



GRAMMAR AND MECHANICS

Using the Apostrophe

The possessive form of a noun is used to show ownership or possession and may be shown by using the preposition “of,” for example, “the roof **of** the house.” This essentially indicates that the “roof” belongs to the “house.” However, the possessive is more commonly shown by using an apostrophe. In this case, the phrase “of the house” can be replaced by the possessive form of the noun or “house’s.” When this occurs, the order of nouns is reversed, so the possessive noun comes first: the **house’s** roof.

The roof of the house needs repair. (The **house’s** roof needs repair.) Either sentence is correct, so it is up to the writer to decide when and where to use the apostrophe.

The spokesperson of the group was eloquent. (The **group’s** spokesperson was eloquent.)

The author of the poem read aloud to the class. (The **poem’s** author read aloud to the class.)

FORMING THE POSSESSIVE CASE

Use an apostrophe and “-s” to signal possession for the following:

- singular nouns (including singular nouns ending in “-s”): the **son’s** chores, a **cat’s** cry, **Nelson’s** journey, an **actress’s** costume, **Thomas’s** laptop
- indefinite pronouns like “anybody,” “someone,” “everyone,” “no one” that are possessive: **anybody’s** guess, **someone’s** jacket, **everyone’s** concern, **no one’s** worry
- plural nouns that do not form the plural with “-s”: the **women’s** decision, the **men’s** entrance, the **children’s** school
- individual and joint ownership: **Moore’s** performance (individual), **Walker’s** sculpture (individual), **Candor and Ebb’s** musical (joint), **Miranda’s and Roger’s** presentations (individual), **Miranda and Roger’s** apartment (joint)
- compound nouns: my **mother-in-law’s** contribution, a **son-in-law’s** duty, the **chief-of-police’s** order
- plural forms of lowercase letters of the alphabet: one word with two *t’s* (italicize the single letter but not the ’s)

Use only an apostrophe to signal possession in the following:

- plural nouns ending in “-s” (the **sons’** chores, the **cats’** cries, the **actresses’** costumes, the **students’** papers, the **babies’** supplies)
- comparisons with a noun that is understood (His talent was more advanced than other **students’**.)
- singular nouns of two or more syllables that end in “-s” to avoid potentially awkward pronunciation (**Socrates’** principals, **Pythagoras’** theory)

FORMING CONTRACTIONS

Use an apostrophe in place of omitted letters to form contracted words or numbers.

- contracted words (I am, **I’m**; he is/has, **he’s**; she is/has, **she’s**; it is/has, **it’s**; you are, **you’re**; they were, **they’re**; we were, **we’re**; we have, **we’ve**; they had/would, **they’d**; cannot, **can’t**; did not, **didn’t**; will not, **won’t**; were not, **weren’t**; here is, **here’s**; let us, **let’s**). Make sure that the apostrophe is in the same place as the omitted letters.
- contracted numbers (the fifties, the 1950s, the **’50s**; the generation of the 1960s, the **’60s** generation; the Spirit of 1776, the Spirit of **’76**); and special circumstances (8 **o’clock**)

Do not use an apostrophe with “-s” as follows:

- to form a plural noun: The **students** (not student’s) are in the auditorium.
- with the possessive form of a pronoun such as “hers,” “ours,” or “theirs”: The future is **ours** (not our’s).
- to form the plural of a surname: the **Rothchilds** (not Rothchild’s)
- to form plurals of numbers, including decades: figure **8s** (not 8’s), the **1990s** (not 1990’s); abbreviations: **FAQs** (not FAQ’s), **CDs** (not CD’s); and academic grades: two **Bs** and three **Cs**, but straight **A’s** (the capital letters “A” and “I” are exceptions).