

Apostrophe catastrophe

A short guide to avoiding the pitfalls of the dreaded



Possession

Apostrophes tell us when something or someone belongs to something or someone, e.g.,

“The cat’s whiskers.”

The whiskers belong to the cat.

But what if there are many cats? Simple - just move the apostrophe one space to the right, e.g.,

“The cats’ whiskers.”

However, there is a little confusion. What do you do if a singular word ends with an ‘s’?

There is no hard and fast rule, but it is easy to remember it like this. For a regular noun, just add an extra ‘s’ after the apostrophe, e.g.,

“My boss’s wife.”

For proper nouns, the apostrophe alone will suffice, e.g.,

“Sherlock Holmes’ pipe.”

Linking two words

Our language has evolved to the point where we can happily join two (or more) words together - all with a little help from the apostrophe, e.g.,

“I’m happy you’ve come to join us as you’re most welcome here. Let’s listen to some music. You’d love this rock’n’roll.”

Some nouns can get chopped in half and abbreviated before eventually breaking free of the apostrophe shackles, e.g.,

Photograph / photo’ / photo
Telephone / ‘phone / phone
Pianoforte / piano’ / piano

In all three of these cases, you would not use an apostrophe to denote the plural.

!! AVOID!!

Apostrophes are **NEVER** used to make something plural, e.g.,

“I have one cat but I **DO NOT** have two cat’s.”

It neither shows possession nor links two words.

However, one particular example always confuses:

“The cat showed **its** true colours.”

But hang on a minute - the true colours belong to the cat, therefore it is possessive and should have an apostrophe.

Unfortunately, no. Because **its** is a possessive pronoun rather than a noun, it takes no apostrophe.

So while you may talk about the “**cat’s** true colours”, it shows “**its** true colours.”

There is one anomaly to the rules - what you do for single letter words, e.g.,

“There are two **t’s** in ‘Kitty’.”
Technically, there should be no apostrophe as it is a plural, but for the ease of the reader, one may be added.

This rule only counts for single letters. Don’t be tempted to slip an apostrophe into **DJs** or **CDs**.