

## What is an Apostrophe?

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark ( ' ) that we use in 3 distinct ways: to indicate possessive cases, contractions, or quotations. Please see below for further details and examples.

### When to Use an Apostrophe

1. To indicate possessive cases, i.e. when one noun is “owned” by another noun. E.g.

- ***The student's essay received an A grade because it was well researched.***  
Here, the “essay” belongs to the “student”.
- ***Morris Weitz's theory of anti-essentialism has been widely debated.***  
Here, the “theory” belongs to “Morris Weitz”.
- ***Ireland's GDP is inflated due to the country's high number of multinational corporations.*** Here, the “GDP” belongs to “Ireland”, and the “high number” belongs to “the country”.

**\*Note:**

- The noun that “belongs” to another noun can be a person, place, or thing.
- The noun that “owns” another noun usually uses 's at the end. However, in UK English, nouns that end in s or in z only use an apostrophe at the end, and drop the s.
  - ***Sarah Jones' theory*** (UK English).
  - ***Sarah Jones's theory*** (US English).
  - ***Pablo Hernandez' argument*** (UK English).
  - ***Pablo Hernandez's argument*** (US English).
- The possessive apostrophe also indicates the number of nouns that “own” the other nouns, i.e. a singular noun uses 's at the end. However, a plural noun only uses an apostrophe at the end, and drops the s.
  - ***The instructor's recommendations*** (1 instructor).
  - ***The instructors' recommendations*** (multiple instructors).

2. To indicate a contraction, i.e. when two words have been combined into one. E.g.

- ***The labelling theory in criminology shouldn't be confused with criminal profiling.*** Here, “should not” has been contracted into “shouldn't”. It is better to avoid such contractions in academic writing and to write words in full for clarity.
- ***Imitationalism isn't grounded in mere artistic mimicry.*** Here, “is not” has been contracted into “isn't”. Again, it is better to avoid such contractions in academic writing and to write words in full for clarity.

### When to Use an Apostrophe

3. To indicate a direct quotation, i.e. at the beginning and end of the quotation. E.g.

- ***Scholars argue that ‘such tactics are essential to mental health awareness among employees in this sector’ (Smith, 2009).*** Here, the opening and closing apostrophes indicate that the words between the two are quoting directly from Smith’s 2009 work..

**\*Note:**

- Ensure that you do not include the citation (Smith, 2009) inside the quotation, i.e. this is additional information for the reader only; the author did not write this, and so it should be included after you have closed the quotation.
- Not all Schools use single quotation marks as above. Some use double quotation marks. E.g. ***Scholars argue that “such tactics are essential to mental health awareness among employees in this sector” (Smith, 2009).*** Students should always check and follow the citation style used by their School. All schools and referencing styles are listed and explained in detail on the UCD Library website:  
<https://libguides.ucd.ie/academicintegrity/citingstyles>