

Editorial Graphics and Publishing Services

Three Ways to Use the Apostrophe

1. **The possessive case.** Use the apostrophe to show that something belongs to someone or to several people.

The student's workbook was left in the cafeteria.

The students' books remained open during the test.

The children's toys were scattered on the floor. (Children's is a plural noun.)

Cary's and Bill's books are covered in brown paper.

Note: If one thing belongs to several people who are named, use the apostrophe *s* after the name just before the noun.

Steven and Maria's house is blue.

Cathy, David, and Simone's father has his own business. (They all have the same father)

2. **The contraction** (to show that letters are missing from a word).

We can't wait any longer.

Here's the list of students who passed the test.

Note: Don't confuse the contraction **it's** (which means it is) with the possessive noun **its**.

It's the beginning of exam season, which will be followed by graduation.

Note: Never use an apostrophe with a possessive noun.

My glasses fell out of its case.

This book is yours.

3. **The plural.** The apostrophe is sometimes used to form a plural. For lowercase letters, add apostrophe *s*.

Mind your p's and q's.

Use x's and y's to label the axes on the graph.

Notes: For capital letters, numerals, and abbreviations, just add an *s*.

Mary got all Bs on her report card.

The PPWs met for their annual conference.

That school was built in the early 1980s.

For *noun coinages* (words and phrases used as nouns) just add *s* or *es*.

Students must turn in their reports; there are no ifs, ands, or buts about that rule.

Know the dos and don'ts before you begin.

See the [MCPS Editorial Stylebook](#), page 6, for more on the apostrophe. Also, check Webster's dictionary, 11th edition, when in doubt, or send e-mail (Donna_M_Marks@mcpsmd.org) to me with your questions.