



## Learning Resource

Student Success

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# Apostrophes

**Apostrophes are used for two main purposes: to indicate ownership or possession, and to show that a letter has been left out of a word.**

## 1. Apostrophes to indicate ownership or possession.

**We use an apostrophe to show that something belongs to someone or something, eg:**

- |                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Mark's jersey                 | - who does the jersey belong to? (Mark)                 |
| Kara's car                    | - who does the car belong to? (Kara)                    |
| The department's video camera | - who does the video camera belong to? (the department) |

**The apostrophe goes straight after the answer to the question "Who does it belong to?"**

**Sometimes, however, we are writing about something belonging to more than one person, (a plural subject) and in order to show that, we put the apostrophe after the 's'.**

- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Two girls' projects won prizes        | - who do the projects belong to? (two girls) |
| Children's coats are reduced in price | - who do the coats belong to? (the children) |
| The women's books                     | - who do the books belong to? (the women)    |

**If you are not sure where to put the apostrophe, ask yourself "how many people or things am I talking about?" and then "who or what does X belong to?".**

### Example:

The girls homework is much better this week.

**With no apostrophe the reader doesn't know whether the writer means one girl or more than one. Ask yourself "who does the homework belong to?" If the answer is the girl (one girl), place the apostrophe after the 'l'.**

The girl's homework is much better this week

**If the answer to your question is "two or more girls", place the apostrophe after the 's' in girls.**

The girls' homework is much better this week

**Note: When you use its to indicate ownership (eg. the tree dropped its leaves) it doesn't need an apostrophe, just as hers and yours and theirs do not have an apostrophe.**

## 2. Apostrophes to show that a letter or letters have been left out of a word.

Apostrophes also show that we are using an abbreviation or contraction of a word. For example:

it is = it's. The apostrophe shows that we have left out the letter 'i'.

did not = didn't. The apostrophe shows that we have left out the letter 'o'.

cannot = can't. The apostrophe shows that we have left out 'n' and 'o'.

**Other examples include: we've, won't, who's, we're, you're.**

**NB: Be careful not to use apostrophes unnecessarily. A straight plural form never needs an apostrophe, eg. one table, two tables.**

## 3. Exercises

Complete this quiz- a to e- then check your answers at the end of this handout.

### a. Decide whether the nouns in the following sentences are singular or plural:

*The boy's father lost control of the lawnmower.*

**One boy (singular) or more than one (plural)? How do you know?**

*The politicians' promises were hollow again.*

**One politician (singular) or more than one (plural)? How do you know?**

*The car's paintwork needed a complete re-spray after the accident.*

**One car (singular) or more than one car (plural)? How do you know?**

### b. Add apostrophes to the following sentences to show that the possessors are plural:

*The girls exam results will arrive in the post tomorrow.*

*The boys behaviour was described by the judge as vandalism.*

*The books covers need to be repaired.*

**c. Add apostrophes to these sentences to show that the possessors are singular:**

*The babys bottle is in the steriliser.*

*The clients address is in the file.*

*The clients former addresses are numerous.*

**d. Complete the following sentences correctly using its or it's:**

*The dog got \_\_\_\_\_ tail caught in the car door.*

*The sky looks black and threatening. I think \_\_\_\_\_ going to rain.*

*From the Octagon \_\_\_\_\_ an easy walk to the Polytechnic and University.*

*The horse kicked \_\_\_\_\_ stable door down and escaped from \_\_\_\_\_ cruel owner.*

**e. Put apostrophes in the correct places in the following sentences:**

*After practice yesterday a girls jersey was left behind in the gym.*

*Sams car was badly damaged in the accident last night.*

*The girls mother said her daughters were found by the police at 10 pm.*

*The next election will really put this governments policies to the test.*

*"Weve had a few setbacks," the Prime Minister said.*

*Several patients files were burnt in the fire at the medical centre yesterday.*

*Sarah Browns research findings suggested that the current approach was not sufficient.*

*"Id like to see you in my office," the principal said.*

*"Bobs going out with Helens sister," said Richard.*

## **Answers to Exercises**

### **a. Singular or plural**

Singular - apostrophe before the 's'

Plural - apostrophe after the 's'

Singular - apostrophe before the 's'

### **b. Plurals**

The girls' exam results will arrive in the post tomorrow.

The boys' behaviour was described by the judge as vandalism.

The books' covers need to be repaired.

### **c. Singular**

The baby's bottle is in the steriliser.

The client's address is in the file.

The client's former addresses are numerous.

### **d. Its/it's**

The dog got its tail caught in the car door.

The sky looks black and threatening. I think it's going to rain.

From the Octagon it's an easy walk to the Polytechnic and University.

The horse kicked its stable door down and escaped from its cruel owner.

### **e. Correct placement of apostrophes**

After practice yesterday a girl's jersey was left behind in the gym.

Sam's car was badly damaged in the accident last night.

The girls' mother said her daughters were found by the police at 10 pm.

The next election will really put this government's policies to the test.

"We've had a few setbacks," the Prime Minister said.

Several patients' files were burnt in the fire at the medical centre yesterday.

Sarah Brown's research findings suggested that the current approach was not sufficient.

"I'd like to see you in my office," the principal said.

"Bob's going out with Helen's sister," said Richard.