The apostrophe has three main functions: 1) It indicates missing letters or
numbers in contractions; 2) it shows possession (except with personal pronouns); and 3) it forms plurals in special cases.

**Contractions**
The apostrophe indicates missing letters or numbers in contractions and is placed where letters or numbers are omitted.

- did not = didn’t
- do not = don’t
- that is = that’s
- what is = what’s
- I am = I’m
- you are = you’re
- they are = they’re
- the ’80s = 1980s

[Note: Avoid contractions in most college writing. Instead, spell out words instead of writing contractions.]

**Possession**
The apostrophe shows possession for nouns and some indefinite pronouns but is never used for personal pronouns.

**Possessive Nouns**
Singular: the chair of the tutor = the tutor’s chair (one driver)
Plural: the chairs of the tutors = the tutors’ chairs (two or more tutors)
Singular: the job of the director = the director’s job (one director)
Plural: the jobs of the directors = the directors’ jobs (two or more directors)

**Rules for Possessive Nouns**
1) If the possessive noun ends in –s, add –‘s: sister of Gabby = Gabby’s sister (Gabby = singular)
2) To form the possessive of a plural noun already ending with an –s, add an apostrophe: horse of the Browns = the Browns’ horse (Browns = plural)
3) Use only the apostrophe with a singular noun if the pronunciation would be awkward with the –‘s: the plays of Sophocles = singular, but awkward to add –‘s
**Possessive Compound Nouns**
Singular: car of the son-in-law = son-in-law’s car (one son-in-law)
Plural: car of the songs-in-law = sons-in-law’s car (two or more sons-in-law)

**Possessive Joint or Individual Nouns**
To show joint possession, use –’s with the last noun only. To show individual possession, make all nouns possessive.
Brad and Cyndi’s new home is beautiful. (Brad and Cyndi own the same home, so an –’s is added only to the last name.)

**Possessive Indefinite Pronouns (such as anyone, everybody, no one)**
The council heard everyone’s ideas. (The ideas belonged to everyone.) The teacher failed to post anyone’s grades. (The grades belonged to anyone.) Somebody’s backpack was left in the hall. (The backpack belonged to somebody.)

*Exceptions: Personal pronouns (I, you, he, she, it, we, they) have their own forms to show possession (mine, yours, his, hers, its ours, theirs) and do not take apostrophes.*

Note the following frequently confused words:

*Its* always shows possession and never equals the contraction of *it is*.
*It’s* always equals *it is* and never shows possession.
*It’s = It is always a pleasure to see our students enjoying the Writing Center.*
*Whose* always shows possession and never equals the contraction of *who’s*.
*Who’s* always equals *who is* and never shows possession.
**Whose ring is that? Who’s = Who is the owner of the ring?**

**Apostrophes with Special-Case Plurals**
Check with your instructor. According to the *MLA Handbook*, an apostrophe is not used to form the plural of an abbreviation or number (62): PhDs, VCRs, 1960s
However, according to *The Bedford Handbook*, an apostrophe and –s are used to form plurals of “numbers mentioned as numbers, letters, mentioned as letters, words mentioned as words, and abbreviations” (466). 8’s, A’s and B’s, I.D.’s