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**Apostrophe Usage Explained**

**By Michael LaRocca**

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**APOSTROPHE USAGE EXPLAINED**

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According to one of my previous articles, whenever a Southerner says "Y'all watch this," get out of the way because those are probably the last words he will ever say.

Well, I am a Southerner. I used to live in the southern US, but I moved to south China. And, I'm about to say the magic words:

Y'all watch this.

The word is "week." If I want to talk about more than one week, like I did near the end of the previous article, I'll use weeks. No apostrophe. If I want to talk about something belonging to a week, such as "last week's newsletter," I'll use an apostrophe.

That's the rule. If it's a noun, s makes it plural and apostrophe-s makes it possessive. It's just that simple.

If I were still in the US, and I wanted one of those fancy carved signs that are so common on southern lawns, it would not read "The LaRocca's." The LaRocca's what? His lawn? His sign? That apostrophe makes it singular possessive, so The LaRocca is surely claiming ownership of something. If that was not his intent, and he whacked in an apostrophe anyway, he's an idiot.

What about plural possessive? Is it "the LaRoccas' house" or "the LaRoccas's house?" Well, it's neither, since my wife isn't

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a LaRocca and we don't own a house. But for the sake of this article, pretend she is and we do.

In ON WRITING, Stephen King swears it's LaRoccas's. When I was a student, my teachers swore it was LaRoccas'. As an editor, I've heard the first was US standard and the second was UK standard. And the answer is, I don't care. Just be consistent.

I once met an editor who said that the spelling has something to do with the pronunciation. She's an idiot. Spelling isn't 100% pronunciation. It's history. I'll say LaRoccas–zz whether it's LaRoccas' or LaRoccas's. So will you.

Jump up five paragraphs and read the seventh word. Noun. Note that I didn't write pronoun. Just for fun, the rule for pronouns and apostrophes is completely different, as I noted in my Common Writing Mistakes article. I still get email praising that one, so let me repeat a little bit of it.

It's is a contraction for "it is" and its is possessive. Who's is a contraction for "who is" and whose is possessive. You're is a contraction for "you are" and your is possessive. They're is a contraction for "they are," there is a place, their is possessive. There's is a contraction for "there is" and theirs is possessive.

If you've been paying attention to the above examples, you've noticed that possessive pronouns never use apostrophes. Its, whose, your, yours, their, theirs...

And there you have it. Apostrophe usage explained.

Michael LaRocca's website at <http://freereads.topcities.com> was chosen by WRITER'S DIGEST as one of The 101 Best Websites For Writers in 2001 and 2002. He published four novels in 2002 and has two more scheduled for publication in 2004. He also works as an editor for an e–publisher. He teaches English at a university in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province, China, and publishes the free weekly newsletter Mad About Books.

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## How To Use Punctuation

By Rumki Sen

### How To Use Punctuation by Rumki Sen

The most common mistake people tend to make while writing is in the use of Punctuation. Wrong punctuation can damage the flow of ideas and change meaning, but properly used punctuation not only helps readers understand your meaning but also makes them engrossed in your writing. The following discussion is about some of the frequently misused punctuation marks and what actually their correct application should be.

**Use of Apostrophe** – Use an apostrophe to show possession, but never put apostrophe in case of possessive pronouns. Always remember that when the word "it's" is used, it is actually for the contraction for the two words: "it has" or "it is". On the other hand, "its" is a possessive pronoun, and the word being already possessive should not contain an apostrophe in it.

Example

It's the same thing happening over and over again.  
(Contraction of It and is: It is the same thing happening over and over again).

Wrong: That car is your's.

Right: That car is yours.

Note: Rewriting is sometimes the solution for an awkward possessive.

Awkward: A friend of mine's cap.

Better: A friend's cap (or the cap of a friend of mine).

To show possession in the case of singular nouns, add 's, and for plural words that end in s, add only an apostrophe. Don't forget to put 's with plural words not ending in s.

Example

Singular: nurse's uniform

Plural: nurses' uniforms (plural word ending in s)

Plural: children's uniforms (plural word not ending in s)

**Use of Comma** – Use commas to separate three or more items in a list. Though journalists most of the times omit the final comma before the word "and", but retaining the final comma avoids confusion.

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### Example

Poor: In this website, you can read articles about how to do business online, the woman who daily eats 45 eggs and Tom Cruise.

Better: In this website, you can read articles about how to do business online, the woman who daily eats 45 eggs, and Tom Cruise.

Use a comma to separate two independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions.

### Example

Wrong: I am not good in writing but I love writing.

Wrong: I am not good in writing, but, I love writing.

Right: I am not good in writing, but I love writing.

Note: If the clauses are long and already contain commas, separate them with a semicolon rather than a comma.

Wrong: If a man begins with certainties, he shall end in doubts, but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties. – Francis Bacon

Right: If a man begins with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties. – Francis Bacon

Run-on sentences – Where Run-on sentences are concerned (in case you don't know what it is, a run-on occurs when two independent clauses are not separated by punctuation or conjunction), add a period, or a semi colon, or a comma in places of separation.

### Example

Wrong: A good student can score full marks in Mathematics it's his analytical ability that will help him achieve that.

Right: A good student can score full marks in Mathematics. It's his analytical ability that will help him achieve that.

Use of Quotation Marks – Use quotation marks to indicate direct quotation.

### Example

"That guy knows me," Mr. Wong said, "very well."

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Note: Never use it for indirect quotation (a restatement of someone's words).

According to Mr. Wong, that guy knows him very well.

Use single quotation marks to indicate a quote within a quote.

### Example

Wrong: Richard wrote, "When Berkeley said, "esse est percipii", he meant that the existence of a thing consists in its being perceived."

Right: Richard wrote, "When Berkeley said, 'esse est percipii,' he meant that the existence of a thing consists in its being perceived."

Note: Always put the comma and final period inside the quotation marks, and put other punctuation marks outside unless they are part of the thing being quoted.

There are many other frequently used punctuation errors, but the above–discussed ones are those I have mostly encountered in several writings. Before putting punctuation marks in your sentences, always ask yourself what meaning you want to convey to the readers. Accordingly, put the marks. In case the sentence becomes difficult to punctuate, consider rewriting it, because when a sentence is well written, it almost punctuates itself.

Rumki Sen is the founder of Perfect Editing Solutions (

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providing a Proofreading and Copyediting service to websites and online documents. Her company also offers resume–writing services. Contact Rumki Sen at



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