



Punctuation Part II: Apostrophes & Quotation Marks

Apostrophe

The apostrophe is commonly used for two purposes:

To indicate omitted letters or numbers:

- Penguins aren't usually found in prison. (are not)
- It's quite a different story with Sven the Penguin, though. (It is)
- His foray into crime began in the '80s. (1980s)

To indicate the possessive case:

- Sven's criminal record is surprisingly long, considering that he is a penguin.

Possession with Apostrophes

(Also see Possession Handout)

The way we show possession differs depending on the word being made possessive.

Singular nouns typically require the '**s** ending to demonstrate possession. (This is true even if the singular noun already ends in s):

- A penguin's flippers present difficulties if he wishes to live a life of crime.
- James's *Giant Guide to Penguins* explains that penguins are flightless Arctic birds.

Plural nouns ending in **s** require only an apostrophe:

- This may be why most penguins' lives are generally dull.

Plural nouns not ending in s require the '**s** ending:

- Just as it has been many children's dream to become policemen, it was always Sven's dream to become a mastermind criminal.

Compound nouns generally add 's (or s') to their last element:

- Sven began his criminal career by stealing his brother-in-law's garden gnome.

Multiple nouns will show possession in different ways depending on your meaning. If you want to convey **joint possession, use an apostrophe only with the last noun:**

- For his mom and dad's sixth anniversary, Sven presented them with a fresco he had chiseled off the Sistine Chapel Ceiling.

If you want to express **separate possession**, use an apostrophe after each noun:

- Sven has pilfered Michelangelo's, Da Vinci's, and Raphael's paintings.

Other Forms of Possession

Possession may also be shown with a prepositional phrase:

- The movie *The March of the Penguins* irritated Sven because it portrayed penguins in such a dull and sentimental way.

This form usually sounds awkward with personal names (the crimes of Sven), but it is generally more appropriate when writing about inanimate objects (the frame of the painting rather than the painting's frame).

Possessive pronouns take the place of possessive nouns, and *they never use apostrophes!!!* **Attributive possessive pronouns** (**my, your, his, her, its, our, their**) appear before a noun. **Nominal possessive pronouns** (**mine, yours, his, hers, its, our, theirs**) require a linking verb (is, was, etc.).

DON'T DO THIS! Do not fall into the incredibly common error of confusing **its** and **it's**:

Its (no apostrophe) is a pronoun which means **belonging to it**.

It's (with an apostrophe) is a contraction which means **it is, it was, or it has**.

Every time you write it's, check yourself by seeing if you could replace it with it is/was/has. If not, you should use its.

- Sven prefers *Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers* for **its** fantastic portrayal of a villainous penguin.

(Please see the following page for information on Quotation Marks)

Quotation Marks

Quotation marks are most commonly used to indicate a direct quotation, though they have certain conventional uses as well:

To enclose the exact words that someone has spoken or written

- “Don’t move another step,” the policeman said.
- Sven responded, “Do you really think I would try to waddle away from you?”
- “You penguins are a sneaky bunch,” replied the cop. “I wouldn’t put it past you.”

Note that commas, periods, and other end marks that come at the end of a quotation should be placed *inside* the quotation marks. (See the “Punctuation Part I” handout for more examples.)

The **exceptions** to this rule **are question marks or exclamation points that apply to the entire sentence**, not just the quoted material; **these should be placed *outside* the quotation marks.** **Colons and semicolons also go *outside*.**

- “Everybody knows you’re just a bunch of waddling, flightless Arctic birds!”
- How would Sven respond to the officer’s characterization of penguins as a “waddling, flightless Arctic birds”?
- Sven retorted, “Well, you appear to be a waddling, flightless inner-city cop”; however, in his heart-of-hearts, this penguin was ready to be done with crime.

When a quotation appears within another quotation, use single quotation marks:

- “Nevertheless, I surrender,” said Sven. “Alas! ‘Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.’ I am a failure as a criminal mastermind!”

To indicate the titles of short works (poems, short stories, songs, etc., but also portions of a larger work such as an article from a journal or a chapter of a book)

- Now Sven sits in his prison cell reading articles such as “Cooking with Parsley” from the *Delicious Dishes* magazine and dreaming of becoming a chef.

For further information, please use the following links via Purdue OWL:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/apostrophe_introduction.html

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/punctuation/quotation_marks/index.html