

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.