

Quick Guide: How To Use Apostrophes (Part 1)

One of the most popular questions on our writing and grammar courses is 'can you have an apostrophe after an s?' And of course you all know you can! This little piece of punctuation causes some of the biggest headaches and the most discussions (or arguments) in offices. So follow the **ten tips below** and always get them right.

- 1. Two main uses. First use: omission of letters.** So, "cannot" becomes "can't", "will not" becomes "won't", and so on. This use doesn't usually cause problems and it is quite acceptable in business writing to use these abbreviations. However, if you want to be very formal then don't use them.
- 2. Second use: to show possession.** Sometimes, people refer to this as 'showing that something or someone belongs to something or someone'. In the phrase, "the clients will", to show that the will belongs to the client, you would write "the client's will". If there were several clients, each with a will, you would then write "the clients' wills".
- 3. For the words men, women and children,** you would only ever write the apostrophe before the s. So, the men's toilets, the women's cloakroom and the children's inheritance.
- 4. For names that end in s,** you have a choice. So you could have James' book or James's book. Both are correct and the second one is the more favoured one.
- Another choice for you! **Words that end in ss, like boss or business,** can just have an apostrophe added or apostrophe s, as in "the boss'/boss's secretary", the business'/business's bank account". In these examples there is only one boss and one business. If there were several bosses and businesses it could only be, "the bosses' secretary" and the "businesses' bank account".
- 6. Remember to use the apostrophe in time words.** For example, in a week's time, a day's notice, four weeks' holiday, six years' accounts
- 7. Beware of plural words** like ladies and companies. So the ladies' coats, all of the companies' tax returns ...
- 8. Beware of double apostrophes.** In the phrase, the partners wives cars, you need to show that the wives belong to the partners (grammatically!) and that the cars belong to the wives. So you should write "the partners' wives' cars". Wrongly placed as "partner's" would mean that there is one partner with several wives!
- In this sentence, **The temp's typing was better than the usual secretary's,** you do need the second apostrophe. Although there is nothing after 'secretary', 'typing' is implied and so the apostrophe is needed.
- "It's" means "it is" or "it has".** Do not use in the following example, "please review it's content and let me know what you think". If you can't substitute 'it is' or 'it has' for the "it's" then it doesn't have an apostrophe.

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Compiled by Judith Di-Castri