**Apostrophe Use**

1. **Apostrophes to Indicate Omissions**
   a. Apostrophes are used to indicate omitted letters in contractions and omitted numerals:
      i. aren’t (are not)
      ii. goin’ fishin’ (going fishing)
      Both examples i. and ii. are considered informal and should not be used in academic writing.
      iii. “Summer of ’69” is a song by Bryan Adams.
      iv. However, if an apostrophe is already present to indicate a plural, you may omit the apostrophe that indicates omission: 90’s grunge music is amazing.

2. **Apostrophes to Plural Lower-case Letters**
   a. Sometimes apostrophes are used to indicate the plural form of lower-case letters; however, this “rule” arose from typography rather than grammar. It is worth noting that we do not use ‘s to indicate the plural form of capital letters, symbols, or numbers.
      i. The word Mississippi has four s’s and i’s.

3. **Apostrophes to Indicate Possession**
   a. An apostrophe and an s (’s) are used to indicate the possessive form of a singular or a plural noun that does not end in s.
      i. Nova Scotia’s capital is Halifax.
      singular
      ii. Harry Potter is a favourite among children’s literature.
      plural
   b. Similarly, ’s is used to indicate the possessive form of compound nouns; in this case place the ’s after the last noun in the compound:
      i. Michelle and Katie’s party is being held on Friday night.
      compound noun
      ii. However, if the nouns don’t actually form a compound, each noun will need the ’s: Michelle’s and Katie’s planned outfits for the party were markedly different.
      singular
   c. To indicate the possessive form of singular nouns ending in s it is correct to add ‘s; some writers prefer to add only an apostrophe if the pronunciation of an extra syllable would sound awkward, but the ’s is also acceptable. Whichever rule you follow, it’s important to be consistent in applying it
      i. Yeats’s poems reflect his modernist ethos.
      ii. Both Achilles’ heel was his weakness and Achilles’s heel was his weakness are acceptable
      iii. You can also avoid possible awkwardness by using an of-phrase instead of ’s to indicate possession: The poems of Yeats reflect his modernist ethos.

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1 This resource was compiled from the following resources:
   “The Apostrophe.” Purdue Online Writing Lab, 22 Feb. 2013, owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/621/01/.

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d. In contrast to the above examples, you add only an apostrophe to indicate the possessive form of plural nouns ending in s:
   i. The cannons’ roar can be heard everyday at noon in Halifax.
   ii. The Sandersons’ garden party had a Mad Men theme.

e. While ’s and of-phrases are both effective in indicating the possessive form, ’s is used more often with the names of animate nouns, that is nouns that are “alive,” whereas the of-phrase is used more often with the names of inanimate nouns. The following examples show that although there appears to be a correlation, both forms (‘s and of-phrase) are acceptable.
   i. Spot the dog’s tail had two brown spots.
   ii. The surface of the desk was covered in graffiti.
   iii. The jury’s decision was “Guilty.”
   iv. The ocean’s water was crystal clear and earned the beach its name “Crystal Crescent.”
   v. She was at death’s door.

f. Double possessives, that show possession with both an of-phrase and a possessive inflection, are also grammatically acceptable:
   i. A favourite movie of mine is Star Wars
   ii. Marlow was a contemporary of Shakespeare’s
   iii. Always avoid such double possessives with a that-construction: His cat looked just like that of the one in Puss in Boots

g. Like nouns, but unlike other kinds of pronouns, many indefinite pronouns take ’s to indicate the possessive form of the pronoun:
   i. At the end of term, it is not in one’s best interest to procrastinate beginning one’s assignments.
   ii. Compare the use of ’s to the of-phrase: At the end of term, it is not in the best interest of one to procrastinate beginning one’s assignments.

Proofreading for Apostrophes

- To see if you need to make a noun possessive, try re-writing it using the of-phrase to confirm whether the word is possessive or not:
  The teenager’s cellphone = The cellphone of the teenager

- If you struggle with apostrophe use, confirm that every noun that ends in s or es fits the of-phrase rule.

- Try using the “search-find” function in Word to find all apostrophes and test each use against the above rules.