Apostrophes

Problem: Apostrophes can be used to connect contractions (i.e., two words combined into one) or to indicate possession. However, when apostrophes are used incorrectly, they can cause confusion in your writing.

Solution: Learn the correct situations for using apostrophes.

1) CONTRACTIONS: Apostrophes are used in the place of a missing letter when you combine two words into a single contraction. For example:

- do + not = don’t
- can + not = can’t
- she + will = she’ll
- who + is = who’s (different from “whose”!)
- could + have = could’ve (NOT “coul’d of”)
- it + is = it’s (Note: You do not use an apostrophe for possessive forms using “it.”)

2) POSSESSIVES: Apostrophes are also used for a very different purpose: showing possession of a noun. In order to determine if you need to make something possessive, simply reverse the phrase into a statement using “of the . . . .” For instance:

- the student’s books = the books of the student
- the manager’s opinion = the opinion of the manager

In other situations, the noun is simply being described, and it does not need an apostrophe to show possession. For instance:

- the room of the conference = the conference room
- the door of the elevator = the elevator door

In those situations in which an apostrophe is necessary to show possession, use the following rules to determine where it should go:

1. For singular nouns, add ‘s (e.g., Steven’s car, the house’s roof, the journey’s end).
2. For singular nouns that end in “s” you can use either an ‘s OR simply an apostrophe after the existing “s” (e.g. James’s cartoon OR James’ cartoon).
3. For plural nouns ending in “s,” simply add an apostrophe (e.g., the cats’ milk, the chairs’ cushions).
4. For plural nouns not ending in “s” add ‘s (e.g., children’s candy).
5. For compound, hyphenated words, add ‘s to the end of the entire word (e.g. my sister-in-law’s best friend).

Note: Do not use apostrophes for possessive pronouns.
- Wrong: his’ table
- Right: his table