

# MPC English & Study Skills Center

## Apostrophes

### Apostrophes Showing Possession

‡ Apostrophes are commonly used to indicate possession.

**Example:**

**The dog's bowl is full of water.**

*In this case, the dog possesses, or owns, something (a bowl).*

Depending on how many people or things possess something, the apostrophe placement changes.

**Singular Possessive:**     one dog's bone     apostrophe before the "s"

**Plural Possessive:**     two dogs' bones  
fifty-seven dogs' bones     apostrophe after the "s"

**EXCEPTION:** If the plural form of the noun does not end in "s" (like women, men, or children), then the apostrophe is placed before the "s."

**Examples:**

**There were twenty women in the room. The women's voices were loud.**

**I have to go to the men's room.**

**Have you been to the Springfield Children's Museum?**

### Possessive vs. Plural

‡ A **possessive noun** means the noun possesses or owns something. Possessive nouns are not to be confused with **plural nouns**, which are not possessive. The majority of plural nouns do not require apostrophes. (See exceptions under "Other Uses" below.)

Ask yourself, does the noun in question possess (or own) something?

**Example:**

**The two dogs' bones' were lying on the table. ✗**

Do the dogs possess something? YES, they possess bones. The word requires an apostrophe.

Do the bones possess anything? NO. The word *does not* require an apostrophe.

**Here is the correct sentence: The two dogs' bones were lying on the table. ✓**

## A Quick Note about Contractions

‡ Apostrophes are also commonly used in contractions, a word or words that are condensed from the original form into one short (or shorter) word.

cannot → can't  
it is → it's

**ATTENTION!** “it’s” always means “it is.” **This is an unusual exception to the rule mentioned above.** If you’re trying to show that “it” possesses something, you write “its,” not “it’s.”

**Examples:**

**It's hot out today. ✓**

*This means: It is hot out today.*

**I have an iguana. Its leash is orange. ✓**

*This means: The leash of the iguana is orange.*

## Other Uses for Apostrophes

‡ Sometimes, numbers (including dates) and letters, when expressed in plural form, are written with apostrophes.

**Examples:**

**The 1920's proved to be an interesting and dramatic time in American history.**

The 1920's encompasses more than one year. It is a special term in plural form.

**Why are there two X's that mark the spot?**

Notice there is more than one “X” expressed in the sentence. It is another special term in plural form.