Apostrophes

Apostrophes are used to show either ownership or possession. They are also used in contractions to indicate a missing letter or letters.

1. Singular Ownership

John’s house
the student’s book
the teacher’s schedule

If a singular noun that ends in an s or z sound does not meet both of the conditions listed above, add an apostrophe and an s.

James’s bicycle
the boss’s orders
Jesus’s disciples
Thomas’s boat

When forming the possessive of a singular noun that ends in an s or a z sound, add only an apostrophe if the noun has more than one syllable and if the addition of an s would make the word difficult to pronounce.

Buenos Aires’ climate
the TV series’ characters

2. Plural Ownership

When forming the possessive of a plural noun ending in s, add only an apostrophe.

the elephants’ trunks
the trees’ leaves
the dogs’ leashes

When forming the possessive of the few plural nouns that do not end in s, add an apostrophe and an s.

the children’s umbrellas
the women’s schedules
the men’s jobs
the geese’s migration
In most cases, no apostrophe is required to make a noun plural; simply adding an s is all you need.

Use an apostrophe for short plurals.
She makes all A’s.
Be sure to dot your t’s and cross your i’s.
Replace the so’s with therefore’s

Possessive pronouns such as its, his, hers, and yours require no apostrophe.

Centuries and decades need no apostrophes.
the 1900s
the 1920s

If a singular noun ends in an s, add an apostrophe and another s unless an additional s would make the word difficult to pronounce.

Pronouns that indicate possession do not use apostrophes.
His book
Their car

Be especially careful with the words its and whose. Its shows possession; it’s always means it is. Similarly, whose shows possession, and who’s means who is.

It’s going to rain soon.
The dog lost its collar.
Who’s coming to dinner?
Whose book is this?