

What is an Apostrophe?

An apostrophe is a unit of grammar which is used in written English to demonstrate possession or a missing character. It looks like this: ‘

WHEN to use the apostrophe.

The apostrophe is used to indicate possession, i.e. when something belongs to something.

- my daughter’s bike = the bike belonging to my daughter
- my uncle’s car = the car belonging to my uncle
- the ship’s name = the name belonging to the ship

It is possible to write a sentence with or without an apostrophe:

- The name of the ship is Marie Rose
- Or: The ship’s name is Marie Rose

- The car belonging to my uncle is a Honda
- Or: My uncle’s car is a Honda

Other instances are:

- **origin:** the girl’s story
- **description:** a summer’s day
- **measure:** five day’s holiday
- **inanimate:** China’s future (China being a country), my life’s aim (life being a concept)
- **Joining of words:** won’t (would not), they’ll (they will), it’s (it is). These are known as contractions and are considered too informal for academic writing.

POSITION of the apostrophe:

Singular: apostrophe comes before the ‘s’ e.g. the girl’s shoes, the cat’s whiskers

Plural: the apostrophe comes after the ‘s’ e.g. the girls’ shoes (two or more girls)
the cats’ whiskers (the whiskers of two or more cats)

Irregular Plurals: e.g. men, women, children the apostrophe precedes the ‘s’
e.g. the men’s shoes, the women’s coats, the children’s hats.

N.B. Words already ending in ‘s’ do not require another ‘s’, but they do require an apostrophe to indicate possession: e.g. Charles’ book, Socrates’ work, The Philippines’ government.