The Apostrophe

There are two primary uses for the apostrophe:

• To indicate possession or ownership

  Dave’s dog (the dog of Dave)
  Somebody’s book (the book of somebody)

• To form contractions

  don’t (do not)
  I am (I’m)

Possession and Ownership:

Be sure to distinguish between singular possessives and plural possessives.

• Singular possessives use an apostrophe + an s at the end of singular nouns:

  the dog’s bone
  Leland’s team

• When the singular noun ends in –s, add a single apostrophe at the end of the word:

  James’ fork

• Use an apostrophe + s at the end of plural nouns that do not end in –s.

  the sheep’s field
  the children’s boots

• Use an apostrophe at the end of plural nouns that end in –s.

  the cats’ litter box
  the girls’ party
Contractions:

Contractions are abbreviations of two or more words which omit letters. The apostrophe appears in place of the missing letters. While they do not commonly appear in formal writing, contractions can be used in informal writing or dialogue.

- do not becomes don’t
- I am becomes I’m
- could not becomes couldn’t

This handout is adapted from University of Alabama Writing Center Website. Only the format has been changed.