How to Use the Apostrophe

*Its or it’s? Johnson’s or Johnsons*’? How are you supposed to know? Mostly, when people get confused about apostrophes, they are actually confused about whether a word is *singular* or *plural*. Here are the rules of apostrophes and some examples to help you along.

1. **Use an apostrophe to show where letters have been deleted to form a contraction**
   - It’s (a *contraction* of “it is”)
   - You’re (you are)
   - She’s (she is)
   - Can’t (cannot)
   - Isn’t (is not)
   - Don’t (do not)
   - We’re (we are)
   - Aren’t (are not)

   And so on and so forth. The *apostrophe* is placed where the *letter(s) have been omitted*; remember, this is not always the same place where the original two words are joined.

   **Special Note:** The contraction *it’s* means “it is,” which is different from the possessive *its*. It is a common error, and it is (or it’s) easy to confuse the two. The following is an example:
   - It’s the largest alligator in the galaxy!
   - The alligator actually escaped its cage.

2. **Use an apostrophe with –s for possessives of singular nouns, even if that singular noun already ends in –s.**
   - Harold’s crayons
   - My daughter’s First Communion
   - Dylan Thomas’s poetry
   - Victoria Beckham’s husband
   - Today’s weather report

3. **Use an apostrophe without –s for possessives of most plural nouns**

   To form the possessive of a plural noun that already ends in –s, add an apostrophe
   - The girls’ swing set (the swing set belonging to the girls)
   - The Johnsons’ house (the house belonging to the Johnsons)

   If the plural noun does not end in –s, add an apostrophe plus –s
   - The women’s conference (the conference belonging to the women)
   - The children’s toys (the toys belonging to the children)