johns” be a plural first name?
7. Why should a restaurant sign say “ladies’ night” instead of “lady’s night” or “ladies night”?

A Checklist

CHECKING YOUR APOSTROPHE USE

- Look at all of the apostrophes in your writing. Are they necessary?
- Look at the names in your writing. Do they require apostrophes?
- Review the contractions you used in your writing. Is your writing too informal?
- Look at any numbers or dates used in your writing. Did you use apostrophes correctly?

Answer Key

NOTE:

For other interesting notes on apostrophe use, visit our blog and search for "apostrophe." <http://blog.esllibrary.com>

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students learn the two main uses of an apostrophe. They also learn some of the most common errors writers make with apostrophes. Students learn to spot and correct errors. Includes a writing and editing challenge.

LEVEL:

Int

TAGS: writing, punctuation, apostrophe, apostrophes

Lesson Objective

Review the lesson objective with your students and make sure they understand what an apostrophe is. Challenge them to say and spell this tricky word too.

Warm-Up

A. WRITING

Give your students some time to hunt for apostrophes in a certain location. This could be a school hallway, a library, or even a web search. Which student came up with the most original examples? Alternatively, you could send students out on an apostrophe hunt. How many can they find in a store or in their neighborhood?

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Print copies of page 23 and cut out the strips, or have students do the matching exercise provided on page 2.

- | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. c | 3. i | 5. b | 7. h | 9. f |
| 2. j | 4. e | 6. a | 8. d | 10. g |

The Two Main Uses for Apostrophes

Review the two main uses for apostrophes and have the students try the tasks.

TASK 1

Answers will vary.

TASK 2

Answers will vary for sentences.

- | | | |
|------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. who's | 5. we're | 9. won't |
| 2. can't | 6. you'd | 10. could've |
| 3. he'd | 7. I'm | |
| 4. they've | 8. shouldn't | |

Common Apostrophe Errors

TASK 3

- | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. its | 3. its | 5. its | 7. It's |
| 2. It's | 4. it's | 6. It's | |

TASK 4

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. cat's (cats) | 4. parent's (parents) |
| 2. day's (days) | vegetarian's (vegetarians) |
| 3. fly's (flies) | 5. frog's (frogs) |
| Wednesday's (Wednesdays) | 6. carrot's (carrots) |
| | 7. chip's (chips) |

TASK 5

Answers will vary.

TASK 6

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. cats litter box (cats') | 5. boxes labels (boxes') |
| 2. teacher's bill (teachers') | 6. nurses station (nurses') |
| 3. lady's night (ladies') | 7. childrens book section (children's) |
| 4. kids rooms (kids') | |

(continued on the next page...)

Answer Key cont.

Common Apostrophe Errors cont.

TASK 7

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|
| 1. your | 3. Your | 5. your, | 6. you're |
| 2. You're | 4. your | you're | 7. your |

TASK 8

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. there (their) | 5. there's (there is) |
| 2. There're (There are) | 6. they're (their) |
| 3. their (they're) | 7. Their (There) |
| 4. there (their) | 8. their (there), he's (he is) |

TASK 9

1. ✗ 2. ✗ 3. ✗ 4. ✓ 5. ✗ 6. ✗ 7. ✗

TASK 10

companies, families, butterflies
Individual answers for sentences.

Review

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. contraction | 4. possession | 7. contraction |
| 2. possession | 5. contraction | 8. possession |
| 3. contraction | 6. contraction | 9. contraction |

Editing Challenge

Check to make sure students aren't teaching each other incorrect usage. You may want to correct your students' work before they challenge a partner to spot the errors.

Comprehension Check-In

- The two main uses of an apostrophe are to indicate possession and to form a contraction.
- People mistakenly write "who's" when they are referring to the possessive form.
- The word "its" is a possessive adjective meaning that an object belongs to something.
- It makes sense to write t's and i's instead of ts and is to avoid confusion with the word "is."
- You form the plural of a last name ending in s, ch, or z by adding es.
- The word "Johns" might be a plural first name if you are referring to two or more people with that name.
- A restaurant sign should say "ladies' night" instead of "lady's night" or "ladies night" because the word "ladies" is the plural form and *ladies'* is the possessive form that shows that the night belongs to the ladies (usually ladies will pay cheaper prices on such a night).

Writing Challenge

Why not take this challenge with your students? Students may be more likely to share their writing if the teacher participates and shares. After students have completed their writing, have them go through the checklist on page 19.

Extra Vocabulary Practice (optional)

Write definitions in your own words. Cut up these vocabulary strips.
 Challenge a partner to match the vocabulary to your definition.

let's	
possession	
contraction	
abbreviated	
vice versa	
substitute	
identical	
for the sake of clarity	
omit	
in context	