APOSTROPHES

People commonly find the use of apostrophes confusing. Here are the rules that will enable you to master them.

1. Following a noun (name word) as a sign of ownership or possession:

e.g. Trevor's hat (the hat belonging to Trevor)
My daughter's cat (the cat belonging to my daughter)
The women's tennis tournament (the tennis tournament for women)

And in denoting periods of time:

e.g. A month's time Two years' experience

However, people sometimes find it tricky to know whether to put 's or s' at the end of a word. Here are the rules:

Use 's after a singular noun or after an owner's name:

e.g. Barry's book Sarah's car
Saturday's newspaper The bus's wheels
A full week's work The boss's desk

Use 's after a plural noun that does not end in s:

e.g. The children's playground
The women's party
The people's rights

And s' after a plural noun that does end in s:

e.g. His parents' problem
The girls' school
Four hours' time

It is becoming common usage to use **s**' after names or other words ending in **s** rather than using the rather cumbersome and difficult to pronunciate **s**'s. However, check with your organisation as to whether the modern or traditional usage is preferred:

e.g. Archimedes' principle (instead of Archimedes's principle)
Mrs Jones' car (rather than Mrs Jones's car)
Charles Dickens' novels (traditionally Charles Dickens's novels)

Finally, words such as yours, hers, theirs, ours, *do not have* apostrophes because the meaning of the words themselves denotes possession. Nothing needs to be added:

e.g. Is that picture yours or ours?
Our house is smaller than theirs.
Is this bag hers?

Its, where it refers to possession, does not have an apostrophe:

e.g. The cat is lying in its basket. Watch out for its claws.

Now check your understanding:	
Word or phrase without an apostrophe	Insert below the equivalent phrase that does contain an apostrophe
The coat belonging to Jim	
2. The cage in which the budgie lives	
3. The advice given by the parents	
4. The books for the children	
5. The food belonging to James	

- 2. Apostrophes are used where one or more letters are missing from a word, often in situations where two words are contracted (reduced) into one:
- e.g. I've (= I have)
 I'm (= I am)
 We're (= We are)
 They've (= They have)
 Mustn't (= Must not)

O'clock (= Of the clock)

Ne'er-do-well (= Never-do-well)

And in some cases where two letters have been missed out, one at the beginning and one at the end of a word, then two apostrophes may be used:

e.g. Rock'n'roll (= Rock and roll)
Salt 'n' vinegar (= Salt and vinegar)

And in dates, where a number is contracted:

e.g. The summer of '69
The '05 bombings in London

Unlike the earlier use of *its* (see section 1) where it is possessive, when *it's* is a contraction of two words, *it is* or *it has*, it does have an apostrophe:

e.g. It's been ages since we last spoke. It's only a week until we meet.

Now check your understanding:	
Word or phrase without an apostrophe	Insert below the equivalent phrase that does contain an apostrophe
1. I cannot imagine	
2. It is not fair	
3. We are nearly there	
4. That will the best time	
5. She is the best of the bunch	

The answers are at the bottom of the page

Section 1 answers

- 1. Jim's coat
- 2. The budgie's cage
- 3. The parents' advice
- 4. The children's books
- 5. In modern usage: James' food / In traditional usage: James's food

Section 2 answers

- 1. I can't imagine
- 2. It's not fair
- 3. We're nearly there
- 4. That'll be the best time
- 5. She's the best of the bunch