

Apostrophes

There are two types of apostrophe: contractive and possessive.

WARNING: Do not use apostrophes just because a word ends in an s. Always ask “Does it own something else? Are any letters missing?” If the answer is no, do not use an apostrophe.

Apostrophes for contraction (contractive apostrophes)

These are used to shorten words. They represent missing letters in the shorter word.

Can not → can't (Missing letters n, o)

Would not → wouldn't (Missing letter o)

I will → I'll (Missing letters w, i)

Should have → should've (Missing letters h, a)

Apostrophes for possession (possessive apostrophes)

These are used to show something belongs to someone. Put an apostrophe after the noun and then add an s.

The girl owns the ball. It is the girl's ball.

Josh has a cat. It is Josh's cat.

If there is already an s we do not need to add another one.

James has a dog. It is James' dog.

Sometimes more than one person owns something, or lots of things. We can see this when there is a plural noun. (Girl is singular, girls is plural – it shows more than one girl.)

We still put the apostrophe after the noun – in this case girls. Because it ends in an s, we do not need another one.

The girls each own a ball. They are the girls' balls.

Sometimes a noun already means more than one of a thing, like children or men. We still follow the same rule – add an apostrophe after the noun and add an s if needed.

The children's games were fun. The men's games were boring.