

8. George's interests were typical of a sixteen-year-old, cars, music videos, and dating.
9. Like many people who have never learned to read or write, the woman who told her life story in *Aman; The Story of a Somali Girl* was able to remember an astonishing number of events in precise detail.
10. The Greek philosopher Socrates took these words as his motto, "The unexamined life is not worth living."

CHAPTER 26

Apostrophes

26a What is the role of the apostrophe?

The **apostrophe** plays four roles in writing: It creates the POSSESSIVE CASE of NOUNS, forms the possessive case of INDEFINITE PRONOUNS, stands for one or more omitted letters in a word (a CONTRACTION), and can help form plurals of letters and numerals.

In contrast, here are two roles the apostrophe doesn't play: It doesn't belong with plurals of nouns, and it doesn't form the plural of PERSONAL PRONOUNS in the possessive case.

26b How do I use an apostrophe to show a possessive noun?

An apostrophe works with a NOUN to form the POSSESSIVE CASE, which shows ownership or a close relationship.

OWNERSHIP	The writer's pen ran out of ink.
CLOSE RELATIONSHIP	The novel's plot is complicated.

Possession in nouns can be communicated in two ways: by a PHRASE starting with *of* (*comments of the instructor; comments of Professor Furman*) or by an apostrophe and the letter *s* (*the instructor's comments; Professor Furman's comments*). Here's a list of specific rules governing usage of 's.

- **Add 's to nouns not ending in s:**

She felt a **parent's** joy. [*Parent* is a singular noun not ending in *s*.]
They care about their **children's** education. [*Children* is a plural noun not ending in *s*.]

- **Add *s* to singular nouns ending in *s*:**

You can add *s* or the apostrophe alone to show possession when a singular noun ends in *s*. In this handbook, I use *'s* to clearly mark singular-noun possessives, no matter what letter ends the noun. Whichever rule variation you choose, be consistent within each piece of writing.

The **bus's** (or **bus'')** air conditioning is out of order.
Chris's (or **Chris'')** ordeal ended.

If you encounter a tongue-twisting pronunciation (*Charles Dickens's novel*), you may decide not to add the additional *s* (*Charles Dickens' novel*). You must, however, be consistent in each piece of writing.

- **Add only an apostrophe to a plural noun ending in *s*:**

The **boys'** statements were taken seriously.
 Three **months'** maternity leave is in the **workers'** contract.

- **Add *s* to the last word in compound words and phrases:**

His **mother-in-law's** corporation has bought out a competitor.
 The **tennis player's** strategy was brilliant.
 We want to hear the **caseworker's** recommendation.

- **Add *s* to each noun in individual possession:**

Shirley's and **Kayla's** houses are next to each other. [Shirley and Kayla each own a house; they don't own the houses jointly.]

- **Add *s* to only the last noun in joint or group possession:**

Kareem and Brina's house has a screened porch. [Kareem and Brina own one house.]

Avram and Justin's houses always have nice lawns. [Avram and Justin jointly own more than one house.]

26c How do I use an apostrophe with possessive pronouns?

When a POSSESSIVE PRONOUN ends with the letter *s* (*hers, his, its, ours, yours, and theirs*), never add an apostrophe. Below is a list of PERSONAL PRONOUNS and their possessive forms.

PERSONAL PRONOUNS

I
 you
 he
 she
 it
 we
 they
 who

POSSESSIVE FORMS

my, mine
 your, yours
 his
 her, hers
 its
 our, ours
 their, theirs
 whose

26d How do I use an apostrophe with contractions?

In a **contraction**, an apostrophe takes the place of one or more omitted letters. Be careful not to confuse a contraction with a POSSESSIVE PRONOUN. Doing so is a common spelling error, one that many people—including employers—consider evidence of a poor education. Whether or not that's fair, it's usually true.

it's (contraction for *it is*)

its (possessive pronoun)

they're (contraction for *they are*)

their (possessive pronoun)

who's (contraction for *who is*)

whose (possessive form of *who*)

you're (contraction for *you are*)

your (possessive pronoun)

NO The government has to balance **it's** budget.


YES The government has to balance **its** budget.

NO The professor **who's** class was canceled is ill.

YES The professor **whose** class was canceled is ill.

Although contractions are acceptable in many forms of writing, most instructors prefer that you avoid them in ACADEMIC WRITING.



ALERT: One contraction required in all writing is *o'clock* (which stands for *of the clock*, an expression used long ago). 

26e How do I use an apostrophe with possessive indefinite pronouns?

An apostrophe works with an INDEFINITE PRONOUN (see list in Box 10-6 in 10h) to form the POSSESSIVE CASE, which shows ownership or a close relationship.

OWNERSHIP

Everyone's dinner is ready.

CLOSE RELATIONSHIP

Something's aroma is appealing.

Possession in indefinite pronouns can be communicated in two ways: by a PHRASE starting with *of* (*comments of everyone*) or by an apostrophe and the letter *s* (*everyone's comments*).

26f How do I form the plural of miscellaneous elements?

Until recently, the plural of elements such as letters meant as letters, words meant as words, numerals, and symbols could be formed by adding either *'s* or *s*. The most current MLA guidelines endorse the use of *s* only, with the exception of adding *'s* to letters meant as letters. MLA requires underlining—never italics—for two elements only: (1) letters meant as letters and

(2) words meant as words. Don't underline the *s* or *'s* that creates the plural for any of the elements discussed in this section. (For published books, any underlined words in a manuscript are printed in italics, as is done in this handbook.) The examples below reflect MLA practices.

**PLURAL OF LETTERS MEANT
AS LETTERS**

Printing **M's** and **N's** confuses young children.

Printing **m's** and **n's** confuses young children.

**PLURAL OF LETTERS MEANT
AS WORDS**

He was surprised to get all **Bs** in his courses.

**PLURAL OF WORDS MEANT
AS WORDS**

Too many **ifs** in a contract make me suspicious.

PLURAL OF NUMBERS

Her e-mail address contains many **7s**.

PLURAL OF YEARS

I remember the **1990s** well.

PLURAL OF SYMBOLS

What do those **&s** mean?

26g When is an apostrophe wrong?

If you're a writer who makes the same apostrophe errors repeatedly, memorize the rules you need (some you likely know almost without thought). Then, you won't be annoyed by "that crooked little mark," a nickname popular with students who wish the apostrophe would go away. Box 26-1 lists the major apostrophe errors.

BOX 26-1 SUMMARY



Avoiding apostrophe errors

- Never use an apostrophe with the PRESENT-TENSE VERB.
Cholesterol **plays** [not **play's**] an important role in how long we live.
- Always use an apostrophe after the *s* in a POSSESSIVE plural of a noun.
Patients' [not **Patients**] questions seek detailed answers.
- Never add an apostrophe at the end of a nonpossessive noun ending in *s*.
Medical **studies** [not **studies'** or **study's**] show this to be true.
- Never use an apostrophe to form a nonpossessive plural.
Teams [not **Team's**] of doctors have studied the effects of cholesterol.

EXERCISE 26-1 Rewrite these sentences to insert 's or an apostrophe alone to make the words in parentheses show possession. (Delete the parentheses.) For help, consult 26b and 26e.

EXAMPLE All boxes, cans, and bottles on a (supermarket) shelves are designed to appeal to (people) emotions.

All boxes, cans, and bottles on a *supermarket's* shelves are designed to appeal to *people's* emotions.

1. A (product) manufacturer designs packaging to appeal to (consumers) emotions through color and design.
2. Marketing specialists know that (people) beliefs about a (product) quality are influenced by their emotional response to the design of its package.
3. Circles and ovals appearing on a (box) design supposedly increase a (product user) feelings of comfort, while bold patterns and colors attract a (shopper) attention.
4. Using both circles and bold designs in (Arm & Hammer) and (Tide) packaging produces both effects in consumers.
5. (Heinz) ketchup bottle and (Coca-Cola) famous logo achieve the same effects by combining a bright color with an old-fashioned, “comfortable” design.
6. Often, a (company) marketing consultants will custom-design products to appeal to the supposedly “typical” (adult female) emotions or to (adult males), (children), or (teenagers) feelings.
7. One of the (marketing business) leading consultants, Stan Gross, tests (consumers) emotional reactions to (companies) products and their packages by asking consumers to associate products with well-known personalities.
8. Thus, (test takers) responses to (Gross) questions might reveal that a particular brand of laundry detergent has (Sylvester Stallone) toughness, (Oprah Winfrey) determination, or (someone else) sparkling personality.
9. Manufacturing (companies) products are not the only ones relying on (Gross) and other corporate (image makers) advice.
10. (Sports teams) owners also use marketing specialists to design their (teams) images, as anyone who has seen the angry bull logo of the Chicago Bulls basketball team will agree.

CHAPTER 27

Quotation Marks

27a What is the role of quotation marks?

Quotation marks are used most often to enclose **direct quotations**—the exact spoken or written words of a speaker or writer. Quotation marks also set off some titles, and quotation marks can call attention to words used in a special sense.