The Apostrophe

The possessive case shows ownership. Use the apostrophe to show the possessive of nouns and indefinite pronouns.

Singular Possession Rules

1. Add 's to singular nouns:
   Harry's book, school's enrollment, FBI's files

2. Add 's to indefinite pronouns:
   anybody's lesson, somebody's car, everyone's personality

3. Add either ' or 's to proper singular nouns ending in s, but the ' alone is preferred:
   Keats' poem or Keats's poem, Ms. Evans' house or Ms. Evans's house.

4. Add the 's to only the last word in singular compound nouns:
   her mother-in-law's hat, his brother-in-law's tools

Plural Possession Rules

1. Add only the ' to plural nouns ending in s:
   The girls' coats, the boys' shoes, the Joneses' cars

2. Add 's to plural nouns not ending in s:
   The men's hats, the women's purses, the children's toys

3. Add the ' to only the last word in plural compound nouns that end in s:
   The Dean of Students' office, the Vice President of Legal Affairs' speech

Other Possession Rules

1. Add the 's when indicating individual ownership of two or more individuals:
   Mary's and Jane's books, Jim's and Bob's houses

2. Add an ' to only the final name when indicating joint ownership:
   Mary and Jane's book, Peter and Paul's car

3. Use both an of and 's to show one possession among several of the same kind:
   an old hat of Tom's, a new dress of Jane's
4. Do not use the ' with the possessive form of personal pronouns. 
   The personal pronouns his, hers, theirs, its, ours, yours, and the pronoun whose are possessives as they stand and do not require the apostrophe: his father, a book of hers, a friend of theirs, its nest.

   Note: For plural compound nouns, add 's to the last word of the compound noun: mothers-in-law's opinions, sons-in-law's trucks, attorneys-in-law's offices

5. Do not confuse the possessive pronoun whose with the contraction who's (who is):
   Who's coming over to dinner?
   Whose plate is this?

6. Do not confuse the possessive pronoun its with the contraction it's (it is):
   We know it's a robin. We couldn't find its nest.

Other Apostrophe Uses

1. Use an ' to indicate the omission of a letter (contraction):
   doesn't, can't, won't, o'clock

2. Use an ' to indicate the omission of a number:
   the blizzard of '89

3. Use an ' to show that a word is given a loose or colloquial pronunciation and spelling:
   "An' one o' the boys is goin' t' be sick," he said.

4. Use an 's or s to form the plurals of letters, numbers, and words used as words.
   (a) Cross your t 's and dot your i 's.
   (b) Count to 10,000 by 1000's.
   (c) You have too many of 's in your sentence.
   (d) 1900's or 1900's