

SSU Writing Center

Ruben Salazar 1008 • 1801 East Cotati Avenue • 664-4401

Apostrophes: Piece o' Cake

Apostrophes are easy. They accomplish two simple tasks:

1. Apostrophes Indicate Possession

Apostrophes show that someone or something owns or has something else:

This is Jim's paper.
The course's syllabus was five pages long.

Note that in these cases, you almost always have two nouns joined by the 's (**Jim's paper**). If you have two nouns running like that with an s between them, almost always you'll need an apostrophe.

Sometimes the second noun gets shifted toward the front of the sentence, but the basic pattern remains the same:

This paper is Jim's.

Also note that you use 's *even when the possessing noun ends in s already*:

Can you see that bus's number?
I think that's Bob Jones's dog.

What Happens when the Possessing Noun Is Plural?

When the possessing noun is plural, simply add the apostrophe:

Write down those buses' numbers for me, will you?
Three books' bindings had come undone.
The Joneses' house is on fire.

2. Apostrophes Indicate Contractions

As the word suggests, contractions indicate that some element has been left out of a word or phrase--the word or phrase has been contracted. Apostrophes stand in for the item or items that get left out:

It's raining.	=	It is raining.
I'll wait here.	=	I will wait here.
rock 'n' roll	=	rock and roll
Spirit of '76	=	Spirit of 1776

That's it for apostrophes. Piece o' cake.

A Few Exceptional Cases--Things You Just Have to Memorize

The trickiest apostrophe case is the **its** versus **it's** case. **Its** is the possessive of **it**; **it's** is the contraction form of **it is**.

The dog likes to have its back scratched.

It's raining.

This paper has its good parts and its bad parts.

I want to go where it's not raining.

Possessive pronouns can also give people grief:

Is this yours? (not your's)

No, it's hers. (not her's)

A Brief Quiz

1. The cow was lying flat on _____ back. (its or it's)
2. The Lone Ranger rode off on _____ horse. (Tontos, Tonto's, or Tontos')
3. Can you see that all four of the _____ are blue? (cars, car's, or cars')
4. _____ (Its or It's) 95 degrees outside and getting hotter by the minute.
5. Five _____ (computers, computer's, or computers') screens were cracked.
6. The _____ (bus drivers, bus driver's, or bus drivers') glasses fell on the floor when he went around a sharp corner.
7. The _____ (Smiths, Smith's, or Smiths') car broke down a few miles from their home.
8. _____ (Its or It's) time to go home.
9. do not ever let black _____ (cats, cat's, or cats') cross your path.
10. All six _____ (Mikes, Mike's, Mikes') I know have brown hair and brown eyes.