



## APOSTROPHES

Punctuation really does matter when writing in English, as the use of punctuation can change the meaning of sentence completely. Consider these two sentences:

- Eat your dinner!
- Eat. You're dinner!



Spell and grammar checkers on computers are sometimes useful but they will not always pick up a punctuation error, as the software cannot understand the full sentence that you have written and is only looking at a word in isolation. It is important to learn and apply the rules for correct punctuation so that you can avoid being misunderstood. Here are some tips to help you use *apostrophes* correctly.

	What you need to know.....
1. Possession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apostrophes are used to show possession. They indicate ownership of a noun.</li> <li>• Singular nouns – add apostrophe before 's' <b>The CEO's budget</b> (one CEO with one budget)</li> <li>• Singular nouns that end in a soft 's' - add apostrophe after 's' <b>The business' store</b> (one business with one store)</li> <li>• Plural nouns – add apostrophe after 's' <b>Businesses' employees</b> (multiple businesses with multiple employees)</li> <li>• Joint possession – add apostrophe before 's' of last noun <b>Australia and America's treaty</b> (two countries with a joint treaty)</li> </ul> <p>But...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Possessive determiners and pronouns <b>do not</b> have an apostrophe i.e. its, your, yours, their, theirs, whose.</li> <li>• If you use an apostrophe, this is actually a contraction and the meaning changes: it's (it is), you're (you are), they're (they are), who's (who is)</li> </ul>
2. Contraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apostrophes are used in contractions to show where words have been combined i.e. It's your book. (It is your book).</li> <li>• Note that <b>contractions are never used in academic writing</b> – all words and numbers should be written in full: Don't = do not      They're = they are      70s = 1970s</li> </ul>
3. Time or quantity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apostrophes are used to indicate time or quantity: One week's time, Two weeks' notice (plural weeks: the apostrophe goes after s) One litre's worth</li> </ul>
4. Common errors	<p><b>Its – It's</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>'Its'</i> is always possessive, <i>'it's'</i> is always a contraction, of either <i>'it is'</i> or <i>'it has'</i>. If you wouldn't say <i>'it is'</i> or <i>'it has'</i>, then don't use <i>'it's'</i>!</li> </ul>

	<p><b>You're - your</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'You're' means 'you are' and has an apostrophe to indicate a missing letter (in this case, the letter 'a'). For example: You're great! (You are great!)</li> <li>'Your' indicates possession and means 'belonging to you'. An example of using this is: Your coat is hanging up. (The coat belonging to you is hanging up.)</li> </ul> <p><b>They're - their</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>They're means 'they are' and has an apostrophe to indicate a missing letter (again, the letter 'a'). For example: They're expecting you. (They are expecting you.)</li> <li>'Their' indicates possession and means 'belonging to them'. For example: Their house was damaged in the storm. (The house belonging to them was damaged in the storm.)</li> </ul>
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<b>5. More examples</b>	<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Example</b>
	Its	Belonging to it	The cat licked its paws
	It's	It is or it has	It's raining again / it's been too long
	Your	Belonging to you	Your new shoes
	You're	You are	You're a dear friend
	Their	Belonging to them	Their big, fancy car
	They're	They are	They're pleased to be here
	We're	We are	We're going to London
	Were	Past plural of 'to be'	We were young once

**Useful links:**

- Rules for finding and fixing apostrophe errors: <http://www.chompchomp.com/rules/aposrules.htm>
- Purdue Online Writing Lab <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/621/01/>
- Monash University <http://www.monash.edu/about/editorialstyle/editing/apostrophes>

**References:**  
Oxford Learning Institute. (n.d.). Mastering the apostrophe. Retrieved from [https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/6\\_grammar\\_-\\_apostrophe.pdf](https://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminoxacuk/localsites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/pdg/managingyourself/6_grammar_-_apostrophe.pdf)