

Lesson Objective: Tutees will learn about the different purposes of apostrophes and how to use them in correct contexts. This lesson will cover the rules of apostrophes, give examples of common mistakes, and ask the tutee to put their knowledge to use by correcting sentences. Tutees often misunderstand the uses of commas, semicolons, colons, and apostrophes and either use each interchangeably or avoid using them entirely because of their confusion. This lesson will clarify how to use apostrophes and where they belong in an academic paper.

Handouts:

- a. The Apostrophe: This handout will provide tutees with a simple explanation of how to use apostrophes and help them practice correcting sentences with apostrophes and colons. The exercise also includes correcting titles within the sentences, so Writing Consultants can decide whether they want to include that portion as it has not been gone over yet.
- b. Misusing the Apostrophe: This handout will give apostrophe rules for students who find themselves mixing up punctuation in their sentences.
- c. There, Their, They're Apostrophe Worksheet: This worksheet will ask students to differentiate between the meanings and uses of there, their, and they're as these are commonly confused.

The Apostrophe

Adapted from Dr. Brown's Worksheet

Asbury University

Center for Academic Excellence

Rules for using apostrophes:

1. Who does it belong to?

- Fill in the blank:
It belongs to _____

2. If it's singular → Add 's

- **Examples:** the man's hat, Asbury's team, anyone's guess, a day's work
 - **Note:** After a final s, z, or x sound, you may not say a second "s" sound – this **does not change** the rule. If it's singular, always add '**s**'
 - **Examples:** Ted Williams's bat, Sherlock Holmes's pipe, John Keats's pen, my boss's desk

3. If it's plural,

- ... and ends in "s": Add '**s**'
 - **Examples:** her sons' bikes, two dollars' worth, the girls' dresses
- ... and does not end in "s": Add '**'s**'
 - **Examples:** the men's room, the women's swim team, the deer's coats

Other rules for using apostrophes:

1. Do not use an apostrophe to make simple plurals.

- Examples: I saw the Smiths at church today. I also saw the Joneses and the Williamses.

2. With joint ownership or compounds, treat the names as one item.

- Examples: Bill and Ted's adventure, Ted and Jane's team, my mother-in-law's hat

3. With separate ownership, do each name separately.

- Examples of individual ownership: Bill's and Ted's brains, Ted's and Jane's eyes
- Examples of joint ownership: Bill and Ted's adventure, Donny and Marie's mother

4. Use an apostrophe for letters only --- not for plural numbers or words.

- Incorrect: I got three *As*. Your *rs* and *7's* are backwards. I misspelled 17 *receive's*.
- Correct: I got three *A's*. Your *r's* and *7s* are backwards. I misspelled 17 *receives*.

5. Possessive pronouns have built-in possession.

- Incorrect: The dog is in **it's** house. This meal is **your's**. That meal is **our's**. **Who's** dog is it?
- Correct: The dog is in **its** house. This meal is **yours**. That meal is **ours**. **Whose** dog is it?

6. No contractions in formal writing as they are too informal.

- Incorrect: It's / He's / We're
- Correct: It is / He is / We are

Misusing the Apostrophe

Asbury University
Center for Academic Excellence

Apostrophes are used either to form contractions (*it's* = it is, *who's* = who is) or show possession (*Momma's flowers*, *Jim's car*). Here are a few rules to remember when using an apostrophe.

1. Do not use apostrophes to form the **plural** of nouns.

Incorrect: Three player's were injured
Correct: Three players were injured.

Incorrect: She planted four rosebush's.
Correct: She planted four rosebushes.

2. Do not use apostrophes to make **personal possessive pronouns** possessive (for example, *his*, *hers*, *ours*, *yours*, and *theirs*)...they already are possessive!

Incorrect: I have misplaced my key. Do you have your's?
Correct: I have misplaced my key. Do you have yours?

Incorrect: His songs are sad; her's are cheerful.
Correct: His songs are sad; hers are cheerful.

3. **Its vs. It's:** Do not confuse the possessive pronoun *its* with the contraction *it's*.

- *Its* is the possessive form of *it*.
- *It's* is the contraction of *it is*.

Incorrect: The stool was on it's last leg.
Correct: The stool was on its last leg.

Incorrect: Its going to rain.
Correct: It's going to rain. (Or: It is going to rain).

4. **Whose vs. Who's:** Do not confuse the possessive *whose* with the contraction *who's*.

- *Whose* is the possessive form of *who*.
- *Who's* is the contraction of *who is*.

Incorrect: Who's plate is empty?
Correct: Whose plate is empty?

Incorrect: Whose ready for seconds?
Correct: Who's ready for seconds?

Directions: Read each sentence given below and underline the pronoun that correctly fits each sentence.

Example: Give them (their / there / they're) things back right away!

Answer: Give them (their / there / they're) things back right away!

1. (Their / There / They're) textbooks are all in the vault.
2. I can tell that (their / there / they're) not happy with the results.
3. We can give them (their / there / they're) things back when they arrive.
4. Make sure (their / there / they're) all accounted for on the bus.
5. We want (their / there / they're) things to be ready on time.
6. Can you tell if (their / there / they're) motivated to learn?
7. Look over (their / there / they're) beyond that building.
8. What if (their / there / they're) not interested in the product?
9. We will walk over (their / there / they're) if we have to.
10. The football team will receive (their / there / they're) equipment tomorrow.
11. Do all of (their / there / they're) ideas make sense?
12. Make sure all (their / there / they're) homework is turned in on time.
13. Do you know what (their / there / they're) password is to the safe?
14. (Their / There / They're) some of the most reliable students in the class.

There, Their, They're Apostrophe Worksheet

Answer Key

Asbury University
Center for Academic Excellence

Directions: Read each sentence given below and underline the pronoun that correctly fits each sentence.

Example: Give them (their / there / they're) things back right away!

Answer: Give them (their / there / they're) things back right away!

1. (Their / There / They're) textbooks are all in the vault.
2. I can tell that (their / there / they're) not happy with the results.
3. We can give them (their / there / they're) things back when they arrive.
4. Make sure (their / there / they're) all accounted for on the bus.
5. We want (their / there / they're) things to be ready on time.
6. Can you tell if (their / there / they're) motivated to learn?
7. Look over (their / there / they're) beyond that building.
8. What if (their / there / they're) not interested in the product?
9. We will walk over (their / there / they're) if we have to.
10. The football team will receive (their / there / they're) equipment tomorrow.
11. Do all of (their / there / they're) ideas make sense?
12. Make sure all (their / there / they're) homework is turned in on time.
13. Do you know what (their / there / they're) password is to the safe?
14. (Their / There / They're) some of the most reliable students in the class.