



COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
OF RHODE ISLAND

# Apostrophes

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# Uses of Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used for:

- Possession with nouns
- Possession with indefinite pronouns
- Contractions
- A quote inside a quote
- Plural numbers and letters
- Missing parts of a slang word



# Possession with Nouns

The words “**of**” and “**belonging to**” can show the possession (ownership) of one noun by a different noun.

The lights **of** the room illuminated a book **belonging to** Joe.

On the table were ten books **belonging to** the other students.

An **apostrophe** with an “**s**” also shows possession.

The room'**s** lights illuminated Joe'**s** book.

On the table were the other students'**s** ten books.



# Possession with Singular Nouns

To show possession with singular nouns, an **apostrophe** and an “**s**” are added to the person or thing acting as the possessor.

*The student’s book was on Mary’s desk.*

Even if the objects being possessed are plural, as long as the possessor is singular, an **apostrophe** and an “**s**” are still used.

*The student’s ten books were on the classroom’s largest desks.*



# Possession with Plural Nouns

To add **possession** to **plural** nouns, a writer can begin by first spelling out all of a sentence's singular and **plural** nouns.

*The lights of the room illuminated the two books belonging to Joe.*

Then possession should be added:

1. If the **possessive** noun has no “**s**” for its last letter, both an **apostrophe** and an “**s**” should be added.

*The room's lights illuminated Joe's two textbooks.*

*Joe's children brought their books as they walked into the room.*

*Joe placed his children's books next to his own textbooks.*

2. If the **possessive** noun has an “**s**,” just an **apostrophe** is added.

*On a different table were some other students' books.*

# Possession with Indefinite Pronouns

An **apostrophe** and an “**s**” show possession for an **indefinite pronoun** (anyone, anybody, everyone, everybody, no one, nobody, someone, somebody).

**Someone's** book is on the shelf.

**Everyone's** books are on the desk.

# Possession with Personal Pronouns

Even though an **apostrophe** is used with possessive nouns, **no apostrophe** is used with possessive personal pronouns (*my, your, his, her, its, our, your, their*).

Singular possessive noun: **Joe's** books are on the desk.

Singular possessive pronoun: **His** books are on the desk.

Plural possessive noun: Two **students'** books are on the desk.

Plural possessive pronoun: **Their** books are on the desk.

# Contractions

Contractions use apostrophes to show where a **missing letter(s)** could be placed in a more formal, longer version.

**cannot**

**they have**

Mary and Joe **can't** believe the fun **they've** been having  
while reading their textbooks.

**They are**

**They're** planning on reading more books over the summer.



# A Quote Inside of a Quote

**Single quotation marks** can indicate a quotation inside of a quotation.

In his paper, Joe Smith wrote, “Ayn Rand must have been thinking about pictures and words when she said, ‘Words are a lens to focus one’s mind.’”

# Plural Numbers and Letters

Both an **apostrophe** and an “**s**” are used to make numbers and letters plural.

*4's were added to the first line, and B's were deleted from the second line.*



# Missing Parts of a Slang Word

An **apostrophe** can show where missing letters have been taken out of slang (an informal version of a word or phrase).

formal: *nothing for my birthday*

informal: *nothin' 4 my b'day*

# More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.



# Contact Information

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