The apostrophe is one of the most commonly misused (or ignored) mechanics of language. Apostrophes are used primarily with nouns and indefinite pronouns to indicate possession.

A. **Use of the apostrophe to indicate possession**

1. To indicate possession in singular nouns and plural nouns that do not end with –s, add ‘s.
   - Rachel’s backpack was stolen.
   - The men’s locker room is in the basement of Mayser Gym.

2. To indicate possession in plural nouns ending in –s, add only an apostrophe.
   - The students’ schedules must be submitted to the registrar by Monday.
   - The Rose’s house burned down last week.

3. To denote possession in the case of compound words or word groups, add ‘s only to the last word.
   - The President-elect’s speech was electrifying.
   - The Spring Arts Council’s main concern is underage drinking.

4. To show individual and joint possession.
   
   A. With individual possession, make all nouns possessive (i.e., use ‘s or s’ with all nouns).
      - Steve’s and Val’s views on good writing were vastly different.
   
   B. With joint possession, make only the last noun possessive (i.e., add ‘s or s’ to the last noun only).
      - Amy and Jen’s dog ran onto the football field in the midst of the game.

5. To make an indefinite pronoun (someone, no one, everyone, anyone, etc.) possessive, add ‘s.
   - I found someone’s notebook on the path.

B. **Other Uses**

1. To indicate omissions in words and numbers.

   A. To contract words: use an apostrophe in place of the missing letters.
I haven't been to the movies in over a month. (haven’t replaces have not)

B. To contract numbers: use an apostrophe in place of the first two digits of a year.

The class of ’85 had its twenty-fifth reunion at F&M last week.

2. To pluralize numbers referred to as numbers, letters referred to as letters, words referred to as words and abbreviations.

A. Numbers: Most people go through a mid-life crisis during their 40’s.

Exception: When pluralizing decades, don’t use the apostrophe. (Ex: I wish I could go back to the ’60s just for a day.)

B. Letters: How many A’s do you have on your transcript?

C. Words: You have to give them a definite answer – maybe’s won’t be considered.

D. Abbreviations: They lost their I.D.’s at the game.

A word of caution: It is as important to know when NOT to use the apostrophe as it is to know when to use it. Don’t use the apostrophe in the following cases:

1. With nouns that are not possessive.

   Their parents took them out to dinner. (NOT Their parent’s took them out to dinner.)

2. With possessive pronouns (his, hers, its, ours, yours, theirs, whose)

   The cat chased its tail. (NOT “The cat chased it’s tail,” because it’s is a contraction of it is.)

   I know the girl whose book you borrowed. (NOT “I know the girl who’s book you borrowed,” because who’s is a contraction of who is.)

Test Yourself

1. His brother-in-law’s sister is my best friend.

2. Charles new car is bright red.

3. My neighbors dog ran around the yard chasing its own tail.

4. The childrens toys were scattered all over the kitchen floor.

5. I love to watch I Love the 80s on VH1.

6. I don’t know how to tell you this, but were out of gas.

7. There are eight 8s in sixty four.

8. Pollution has adverse effects on everybody’s health.