



# Punctuation: apostrophes (‘)

Punctuation marks help the reader to clarify meaning and also to establish the tone of the text they are reading. They are therefore really important marks for you to learn how to use correctly in your writing.

The apostrophe is used in two ways: **as a deleting mark** to abbreviate or shorten words (where letters or a letter has been omitted) and **to show possession**.

## 1. Use an apostrophe when two words are joined with letters left out, as in abbreviations or contractions

### Examples:

- cannot = can't
- do not = don't
- I am = I'm
- of the clock = o'clock
- it is = it's

### Note:

In formal academic writing it is best to avoid contractions and abbreviations.

## 2. Use an apostrophe to show possession

### Examples:

- Michael Bridges' sons (meaning: the sons who belong to Michael Bridges)
- The three hours' exam (meaning: the exam lasting three hours)
- The student's exams (meaning: the exams for one student)
- The students' exams (meaning: the exams for more than one student)
- The company's huge losses (meaning: the huge losses made by one company)
- The children's books (meaning the books belonging to more than one child)

### Note:

- If a word originally ends in 's', an apostrophe is added **after** the final 's' to show possession. This is true for both singular and plural.
- If a word does not originally end in 's', add an apostrophe **at the end of the word** together with an **additional 's'** to show possession. This is true for both singular and plural.

### Common mistakes

- Rock and Roll began in the 1950s (**Not** 1950's)
- The teachers attended a meeting (**Not** teachers')
- Apples for sale (**Not** Apple's).
- Gmail is amazing for its ease of use (**Not** it's).

## Activity

Decide where the apostrophes need to be placed in the following sentences.

1. I think (its, it's, its') an elephant but (its, it's, its') too far away.
2. I (can't, cant, ca'nt) see (its, it's, its') trunk.
3. Communication theory was only beginning to become popular in the 1980s.
4. Charlenes books were due back at the library last Tuesday.
5. The four companies accounting practices were not done correctly.

*See answers below*

## Answers

1. I think **it's** an elephant but **it's** too far away.
2. I **can't** see **its** trunk.
3. Communication theory was only beginning to become popular in the **1980s**.
4. **Charlene's** books were due back at the library last Tuesday.
5. The four **companies'** accounting practices were not done correctly.

### Useful links *(all open in a new window)*

There may be resources that have been created with your lecturers, addressing assignment tasks and topics specific to your courses. Follow the links below to find out:

[Business](#)

[Education, Arts and  
Social Sciences](#)

[Health Sciences](#)

[IT, Engineering and  
the Environment](#)