



DALLAS BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Apostrophes

Apostrophes (') are typically used to indicate possession and/or the omission of letters and numbers.

Possession

- Add **'s** to singular forms or plural forms that do not end in **s** to indicate possession.
Ex: *the owner's house, the children's play house*
- Add only an **'** to the plural nouns that end in **s** to indicate possession.
Ex: *three friends' houses*
- Add **'s** or only an **'** to singular proper nouns that end in **s** to indicate possession.
Ex: *James's house* or *James' house*
- Add **'s** to the end of compound words or to the last noun in a group to indicate possession.
Ex: *my brother-in-law's house, Todd and Anne's house*

Omission of Letters and Numbers

In contractions, one or more letters have been omitted, and an apostrophe shows this omission.

Ex: *didn't = did not let's = let us it's = it is*

Contractions are common in speaking and informal writing but should not be used in formal writing.

Add an **'** to the beginning of a year when the first two numerals are omitted.

Ex: *'98 = 1998*

When Not to Use Apostrophes

Do not use apostrophes for possessive pronouns or, in most cases, to form plurals.

Wrong: his' house

Right: his house

Wrong: kind's of houses

Right: kinds of houses

Wrong: it's door

Right: its door

(Note: "its" indicates possession; "it's" is a contraction of "it is")

Wrong: 1920's

Right: 1920s

Wrong: VCR's

Right: VCRs

Wrong: ABC's

Right: ABCs

Wrong: all four's

Right: all fours

Please note that the MLA handbook says to use apostrophes to indicate plurality of single letters.

Ex: *I made all A's last semester.*

The Turabian manual says to omit apostrophes in such cases, and the APA manual does not specify.