

Apostrophes

Apostrophes have two uses: to indicate possession and to indicate an omission, as in a contraction.

Possession:

Apart from personal pronouns (my book, your handout, her memory stick, their iPhones), possession is indicated by adding apostrophe s to

- a singular noun , or
- a one-syllable noun that ends in s, or
- a plural noun that doesn't end in s.

Ms Goulet's book; Jane's handout; James's memory stick, the children's iPhones

An apostrophe alone is added to

- plural nouns ending in s, or
- singular nouns of more than one syllable that end in s

the publishers' convention; Mr. Jenkins' book

Unsure?

In two weeks time or in two weeks' time ?

To check, turn the possible possessor into a phrase with "of":

In the time of two weeks – therefore, in two weeks' time is correct.

Omission/Contractions

Where'er you omit a letter, an apostrophe shows the gap. Words like cant or wont can't and won't be confused if you are scrupulous about apostrophes.

In academic writing, contractions are often discouraged, so apostrophes will not appear except for possession or in quotations.

It's and its

If you never use contractions, you'll never be wrong about this frequently confused pair:

- It's = it is (a contraction)
- Its = belonging to it

Finally, abbreviations are not an exception

PCs are not better than Macs. A PC's operating system...

Use s alone to make an abbreviation plural; use apostrophe s to indicate possession.