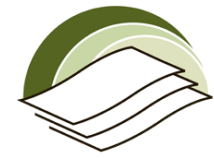


# Apostrophes



University Writing Center

## 1. Use an apostrophe to indicate that a noun is possessive

Add  
's

- to singular nouns
- to singular nouns that end in -s or an s sound
- to plural nouns that do not end in -s
- to indefinite pronouns (anyone, everyone, someone, no one, etc.)

Parking Services always makes sure there is a pass on every **owner's** car.

The **bus's** fumes gave **Alex's** roommate and me a headache during our ride from Warren to Festival.

The **women's** basketball team had a great season last year.

Whenever I find **someone's** JACard, I send her an email so she does not worry.

Add only  
an  
apostrophe

- to the end of plural nouns that end in -s

When I come home from JMU, my **parents'** friends always ask me how much fun I'm having.

## Do not use an apostrophe with nouns that are plural but not possessive

Misuse  
Alert!

*Incorrect:* Some resident's have parking permits, but others do not.

*Correct:* Some residents have parking permits, but others do not.

## Other rules to keep in mind

Make the last word in the group possessive for **compound nouns**.

My **brother-in-law's** favorite thing is to share stories about when he was at JMU.

Make **each noun** possessive to show individual possession.

**Emily's and Tori's** expectations of GWRTC 103 were very different.

Make only the **last noun** possessive to show joint possession.

**Tyler and Shane's** puppy gets them a lot of attention when they bring her to the quad.

## 2. Use an apostrophe to indicate contractions and omitted letters

To create a contraction, place an apostrophe where the omitted letter(s) would go. Some contractions are common in speech and (increasingly) accepted in writing.

It's often seen as wrong to use contractions in formal writing, but **don't** automatically avoid them. If the context and audience calls for 'em, use 'em. "O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave" contracts the word "over" to preserve the rhythm.

**Do not use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns: its, whose, his, hers, ours, yours, theirs.**



*Incorrect:* Carrier keeps it's doors during finals. Whose going to be there?  
*Correct:* Carrier keeps its doors open during finals. Who's going to be there?

## 3. Be careful and consistent in using apostrophes with special plural forms

Generally speaking, you can omit the apostrophe if the plural form is clear, but consult your discipline's style guide for further help.

### **Plural letters and numbers:**

*Use an apostrophe with lowercase letters:* There are three *a's* in "banana."\*

*MLA recommends an apostrophe with uppercase letters (especially the letters A and I):* She painted two *A's* on one side and two *Z's* on the other side.\*

*Apostrophes with numbers generally omitted:* Alyssa earned *85s* on all of her exams. Many JMU students were born in the *1990s*.

### **Plural abbreviations:**

*Use an apostrophe for abbreviations with periods:* She earned two *B.A.'s*.

*Apostrophes with other plural abbreviations are generally omitted:* We painted a bunch of *JMUs* on the spirit rock. The Frisbees on the quad look like *UFOs*.

### **Plurals of words mentioned as words:**

*Apostrophes are generally omitted with plural forms of words mentioned as words (as in "dos and don'ts" and "yeses and nos" and "ifs, ands, or buts"):* She had heard so many *maybes* when asking for overrides that she was surprised to finally hear a *yes*.\*

\* Note the italics in the examples above. Letters used as letters and words used as words are generally italicized. Academic grades—He hated *F's* and loved *A's*—are not.

Adapted from *Rules for Writers* by Diana Hacker, *The New Century Handbook* by Christine Hult and Thomas Huckin, and *The Everyday Writer* by Andrea Lunsford