

## APOSTROPHES

### Or, How to Avoid Silly Mistakes That Make Your Professors Crazy

#### I. Showing possession

A. ALL single nouns: add an apostrophe and -s  
bikebike's bossboss's Betsy HicksBetsy Hicks's

B. Plural nouns NOT ending in -s: add an apostrophe and -s  
Menmen's sheepsheep's childrenchildren's

C. Plural nouns ending in -s: add an apostrophe  
the dancers' costumes three dollars' worth of candy

D. More than one noun  
My *mom and dad's* house is thirty years old. (They live together)  
*Ben's and Jodi's* jobs are very different. (They have different jobs)

#### II. To signal contractions (avoid them in formal writing!)

Remember that the apostrophe takes the place of the missing letter(s).  
So *didn't* but not *did'nt*

rock and rollrock 'n' roll

And remember—

*its* = possessive (The cat licked *its* paws.)

*it's* = it is, it has (*It's* a crime to make apostrophe mistakes at the college level).

#### III. To form plurals of letters, numbers, symbols, and the like

She picked all the *M's* out of her alphabet soup.

Your *4's* look too much like your *9's*.

He has too many *but's* in this sentence.

#### **DO NOT use apostrophes**

In ordinary plurals (It's raining cat's and dog's.)

In verbs (Keith want's too many things from her.)

With possessive pronouns (Is that container her's?)