



Writing Center MUK 113 Phone 425-640-1750 Email: [tutoring@edcc.edu](mailto:tutoring@edcc.edu)

## Finding and Fixing Apostrophe Errors

### What is an Apostrophe Error?

Apostrophes are used to show ownership and are used to show that one or more letters are missing in a contraction. An apostrophe error occurs when an apostrophe is needed to show possession or contraction, and it is not there or is in the wrong place.

**Apostrophes have two main uses: contractions and possession. If you can learn these rules, you can master apostrophe usage!**

**Contractions:** Contractions are shortened forms of words which add an informal tone to academic writing. An apostrophe indicates that one or more letters have been left out.

To assess whether you need an apostrophe or not, re-read the sentence to see if you can expand the shortened contraction words by filling in the missing letters. Place an apostrophe where letters are missing.

- **Thao wasn't in class today.** (*The apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter "o"*).
- **Thao was not in class today.** (*Note that you can expand the shortened word "wasn't" by filling in the missing letter "o"*).

**These are some of the most common contractions:**

I am = I'm	It is = It's	Who is = Who's
She is = She's	She would = She'd	She would have = She would've
He is = He's	He would = He'd	He would have = He would've
Let us = Let's	You are = You're	They had = They'd

### It's or Its???

- **Error: Its raining heavily today.** (*Note that there is no apostrophe here, so this cannot be a contraction of "it is". The word "its" with no apostrophe is a possessive pronoun, so it's always used to show possession: "The cat licked its paws"*).
- **Correction: It's raining heavily today.** (*Note the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter "i" so this is the correct contraction of "it is"*).

**Possessives - Singular and Plural:** Apostrophes are also used with nouns to show ownership. With singular and plural nouns that do not end in the letter s, possession is usually shown by adding 's to the end of the noun:

- **The student's book** was left in her car. (*Singular possession – one student left her book*).
- **The audience's laughter** lasted for over ten minutes during the performance. (*Plural possession – the audience laughed as a group*).
- **Children's toys** are sold everywhere. (*Plural possession – children is a plural noun, just like women or men*).

**For singular or plural nouns that end in the letter s, add EITHER a final apostrophe OR 's to show possession. Whichever you choose, make sure you do the same thing consistently:**

- **The students' / students's** club meeting was held in the library conference room. (*Plural possessive ending in s – many students had a meeting together*).
- **My boss' / boss's office** looks like an art gallery. (*Singular possessive ending in s: one boss with one office*)

**For Possessive Proper Nouns Ending in the letter s, add EITHER a final apostrophe OR 's to show possession.**

- **Agnes'/ Agnes's** new laptop weighs only eleven ounces.
- **Pat Marks'/ Pat Marks's** car smoked the competition at the racetrack this weekend!

**TIPBOX: To test for ownership of possessions is to try the *Of* Option to check for ownership:**

- **Miguel's textbook** was very expensive.
- **The textbook of Miguel** was very expensive. (*The apostrophe above shows that the textbook does belong to Miguel, so it is correct*).
- **The students' books** were very expensive.
- **The books of the students** were very expensive. (*The apostrophe above shows that the textbooks do belong to the students so it is correct*).

**Apostrophes Can Show Expressions of Time or Measure:** Apostrophes can also be used to show amounts or periods of time. For example:

- Last year's class schedule
- Your money's worth

**These are Possessive Pronouns, and they NEVER need an apostrophe to show possession:**

its	hers	their	your	our	my
	his	theirs	yours	ours	mine

**Sentence Practice - Please identify and correct the apostrophe errors below:**

1. Information about Students Rights and Responsibilities at the college can be found in the Student Handbook and Planner provided each year by the Office of Student Life.
2. My dad says it would be beneficial to Americas future if we required summer school.
3. Divorce is an unfortunate part of todays society.
4. Everyone needs to do his or her part to help prevent the destruction of salmon and it's natural habitat.
5. Fahad explained its true that the more you study the better you will do on the test.

**For more practice and to test your knowledge, go to:**

- Capital Community College Guide to Grammar and Writing  
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/marks/apostrophe.htm>
- The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University  
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/621/01/>