Using Apostrophes Correctly

And Other Related Issues
Apostrophes are perhaps the most confusing of all punctuation marks.

They have a number of uses:

- **Showing possession**
  - Singular
  - Plural
  - Joint
- **Indicating omissions**
- **Forming some plurals**

Some of the uses seem contradictory; that’s why they are confusing.
Showing Singular Possession

Add ‘s to make most single nouns possessive.

- A day’s pay          Les’s presentation
- Harry’s vomit       Bridget Jones’s Diary

Exception: Add only ‘ to words that already end in s if pronunciation would be difficult with ‘s.

- Socrates’ philosophy
- Massachusetts’ laws
Showing Plural Possession

- Add only ' to show possession for plural nouns ending in s.
  - the instructors’ meagre salaries
  - 17 students’ marks
  - Three weeks’ pay
- Add 's for words that don’t use s to form plurals
  - The children’s boots are wet.
  - We have two men’s rooms in the building.
Joint possession indicates that two or more people share something.

The apostrophe should be added to the last item in the series.

- Bob and Carol’s house

**Exception**: Add the apostrophe to both items to show individual possession.

- Ted’s and Alice’s cars
Rules for Compound Nouns

- Hyphenated nouns add to the confusion.
- Show possession by adding ‘s at the end of the word.
  - The governor-general’s car
  - My brother-in-law’s boat

**But:** To form the plurals of hyphenated nouns, add *s* only to the first word.
- Governors-general from four countries
- Brothers-in-law and their wives
Forming Contractions

Apostrophes are used to show where letters or numbers have been left out.

- Do not = don’t
- The flood of ’97
- Should have = should’ve
- It is = it’s

Contractions are frequently used in speaking and informal writing.

When in doubt, write the words out in full without using a contraction.
Forming Plurals

Add ’s to form the plurals of numbers, letters, symbols, and abbreviations.

A sale on VCR’s
I got two A’s

His 5’s look like S’s
I use many @’s with e-mail

Note: Some guides recommend not using apostrophes to show plurals in abbreviations and numbers.

VCRs 5s 1920s

Choose one rule or the other and follow it consistently.
Using Pronouns to Show Possession

Personal pronouns do not use apostrophes to show possession.

- We refer to his boat, not he’s boat

None of these pronouns uses an apostrophe:

- His, hers, ours, yours, theirs, whose, its

- Note: It’s = it is  It’s a nice day

- A chicken lays eggs in its nest.
Using Pronouns to Show Possession

Indefinite pronouns use 's to show possession in the same way as nouns

- Someone’s car     each other’s work
- Anybody’s guess   no-one’s fault
Trouble Spots

Don’t use apostrophes to form the plurals of names

✗ Come to a party with the Jackson’s.
✓ Have a visit with the Osbournes.

On a related note, don’t change y to ies when forming plurals of names ending in y

✗ Pictures of the Kennedies
✗ Gossip about the Kennedy’s
✓ Scandals involving the Kennedys
More Trouble Spots

Don’t use apostrophes to make nouns plural

**X** Customer’s will be served on the terrace.
✓ Customers will be served in the bar.

Remember that it’s means it is

**X** Every dog has it’s day.
✓ Every dog has its day.
✓ It’s about time this presentation ended.
Practice Exercise

Let’s get some practice with apostrophes before attempting the homework.

http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/leshanson/Hot_Potato/apostrophe6.htm