The Apostrophe

Adapted from *The Little, Brown Handbook*, 11th Edition, Contributors Dayne Sherman, Jayetta Slawson, Natasha Whitton, and Jeff Wiemelt, 2010, 451-458. Prepared by the Southeastern Writing Center. Last updated July, 2011.

An **apostrophe (')** is used to form the possessive case, to indicate omissions in contractions, and to form certain plurals.

Forming Possessives

Use – *'s* to form the possessive of a singular noun, even one that ends in –*s*. However, if the pronunciation of the possessive form is awkward, form the possessive by adding an apostrophe only after the -*s*.

  Example: John's car   Doris's dog   Jesus' journey (not Jesus's journey)

Use an apostrophe only to form the possessive of a plural noun that ends in –*s*.

  Example: The boys' bicycles   the dogs' toys

Use an – *'s* to form the possessive of a plural noun that does not end in –*s*.

  Example: The children's room

Put only the last word of a compound noun in the possessive form.

  Example: The secretary of state's office   her sister-in-law's house

If two or more individuals possess something together, use the possessive form only with the last person mentioned.

  Example: Becky and Jane's book collection

If two or more individuals possess something individually, use the possessive form with each person mentioned.

  Example: John's and Jim's boats

Forming Contractions

Use an apostrophe in place of letters omitted in contractions. Common contractions combine a subject and a verb or a verb and an adverb.

  Example: he is/he has = he's   we are = we're

Common Misuse

The possessive pronouns *its* and *whose* are often confused with the contractions *it's* (*it is* or *it has*) and *who's* (*who is* or *who has*). For these types of possessive pronouns, it is not necessary to use an apostrophe to show possession.

  Example: Possessive pronoun *its*   Contraction *it's*
              The department received its funding   It's getting very cold.

              Possessive *whose*   Contraction *who's*
              Whose car is parked outside?   Who's taking John to school?