



Dashes (—) are used to emphasize the information they isolate in a sentence. They are typically used in three ways:

1. To introduce a change in thought.

The gymnast earned an impressive set of scores—despite having a broken foot.

2. To set off an appositive phrase, which is a type of noun phrase that gives additional information about the noun it modifies.



The house—an old and dark one—was abandoned years ago.

3. To set off a parenthetical description that clarifies or defines an idea.

I was reviewing—actually scanning—my notes before the test.

Apostrophes (') are used in three ways:

1. To show ownership

- a. Add **'s** after nouns that do **not** end in s.

The boy's bike is blue. (*The bike that the boy owns is blue.*)

- b. Add only an **'** after plural nouns ending in s.

The boys' bikes are all blue. (*All the boys have bikes that are blue.*)

2. To form contractions (or rather, to show where letters have been removed).

It's currently 2 o'clock.

TIP: *It's* stands for *it is*, but *its* is used to show *ownership* (see 1).

3. To show plural forms.

Her speech had too many like's and um's in it.

Adapted from:

Barron's CSU Writing Proficiency Exams, 2005 and Handbook for Writers, 2009



Practice

Correct the following sentences using apostrophes (or 's) and dashes.

1. Apostrophe has two ps and two os in it.
2. Were going to the park the one by the lake this afternoon.
3. James keys are on the side table.
4. Swans computer actually her laptop isnt working.
5. The students paper received a good grade an A in fact.
6. Sarahs party the one for her college graduation was at a great restaurant.
7. Charles movie collection dating from the 70s includes a lot of titles.
8. Its my turn to decide what station we listen to.
9. Waiters wages are often split between hosts and chefs.
10. California is known for its beautiful weather.

Find out more. Search the web for **dashes, appositives, apostrophes, contractions, or possessive (pro) nouns.**

Answers:

1. Apostrophe has two p's and two o's in it.
2. We're going to the park—the one by the lake—this afternoon.
3. James' keys are on the side table. **If the noun already ends in s and adding 's interferes with its pronunciation, only add an '.** This is most relevant for names.
4. Swan's computer—actually her laptop— isn't working.
5. The student's paper received a good grade—an A in fact.
6. Sarah's party—the one for her college graduation—was at a great restaurant.
7. Charles' movie collection—dating back from the '70s—includes a lot of titles. **When abbreviating decades, simply replace the first two digits (e.g., 19) with an '.**
8. It's my turn to decide what station we listen to.
9. Waiters' wages are often split between hosts and chefs.
10. California is known for its beautiful weather.

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