

Apostrophes

You prefer not to haul your **grandmother's** tool box full of apostrophes to the beach, so you decide to tackle the necessary punctuation issues the night before your big outing. You need stuff that other people possess to ensure that you have a splash-up time: your **father's** sun umbrella, your older **sister's** car and your best **friend's** novel. Presto, as a **singular possessor** with all your apostrophes in place, your beach day preparations turn out to be a breeze, and you can leave that tool box at home or so you think.

You have however forgotten a few things. As a **plural possessor**, you and your friends need to locate the **women's** and **men's** change rooms. You should have brought along a spare supply of apostrophes since the surfers are **regular plural possessors**, and you want to spend the afternoon admiring the **surfers'** bodies. Yes, definitely the **surfers'** bodies versus the **surfer's** body, though the lone surfer at the end of the beach is worthy of considerable admiration. You also wonder about the lonely person around the bend from the sign the **Nudist's** Beach. Where are all his or her buddies? Yes, if the sign read the **Nudists'** Beach the lonely nudist would have company.

Contractions are another use for the apostrophe. Without those extra apostrophes you have to spend the entire day speaking in a stilted manner since you have to avoid all contractions: *You will get seriously burned if you do not wear sunscreen. It is extremely hot. What a cute dog. It has lost its ball.* Your friends give you a **what's-the-matter-with-you** look. They remembered to bring their apostrophes. For you, however, without apostrophes there is no **you'll** (you will), or **it's** (it is) or **it's** (it has). Fortunately, the ball does belong to the dog since **its** is a possessive form without an apostrophe (**its** ball). Remember that contractions are great for the beach, but should usually be avoided in academic writing.

Apostrophes in their Proper Places

Avoid possessive when you want a simple plural

not writers' retreat's **but** writers' retreats
not book's needed **but** books needed

Use plural possessive when ownership belongs to a group

not Writer's Federation **but** Writers' Federation (unless there's only one lonely writer)
not Resident's Association **but** Residents' Association

If something is owned by one person use singular possessive

not Joes' wharf **but** Joe's wharf (unless he has a lot of cousins all with the same name)
not Grandmas' tool box **but** Grandma's tool box

Remember that people own their thoughts and ideas, and that a day or week can show ownership

not Janes ideas **but** Jane's ideas; **not** James thoughts **but** James's thoughts
not a days worth of play **but** a day's worth of play; **not** in two weeks time **but** in two weeks' time

The clarity of a properly placed apostrophe

not its confusing **but** it's confusing **or** it is confusing
not were happy to say that our beach day was a success **but** we're happy to say that our beach day was a success **or** we are happy to say that our beach day was a success

