

## THE USE OF APOSTROPHES: A BRIEF GUIDE

The apostrophe (') is used for two main purposes:

1. To show possessive case, i.e. ownership, as in *the cat's tail*
- or 2. To show that one or more letters have been omitted, as in *I'm going away.*

Let's look at these in more detail.

### POSSESSIVE CASE

If, when speaking, you add an *s* sound to make the word possessive, write it with an additional 's.

**Examples with an added *s* sound**

*The cat has a tail, hence the cat's tail*

*The nurse has a cap, the nurse's cap*

*The people need a voice, the people's [voice]*

*A good day so a good day's work*

If you don't add an *s* sound to make it possessive, simply add an apostrophe at the end of the word to show it is possessive.

**Examples with no added *s* sound:**

*The cats have tails, so these are the cats' tails.*

*The houses have addresses, so they are the houses' addresses.*

*The Joneses have a cat, the Joneses' cat.*

*He worked for ten days, so he did ten days' work.*

**Note:** There is no need to add an apostrophe just to make a word plural (without possession), so a sign reading *Banana's 30p/lb.* is wrong.

### OMISSION OF LETTERS

When we abbreviate words by omitting some sounds, the shortened words are written with an apostrophe in place of the missing letter(s).

**Examples:**

*Don't* stands for *Do not*

*I haven't* stands for *I have not*

*He's great* is short for *He is great*, but

*He's got great biceps* means *He has got great biceps*

*It's* is short for *It is* or *It has*

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** To avoid confusion with *it's*, meaning *it is* or *it has*, the possessive form of *it* is written without an apostrophe, making it an exception to the rule. Thus it is correct to write:

*It's a big firm. It's a pity it's got no logo on its letterhead.*