Apostrophes

The apostrophe is primarily used in the following cases: (1) to show someone or something has or possesses something and (2) to show contraction/omission of letters.

Has/possesses: Rick's ball is bouncy. (Rick owns/has the ball)

Contraction: I don't like you. (don't contracted from do and not)

To determine if you need to form the possessive, rearrange the words as an "of the" phrase.

Example: the boy's hat = the hat of the boy

Example: three days' journey = journey of three days

Another way to determine whether you need an apostrophe is to see if you can **substitute a possessive pronoun** (his, her, its, their) for the noun in question. If you can, you NEED the apostrophe.

Example: the boy's hat = his hat

Example: my library's policy = its policy

Tricky Apostrophe Concepts

1. Distinguish between *it's* and *its*, *who's* and *whose*. It's = it is (it's a contraction).

There is no such word as its'. *Its* is possessive, like *his* or *hers*. *Who's* is a contraction of who is and *whose* shows possession (whose ball is that?)

2. Distinguish between plural and possessive. Three teachers live down the street = plural (more than one teacher). The three teachers' houses reek = possessive (more than one of the teachers has/possesses a reeking house).

3. Some words form their plural irregularly. In most cases, we add —s or —es to indicate plural. Singular words such as *child* and *woman* become *children* and *women*.

4. Never use an apostrophe in a possessive pronoun (his, our, their) to show possession. These words exist to show possession, so don't add apostrophes to them.

Example: her's house= INCORRECT. *Her house=CORRECT*

5. It's standard NOT to use apostrophes next to words such as cds or next to multiple letters (there are three ps in the words pepper). So don't use apostrophes here since you are showing plural, NOT possessive. You should, however, use apostrophes when abbreviating dates. 1968 = ‘68. 2021 = ‘21

Exercise on Apostrophe Use

Directions: (1) Place apostrophes if they are needed in italicized words and (2) In the blanks, indicate if the word is plural, possessive, plural and possessive, a contraction, or a possessive pronoun that needs no apostrophe.

Example: My three *turtles’* shells look healthy. Plural and possessive.

1. I have three *cousins*. _____

2. My *noses* shape and size bother me. _____

3. The three *dogs* bowls are empty. _____

4. Aunt Montemurro thinks there are two *bs* in embarrass, but there is only one. _____

5. I *cant* finish my dinner because I foolishly ate dessert first. _____

6. The *womens* restroom, located on the third floor, is accessible by elevator. _____

7. *Elaines brothers* condition has worsened. _____

8. This *sports* biggest problem is extremely long and boring games. _____

9. That book isn’t mine; *its* hers. _____

10. *Youll* have to wait for Donna’s decision before you consider moving forward. _____

11. That mistake was *hers*, not mine. _____

12. Two of my *friends* own houses, but the rest of my friends rent. _____

13. *Its* nose is warm: that's why I know my dog is ill. _____

14. Four hours ago I called you and left a message, but you still *havent* called me back. _____

15. An *apostrophes* function is sometimes hard to determine. _____

EXERCISE ON APOSTROPHES IN CONTEXT

Directions: Circle the letter that corresponds to the best answer.

1. Its not smart to wait until youve failed a class to ask for help.
   A. Add an apostrophe before the s in *its* and before the v in *youve*
   B. Add an apostrophe before the v in *youve*
   C. No change

2. The childrens' sneakers no longer fit.
   A. Move the apostrophe to before the s in *childrens* and add an apostrophe after the s in *sneakers*
   B. Move the apostrophe to before the s in *childrens*
   C. No change

3. I could of been a contender when I was in my prime in the 1970s.
   A. Change *could of* to *could've*
   B. Add an apostrophe before the s in *1970s*
   C. No change

4. I sold twenty cds, earning over seventy dollars.
   A. Add an apostrophe before the s *cds*
   B. Add an apostrophe before the s in *dollars*
   C. No change

5. The summer of 69 included the best days of my life.
   A. Add an apostrophe before the s *days*
   B. Add an apostrophe before the 6 in *69*
   C. No change

6. My ex-girlfriend loves the song “Dont you forget about me,” but I happen to think that the songs’ lyrics are cliché.

A. Add an apostrophe before the t in *Dont* and move the apostrophe from after the final s to before the final -s in *songs*.
B. Add an apostrophe before the t in *Dont*
C. No change

7. Mom’s friends daughters car is a hot black Prius.

A. Add an apostrophe before the s *friends* and after the s in *Prius*
B. Add an apostrophe before the s in *friend*s and before the s in *daughters*
C. No change

8. The womens’ restroom is on the left at the end of the hall.

A. Move the apostrophe in *womens’* to before the s
B. Delete the apostrophe in *womens’*
C. No change

9. The swimming pool’s pH is perfect.

A. Delete the apostrophe in *pool’s*
B. Add an apostrophe before *is*
C. No change

10. Its’ not easy to determine who’s ball it is.

A. Change *who’s* to *whose*
B. Change *Its’* to *It’s* and *who’s* to *whose*
C. No change