

Civil Engineering Writing Project - Grammar & Mechanics Lesson 7

APOSTROPHES (')

1. Objectives

An apostrophe is a punctuation mark that expresses possession or indicates missing letters in a contraction. By the end of this unit, you should be able to

- use apostrophes correctly.
- identify and correct common errors in apostrophe use, including distinguishing the most commonly mistaken words: *its* and *it's*.

2. Using Apostrophes for Possession

Possession can be expressed by using an apostrophe or a phrase with **of** -- e.g. *the visit's purpose* or *the purpose of the visit*. Apostrophes tend to be more common with names or short phrases, and *of*-phrases with more complicated phrases. Because civil engineering writing often refers to complicated concepts and specific objects, *of*-phrases are especially common, but you also need to know how to use apostrophes correctly.

Rules for Using Apostrophes to Show Possession		
Add 's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • singular nouns (even those that end in s). • plural nouns that do not end in s 	the owner's address the bridge's level of deterioration MDOT's requirements last week's meeting the truss's overall condition the men's restrooms
Add apostrophe only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plural nouns ending in s 	the two counties' regulations other cities' experiences the engineers' decisions [referring to more than one engineer]
No apostrophe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possessive pronouns (e.g. my, our, its, mine, ours) 	our recommendations [compare: the team's recommendations] its foundation [compare: the building's foundation]

Correct Examples from Practitioner Reports	Explanation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A Manning's n of 0.042 was estimated for the main channel downstream and upstream of the bridge. 2. The vegetated swales are designed to meet the City of Cortland's standards for pollution removal. 3. One timber section serves as the ramp for the truss's south approach. 4. The comments in this report are based on a limited visual inspection of the buildings' exposed components. 	<p>The apostrophes express possession with a person's name (1), an organization name (2), and objects (3 and 4).</p> <p>Example 4 refers to more than one building.</p>

3. Using Apostrophes for Contractions

In a **contraction**, an apostrophe takes the place of missing letters, for example:

I am → I'm
we will → we'll
it is → it's
do not → don't

Contractions are more common in casual writing than professional writing. Therefore, they are uncommon in civil engineering writing, occurring most often in e-mail and not formal documents.

4. Common Errors to Avoid

1. Plurals: Do not add apostrophes to plural nouns that are not possessives.

Incorrect: When we entered the Data Center, there were sound proof headphones for everyone's use because of the loud noises from the servers and AC unit's.

Correct: When we entered the Data Center, there were sound proof headphones for everyone's use because of the loud noises from the servers and AC units.

2. It's/its: Do not confuse *it's* (contraction meaning *it is*) and *its* (possessive pronoun).

Incorrect: I appreciate the opportunity to work on this project and your assistance in **it's** creation.

Correct: I appreciate the opportunity to work on this project and your assistance in **its** creation.

Incorrect: This bridge experiences heavy traffic because **its** the exit serving two major shopping centers.

Correct: This bridge experiences heavy traffic because **it's** [or **it is**] the exit serving two major shopping centers.

3. Decades: Do not use apostrophes in decades - e.g. 1950s (not 1950's).

Incorrect: In the early 1990's, Portland's storm water management program was set up in response to the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.

Correct: In the early 1990s, Portland's storm water management program was set up in response to the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System.

Practice

Correct the apostrophe-related errors in these sentences.

1. The construction site was my teams next destination.
2. Automated car parking systems save driver's time and also reduce vehicle emissions.
3. Development of this area began in the early 1900's, with most of the land having been developed by the 1940's.

4. Typically, a level of service (LOS) grade between A through F is assigned to an intersection to illustrate its quality of service.
 5. The purpose of this visit was for the student's to get a better understanding of the varying responsibilities of an engineer and varying settings in which engineers work.
 6. Class D water would be adequate for many needs because its oxidized and disinfected, but it is currently not approved for use even in toilet flushing.
 7. Soil amplification calculations are based on a site's soil properties and profile.
 8. In the two years following their completion, the wells experienced intermittent salt water intrusion that left the villagers without a source of drinking water.
 9. Up until the 1960's, Portland had many competing private bus companies.
 10. Following a similar trend, Coupon 14 was the least ductile, and its yield strength was the lowest.
-

© Portland State University (PSU) and others 2015. Contact: Susan Conrad, conrads@pdx.edu
Instructors are welcome to copy, display, and distribute these materials as they appear here and to use them with students. Individuals are welcome to use the materials for self-study. Other uses of the materials, including making derivatives, are prohibited without permission from PSU. Contact Susan Conrad at conrads@pdx.edu. All rights not granted here are reserved.



This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grants No. DUE-0837776 and DUE-1323259. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.