

The Writing Center

DLA: Apostrophes and Possessives



This DLA is a writable PDF form. You can enter your answers directly into this document.

YOU MUST DOWNLOAD AND SAVE THIS FILE TO YOUR COMPUTER.

Do not complete this form in a web browser. You will not be able to save your work.

Student Name:

Important Note

To get completion credit for this DLA, make sure you complete all the required activities. If you'd like help while working on a specific DLA, you can meet with a specialist at the Writing Center. Keep in mind that you might need to schedule a second appointment to review your work, check your understanding, and get your completion credit. You can only review **ONE** DLA per appointment. (Check the last section of this DLA for information on making your appointment and receiving completion credit for your work).

Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Read the information, complete the activities that follow, and be prepared to discuss your answers when you meet with a tutor.

Understanding Apostrophe Use

Possession

Possession is used to show ownership or relationship before singular and plural nouns, especially when referring to people. There are different ways to show possession.

Singular Nouns

When the noun is singular, add 's.

- The woman's shoes are beautiful.
- My neighbor's house sold for a million dollars.

For names that end in s, it is acceptable to add 's or only the apostrophe. Both of the following sentences are correct.

- Legolas's bow is a powerful weapon.
- Legolas' bow is a powerful weapon.

Plural Nouns

To form the possessive of a plural noun, pluralize the noun first and then add the apostrophe.

- The wizards' beards are long and gray.
- The elves' ships moved silently through the night.

With irregular plural nouns, you must add 's.

- The children's books are on the shelf.

Possessives with Animate vs. Inanimate Objects

In addition to adding 's to make a noun possessive, you can also use an **of** phrase to show possession.

- J.R.R. Tolkien's writing is loved by many fans.
- The writing of J.R.R. Tolkien is loved by many fans.

In general, it is preferable to use the 's form when the noun is animate or seen as performing the action.

- Kevin's teacher showed several films in class.

- The dog's tail is wagging.
- The flight's departure was delayed due to weather.

You can also use the 's form for double possessives, nouns related to human activity, and natural phenomena or events.

- Lisa's daughter's boyfriend is a student at Mt. SAC. (double possessive)
- San Diego's economy continues to grow. (related to human activity)
- The hurricane's path changed course this morning. (natural phenomena)

The apostrophe possessive is also used with expressions of time and money.

- A year's salary is too much to spend on a car.
- He gave the teacher two months' worth of homework.

In all other cases, when the noun is inanimate, it is preferable to use an **of** phrase.

- **The seat of the chair** is made of wicker.
NOT The chair's seat is made of wicker.
- **The leaves of the tree** turned gold.
NOT The tree's leaves turned gold.

It may also be possible to use the noun as an adjective rather than turning it into a possessive noun.

- These chair seats are uncomfortable.
- The tree leaves look beautiful in the sunlight.

Compound Possessives

When there are two subjects that both possess something, you must determine if the possession is joint or individual.

In the following sentence, 's is after the last noun only. This means that the possession is joint: the children are both Jason's children and Myrna's children.

- Jason and Myrna's children are currently attending college.

In the following sentence, 's is after each noun. This means that the possession is individual: Jason has his own children, and Myrna has her own children. The children are not children that Jason and Myrna have together.

- Jason's and Myrna's children are currently attending college.

Contractions

Contractions are generally used in informal contexts. The apostrophe is used to blend sounds and show omission of letters.

- I am taking English this semester. ☐ I'm taking English this semester.
- It is time to go on a journey. ☐ It's time to go on a journey. *
- They are traveling to Mount Doom. ☐ They're traveling to Mount Doom. *

*Note: "It's" is a contraction for **it is** or **it has**. The possessive of **it** = **its** (no apostrophe). **They're** is a contraction for **they are**. The possessive of **they** = **their**.

More on Apostrophe Usage

Like contractions, the apostrophe is used to show omission of digits as well.

- Tolkien completed The Lord of the Rings in '48.

In rare instances and to avoid confusion, an apostrophe is used to indicate the plural form of letters.

- Did you dot all of your i's?
- The word "possessive" has four s's.

Common Misuse of the Apostrophe

We generally do not use an apostrophe to pluralize numbers and acronyms.

- Many of Tolkien's novels became popular in the **1960s**.
NOT Many of Tolkien's novels became popular in the 1960's.
- The Writing Center has many new **DLAs**.
NOT The Writing Center has many new DLA's.

Activities (approximately 1 hour)

Follow the steps below and be prepared to explain your answers when you meet with a tutor. Check off each box once you have completed the activity.

1. Apostrophes and Possessives Review

Review the information on apostrophes and possessives. Then answer the following question.

Where are the two places an apostrophe can be used? Provide your own example of each.

2. Online Quiz

Go to <http://tinyurl.com/apostrophespossessivesdlaquiz> and take the quiz. You must score at least 75% on the quiz before meeting with a specialist. After you complete the task, please take a screenshot of the page that has your score and show it to your specialist. Do not exit the quiz until you take the screenshot

3. Find Uses of Apostrophes

Look at the text field in the following page and correct any apostrophe use errors. Some apostrophes are used correctly, but others may be used incorrectly or missing. Correct any errors.

Peter Jackson, the director of Lord of the Rings, was born in New Zealand during the 1960's. He grew up in Pukerua Bay, New Zealand. Jackson's house was on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean, and he described his home as a childrens' playground. Jacksons' obsession with film began when he saw the original King Kong in 69. He created several short films using his parents 8-mm camera, and he dropped out of high school at age 16 to get a job. He worked six days a week, and on Sunday's, he created films. He made the horror films Bad Taste, Braindead, and Meet the Feebles, a film which has it's own cult following. In 1994, Jackson moved away from horror films and wrote and directed Heavenly Creatures, a drama about New Zealands most famous matricide case. The films script earned him an Academy Award nomination. In 1997, Jackson won the film rights to The Lord of the Rings trilogy, and the films were released in the years 01, 02, and 03. The three films' success established Jackson as one of the worlds greatest directors. Jackson is married to screenwriter Fran Walsh, and they're children are Billy and Katie. They currently live in New Zealand.

Adapted from <https://www.biography.com/people/peter-jackson-37009>

Choose 4a or 4b Below

4a. Correct Your Own Writing

Collect some of your graded work. Find five places where you have used apostrophes or possessives. If the apostrophes and possessives are used incorrectly, make the correction. Bring this revised work with you to the DLA tutoring session (Step 5 below) and be prepared to discuss these revisions with the tutor.

If you do not have your own essay to work with, please complete the supplemental activity below (5b).

4b. Sentence Correction

In the space provided, mark whether the sentence correctly (C) or incorrectly (IC) uses apostrophes and possessives. Correct any errors.

1. J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings novels were written as bedtime stories because Tolkien

wanted to teach his children about they're faith.

2. Gandalf says, "The Ring has awoken; it's heard its masters call."

3. Frodo wishes that his time was not the time for Sauron the Great's return, and Gandalf explains that we can't choose the times we live in.
4. These novel's were written during World War II.
5. Frodo's and Sam's journey leads them to many places in Middle Earth.
6. Frodo's and Sam's elven cloaks helped hide them from unfriendly eyes.
7. Legolas' aim is accurate, and his bow hits the orc in the chest.
8. The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Rings was released into theaters in '01.
9. The three horse's saddles were handmade.
10. The series' publication wasn't complete until 1955.

5. Review the DLA/Receive Completion Credit

1. Go to [EAB Navigate](#) and make an appointment (online or in-person).
2. Attend your session and be prepared to explain your understanding of the information you've learned in the DLA. Consider the main concept you learned and how you might use this in your future assignments/classes.
3. If your professor asks you to provide proof, you can review the "appointment summary report" through EAB Navigate (app or desktop). You will find all Writing Center appointments under "appointment summary reports" (app or desktop). Look for the summary report for your DLA appointment. This is where your writing specialist will indicate the title of your DLA and state whether it is "completed" or "not completed." If it is marked as "not completed," book a follow up appointment to complete.

Note: Appointment summary reports are also sent weekly to your instructor on record. If there is an issue, please contact us at writingcenter@mtsac.edu or (909) 274-5325.

If you are an individual with a disability and need a greater level of accessibility for any document in The Writing Center or on The Writing Center's website, please contact the Mt. SAC Accessible Resource Centers for Students, access@mtsac.edu, (909) 274-4290.

Revised November 2025