THE APOSTROPHE

☞ **Use an apostrophe to show possession:**

Tip: If you are not sure whether a word ending in –s is possessive or not, put the word into a phrase showing ownership: *Demi's dress* is "the dress that belongs to Demi"; *Kansas's finest shop* is "a shop that belongs to Kansas"; the *dress's skirt* is "the skirt that belongs to/goes with the dress".

- **If the word is singular, always add 's regardless of its ending.**
  The <u>Princess's</u> dress caught <u>Orlando's</u> attention. The <u>dress's</u> skirt was a brilliant green.
- **If the word is plural and end in –s, just add the apostrophe. For plural forms that do not end in –s (e.g. children, women), add 's.**
  Orlando ignored the <u>doctors'</u> advice and locked himself in his house. His <u>servants'</u> complaints about his behavior were understandable.
  The <u>children's</u> voices did not disturb Orlando's contemplation. The noise of the <u>men's</u> work could not distract him.
- **If two people (*Orlando and Nick*) own something jointly, consider them a single unit and put the single 's at the end of the second name.**
  <u>Orlando and Nick's</u> conversation made Orlando angry.
- **If two people possess some things individually rather than jointly, each name gets an 's.**
  <u>Orlando's</u> and <u>Nick's</u> shirts were both green.
- **Words like everybody, somebody, anybody become possessive if you add 's.**
  Orlando kept to himself and tried not to attract <u>anyone's</u> attention. He no longer wanted everyone <u>else's</u> approval.

💣 Watch out:

Possessive pronouns (yours, his, hers, its, theirs, whose) do not take an apostrophe! If they did, we would confuse them with contractions (see below).
  Every morning, Orlando walked out to the big oak tree and sat in <u>its</u> shade.
  Orlando asked Sasha if the boat was hers. She did not know <u>whose</u> boat it was.

☞ **Use an apostrophe to mark contractions:**

Contractions mark places where letters and sometimes words have been left out for the speaker's convenience. If you are not sure if something is a contraction, see if you can replace the missing words: "It's been cold" → "it has been cold"; "you're an idiot" →"you are an idiot"; "who's that girl?" → "who is that girl?" "I'm tired" → "I am tired." <u>In formal writing, avoid contractions altogether.</u>

• **It's/its**: If the word you want could be replaced by <u>it is</u> or <u>it has</u>, use <u>it's</u>. If you can put the word in a phrase expressing ownership (see above), use <u>its</u>.
  <u>It's</u> been several years since Orlando started writing his poem, but <u>it's</u> still not finished. Orlando is not yet satisfied with <u>its</u> wording.

• **Who's/whose**: If the word you want could be replaced with who is or who has, use who's. If not, use whose.

  <u>Who's</u> that knocking on Orlando's door? I wonder if he knows <u>whose</u> door it is.

• **They're/their/there**: If the word you want could be replaced by <u>they are</u>, use <u>they're</u>. If the word you want could be put in a phrase starting with "they own …", use <u>their</u>. If the word you want describes a place (<u>there</u> as opposed to <u>here</u>), use <u>there</u>.
  Orlando went to Turkey. While he was <u>there</u>, he complimented his hosts on <u>their</u> fine furniture. "<u>They're</u> very friendly, and <u>their</u> furniture is really quite ice," he thought.

☞ **Use 's to pluralize numbers written as numbers, letters written as letters, words mentioned as words, and abbreviations. These are rare exceptions: normally, you just use –s to make a word plural, without an apostrophe.**
  Orlando skated figure <u>8's</u> on the frozen river.
  When Orlando wrote, he always crossed his <u>T's</u>.
  Orlando expected <u>Yes's</u> from his friends and became angry when he heard <u>Maybe's</u>.

►Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*.