The Apostrophe (')

The apostrophe is used to show ownership, indicate an omitted letter or number, and to form the plural of numbers, specific words, and letters. Don't worry, though, as this guide should help you avoid apostrophe errors.

1. First Rule: The apostrophe can show ownership or possession.

    A. To show ownership by a singular person, thing, or indefinite pronoun, simply add 's:

        ● The dog's paw

    B. If the noun already ends in "s" in its singular form, and the adding of 's would make the pronunciation difficult, so you may use an apostrophe only. However, s's is preferable.

        ● Jessie James' next robbery

    C. To show ownership by a plural noun ending in "s," add an apostrophe only. For plural nouns not ending in "s," add "'s:"

        ● The books' covers

        ● Women's rights

    D. To form possessives of compounds, use the apostrophe according to the meaning of the construction:

        ● Abbott and Costello's movies (the movies of Abbot and Costello)

        ● Chaplin's and Woody Allen's movies (the movies of Chaplin and Allen, respectively)

- Her mother and father's neighborhood (the neighborhood of her mother and father)

2. Second rule: Use an apostrophe to indicate and omitted letter or number, these are also known as contractions:

Contraction	Isn't	Can't	'90	John's here.
Non-contracted	Is not	Cannot	1990	John is here.

3. Third rule: Use an apostrophe to form the plurals of letters, specific words, and numbers.

- Watch your p's and q's

- The yes's outnumber the no's.

4. Note: An apostrophe is not necessary for the plural of a year or decade.

- The 1960s were a decade of turmoil.

5. Caution: Never use an apostrophe with possessive forms of personal and relative pronouns.

- (incorrect) it's, her's, your's, our's, who's

- (correct) its, hers, yours, ours, whose

Quick Tips for Forming Possessives of Nouns

1. Make the noun singular or plural according to your meaning.
2. If the noun is singular, add 's. If adding the 's makes the pronunciation difficult, add an apostrophe only. However, 's is preferred.
3. If the noun is plural and ends in "s," just add an apostrophe.
4. If the noun is plural and ends in some other letter, add 's.