

Apostrophes

There are two main functions of apostrophes: to show the omission of a letter or letters in a contraction or to show possession.

Contractions

A contraction is a shortened form of two or more words that has some letters missing, which are shown by an apostrophe; a contraction is generally an informal construction and should, in most cases, be avoided in formal, academic writing. When forming a contraction, the apostrophe goes in the place of the missing letters.

Examples don't (do + not), haven't (have + not), and y'all (you + all)

Possession

When an idea or object belongs to someone or something, we can show this possession with an apostrophe. In all nouns that do not end in -s, we add -'s to the end of the noun.

Examples Jim's car (where the car is property of Jim), the cat's paw (where the paw is owned or possessed by the cat) and the book's spine (where the spine is a part of the book)

But when a noun ends in -s, including proper names, we add only an apostrophe.

Examples Texas' independence, Ross' car, and The Smiths' discography

Note One important distinction still needs to be made: it's versus its. *It's* is a contraction (it + is) and *its* (without the apostrophe) shows possession in the same way possessive pronouns show possession without using an apostrophe. When used alone, these possessive pronouns are *mine*, *yours*, *his*, *hers*, *its*, *ours*, *theirs*, and *whose* – as in “The car is his” or “The cat is theirs” – but when they are used to modify a noun, these pronouns are *my*, *your*, *his*, *her*, *its*, *our*, *their*, or *whose* – as in “It is my car” or “It is their cat.”

Exercises

Use these examples to help understand this rule. Correct the following sentences using either ' or 's. The sentences may have more than one error that needs to be corrected.

1. I wasnt going to the party until Carlos roommate talked me into it.
2. I cant go because I have to go to Jen house.
3. You shouldnt have told Jim you were going.
4. I didnt mean to, but I was distracted by the twins dog.
5. Were yall on a walk or something?

6. Yeah, I hadnt seen Steve and Mary in a while, and their dog needed the exercise?
7. Is their dog belly still touching the ground when she stands up?
8. Yeah, but not as bad as Marys cat.
9. Didnt you see your professor?
10. Yeah, he reminded us of our one projects due date.
11. Its due at the same time as its worksheet?
12. I wouldnt have finished the worksheet if it wasnt for James insistence.

Answers

1. Two (2) changes: wasn't and Carlos'. The first is a contraction (was + not), and the second is a possessive with a noun ending in "-s," so it doesn't need another "s" on the end.
2. Two (2) changes: can't and Jen's. The first is a contraction, and the second is a possessive noun.
3. One (1) change: shouldn't. It is a contraction.
4. Two (2) changes: didn't and twin's. The first is a contraction, and the second is a possessive noun.
5. One (1) change: y'all. It is a contraction, and it is a mostly Southern expression.
6. One (1) change: hadn't. It is a contraction.
7. One (1) change: dog's. It is a possessive noun.
8. One (1) change: Mary's. It is a possessive noun.
9. One (1) change: didn't. It is a contraction.
10. One (1) change: project's. It is a possessive noun.
11. One (1) change: the first its to "it's." The first one is a contraction (it + is) and needs an apostrophe to distinguish it from the second one, which is possessive.
12. Three (3) changes: wouldn't, wasn't and James'. The first two are contractions and the third is possessive.