



Apostrophes are used to indicate possession and contractions.

1. To Show Possession to a Singular Noun, Add Apostrophe-s:

Aaron Burr's aim was spot-on.

The philosopher's stone was mossy from lack of use.

Socrates's hair loss was attributable to too much thinking.

Note: (1) To show that an inanimate object possesses something, use "its," as in, "Its garish cover made the textbook unappealing and unlikely to be opened." (2) Many writers use only an apostrophe following a singular noun ending in -s: "Socrates' hair loss was attributable to too much thinking." Whichever way you choose, be consistent.

2. To Show Possession to a Plural Noun Ending in -s, Add Only an Apostrophe:

My sisters' new hairstyles are big and cumbersome.

3. To Show Where Letters or Numbers Have Been Removed in a Contraction:

It's too bad that Bo is not the next American Idol.

Tony Clark was the valedictorian of the class of '92.

Note: (1) "It's" is the contracted form of "It is." It never shows possession. (2) It's wise to avoid using contractions in formal writing, including your academic writing, unless your professor says it's acceptable.

4. To Give Clarity to Certain Plural Numbers/Words and Abbreviations:

Sasha needs to execute her figure 8's better.

The killer slashed Z's all over the victim's body.

John has said enough "I'm sorry's" to last a lifetime.

5. When Not to Use an Apostrophe:

When pluralizing decades: The *1950s* were a swell time.

With non-possessive plural nouns: The *soldiers* sang while looting the museum.

With possessive pronouns (its, hers, yours, ours): The ballpark even has *its* own life support system.