The Apostrophe

Although we do not use the apostrophe in our everyday speech, it is important in writing. The whole meaning of an idea, phrase or sentence can be changed by an apostrophe.

The apostrophe has three uses:

1) to form possessives of nouns
2) to show the omission of letters
3) to indicate certain plurals of lowercase letters.

(Note: Apostrophes are NOT used for possessive pronouns or for noun plurals, including acronyms)

1) Forming possessives of nouns
To see if you need to make a possessive, change to the passive form. For example:

- the boy's bike = the bike of the boy
- five days' journey = journey of 5 days

• add 's to the singular form of the word (even if it ends in -s):
  - the owner's Mercedes
  - James's white surfboard

• add 's to the plural forms that do not end in -s:
  - the children's snacks
  - the chicken's clucking

• add 's to the end of plural nouns that end in -s:
  - houses' thatched roofs
  - four friends' fire knives

• add 's to the end of compound words:
  - my brother-in-law's moped

• add 's to the last noun to show joint possession of an object:
  - Todd and Anne's baby boy

2) Showing omission of letters
Make sure to lace an apostrophe where the omitted letter(s) would go. For example:

- don't = do not
- I'm = I am
- he'll = he will
- who's = who is
- shouldn't = should not
- didn't = did not
- could've = could have (NOT "could of"!)
- '60 = 1960

3) Forming plurals of lowercase letters
To form the plural of a lowercase letter, place 's after the letter, number, or symbol.

- Nita's mother constantly stressed minding one's p's and q's.
- There are two G4s currently used in the writing classroom.
- that printed page has too many &s on it.

The 1960s were a time of great social unrest.
**Proofreading for apostrophes**
A good time to proofread is when you have finished writing the paper. Try the following strategies to proofread for apostrophes:
• If you tend to leave out apostrophes, check every word that ends in -s or -es to see if it needs an apostrophe.
• If you put in too many apostrophes, check every apostrophe to see if you can justify it with a rule for using apostrophes.

**Don't use apostrophes** for possessive pronouns or for noun plurals.
Apostrophes should not be used with possessive pronouns because possessive pronouns already show possession -- they don't need an apostrophe. *His, her, its, my, yours, ours* are all possessive pronouns. Here are some examples:

- incorrect: *his' book*  
  correct: *his book*

- incorrect: *The group made it's decision.*  
  correct: *The group made its decision.*

- incorrect: *a friend of yours'*  
  correct: *a friend of yours*

- incorrect: *She waited for three hours' to get her ticket.*  
  correct: *She waited for three hours to get her ticket.*

**Also,** no apostrophe is needed to form a simple plural:
- incorrect: *The ponie's galloped across the plains.*  
  correct: *The ponies galloped across the plains.*

- incorrect: *Dave beached all of the rowboat's.*  
  correct: *Dave beached all of the rowboats.*

Sometimes a simple plural is used when a possessive is needed:
- incorrect: *The babies bottle is on the floor.*  
  The rockets red glare. . .

  correct: *The baby's bottle is on the floor. (one baby)*  
  The rocket's red glare. . . (one rocket)*  
  The rockets' red glare . . . (many rockets)

Finally, while contractions are usually words like *we're, I'm, shouldn't,* and so on, they're often made up of names, places, seasons and the like, as in the following sentence:
Summer's over, and Shiela's going back to where life's a bowl of oatmeal and Friday's the first day of the week.
All the apostrophes in this example are used to make contractions of a noun and the verb *is.* This sort of contraction is considered to be informal, however, and should not be used in formal writing such as term papers.

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