

# Punctuation

## Apostrophe - Missing Letter:

Use an apostrophe to denote letters missing from a contraction:

would not-won't

do not-don't

it is-it's

NOTE: Be aware of the difference between "it's" (a contraction of "it" and

"is") and "its" (the possessive form of the pronoun "it"):

It's a busy bee that always finds its honey.

An apostrophe should not be used to denote the letters missing from an abbreviation:

dept., capt., asst., etc.

You may use the apostrophe for the first two digits of a year:

1989 or '89

The 1970's or The '70's

The apostrophe may be added to figures, signs, and symbols to denote the plural form, but the trend is to omit it when clarity of meaning will not be sacrificed:

ABC's-ABCs

1970's-1970s

-BUT-

Don't change P's and Q's to Ps and Qs.

## Apostrophe - Possession:

Add apostrophe "s" ('s) to denote possession for singular nouns:

the boy's room (one boy—his room)

the mouse's pad (one mouse—its pad)

waitress's uniform (one waitress—her uniform)

Add an apostrophe "s" ('s) to denote possession for plural nouns if they do not end in an "s":

women's rights (some women—their rights)

men's clothes (some men—their clothes)

Add an apostrophe (s') to denote possession for plural nouns if they end in "s":

the girls' room (some girls—their room)

the dogs' fleas (some dogs—their fleas)

An apostrophe should be used to show possession of abstract values or concepts:

Linda's integrity

John's habits

An apostrophe is never used to denote possession for words that are already possessive:

theirs, ours, hers, his, its

NOTE: Be aware of the difference between "it's" (a contraction of "it is") and "its" (the possessive form of the pronoun "it"):

It's only following its instincts.

An apostrophe is used to denote possession for an indefinite pronoun:

someone else's, anyone's, somebody's

Add an apostrophe "s" ('s) to denote possession for proper nouns ending in "s":

Ross's expeditions

Hess's trial

NOTE: Some writers and editors still prefer to add only the apostrophe when the proper noun ending is, or sounds like, an "s", but the trend is toward adding the apostrophe and the "s".

If the subject is the object of an action, the possessive case should be replaced by an "of" phrase:

the hanging of Patrick Henry  
-NOT-  
Patrick Henry's hanging

The possessive case for an inanimate object should normally be expressed by an "of" phrase:

the surface of the table  
-NOT-  
the table's surface

If an inanimate object is personified, the rule does not apply:

the sea's cruelty  
time's relentless march

Inanimate objects referring to time can also be exempt from the rule:

a day's work, a week's pay, a year's crops

## Brackets - Enclosing Words:

Use brackets to enclose words and phrases that are needed to clarify, but are not part of the original quotation:

"The point of the meeting [October '88] was to close the deal."  
"We gave it all we had; [but] we gave ground steadily."

Use brackets to enclose sic following an error in quoted or copied matter:

"The horses galoped [sic ] across the meadow."

Note: No punctuation is needed before or after brackets, unless the

punctuation would clarify the meaning of the sentence. No punctuation is ever added to a quotation.

## Colon - After a salutation:

Use a colon after the salutation at the beginning of a letter:

Dear Mom:  
My Esteemed Colleague:  
Valued Customer:  
Gentlemen:

## Colon - Before an Explanation:

Use a colon before a lengthy explanation or an illustration:

to For two basic reasons, country boys are less inclined  
have become involved with drugs and crime: Firstly, they  
for chores and responsibilities that make it impossible  
secondly, them to find the time to get into trouble; and  
in a they are not crowded together like experimental rats  
lab.

of Do not be fooled by claims of indestructibility: Many  
the units we bought in the first quarter of this year  
were in the trash by October.

Use a colon between two independent clauses to restate or emphasize the same idea:

It The rusty old tub appeared to be sinking at the dock:  
was taking on water and listing badly.

She Her scores were among the highest in the county:  
simply outclassed the rest of the local students.



following to  
windshield, a  
weavings.

After three weeks in Central America, he had the  
show for his diplomatic efforts: He had a broken  
sunburn, a depleted wallet, and some colorful

following to  
a  
weavings.

-BUT-

After three weeks in Central America, he had the  
show for his diplomatic efforts: a broken windshield,  
sunburn, a depleted wallet, and some colorful

## Colon - Introducing a Quotation:

Use a colon before a long or formal quotation:

shout his  
hold on to a  
and

Whenever a new passenger got on, the driver would  
instructions: "Move as far to the rear as possible,  
grab-rail at all times, no smoking, eating, or drinking,  
don't even try talking to the operator!"