Common problems with apostrophes:

**Its / it’s**
The cat licked its paws.
There is no need for an apostrophe, because ‘its’ is a pronoun in its own right which stands in for ‘the cat’s’ and indicates ownership.

**It’s an amazing idea.**
A missing letter has been replaced by the apostrophe, so it really means ‘it is’

**Whose / who’s**
Whose shoes are they?
Here whose is a special kind of pronoun (like its) which indicates ownership already, so there is no apostrophe.

Who’s coming to dinner?
A missing letter has been replaced by the apostrophe, so it really means ‘who is’.

**Dates**
The **1960s** were a period of radical changes in morality.
In the **’60s**, public morality underwent radical changes.

In the first sentence, ‘1960s’ is a plural referring to all the years between 1960 and 1969, so there is no apostrophe. In the second sentence there is a contraction with ‘19’ missed off. The apostrophe replaces the missing numbers.

Useful Websites:
The Internet Grammar of English: [www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/internet-grammar/)

English grammar exercises: (Higher Education Academy/Anglia Polytechnic University) [www.las.ac.uk/materialsbank/mb061/index.htm](http://www.las.ac.uk/materialsbank/mb061/index.htm)

Learn English (for adult learners whose first language is not English) [www.learnenglish.org.uk](http://www.learnenglish.org.uk)

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**Punctuation**

**Academic writing 1**

This guide offers a brief summary of the most common types of punctuation. It includes advice on:

- Using commas
- Using semi-colons
- Using colons
- Using apostrophes

**Using commas (,)**

Commas are used to break up different parts of a sentence. They allow someone to make sense of what they are reading. It may be helpful to think of commas as places where a reader might draw breath. The comma forms a natural place in a sentence where the reader can pause, to make sense of an idea. Here are some ways commas can be used:

**To separate words in a list:**
- He lost his house, his heritage, his hair, and his handkerchief.

**To separate parts of a sentence:**
- Firstly, I would like to consider the merits of supplementing the diet with zinc extract. Secondly, vitamin C can be introduced to combat infection.

Here the comma separates the first word from the body of the sentence, to indicate that this idea is only the first.
To separate two parts of a linked idea:
- After the French Revolution had taken place, many other European countries were concerned about civil unrest.
- Many scientists believe in evolution, although some are trying to disprove Darwin's Theory of Evolution.

To separate a final phrase, that is an afterthought:
- Few people enjoy arduous and demanding exams, especially on Saturdays.
- I would like to run the London Marathon, if I were fit.

Using semi-colons (;)
It may be helpful to think of semi-colons as halfway between a comma and a full stop. They are used in the following ways:

To link sentences that are closely related:
- The night sky was the deepest sapphire; Claire realised that she had not observed its beauty until now.
A full stop between the two sentences would detract from Claire's observation, as it wouldn’t show the connection between the ideas. A comma could not be used as they are two complete sentences and can stand alone.

To link sentences that are in opposition to each other:
- His research methods were fundamentally flawed; nonetheless, he collected the data.
In each of the examples above, the set of words after the semi-colon must be able to stand as a sentence on its own. However, there is a very common use of the semi-colon where this is not the case:

To separate items in a list:
- Mrs Brown was assisted by other members of staff: Dr Benham from Animal Husbandry; Mr Gleeson from Botany; and Dr Chalk from Soil Science.

Using colons (:)
When a colon is used in a sentence, the parts it separates do not need to be complete sentences in their own right. Colons are used in the following ways:

To introduce a list:
- The results of the indoor team games were as follows: Sibly came first, Bridges and Wessex were joint second, and Wantage came last.

To link two sentences thematically:
- Psychological studies into domestic violence are usually centred on an idea of the nuclear family: Henry Davis decided to undertake a more radical approach to this field of research.
Here the two sentences could exist separately, but by connecting them with a colon the reader is led from one idea to the next.

To draw out a conclusion:
- Language acquisition is a difficult but immensely rewarding task: without it, there is little hope for global communication.
Here, what is said in the first sentence is contextualised by what is said in the second sentence.

Using apostrophes (‘)
The apostrophe has two functions:
1. To show that letters are missing. This is known as contraction.
2. To indicate ownership. This is known as possession.

Contractions - not to be used in academic work!
When letters are missing in a word, and the word becomes shorter, the apostrophe is used to show where the missing letters belong:
- I am becomes I’m
- You will becomes you’ll
Contractions are used in informal writing. Essays and reports should not contain informal writing – words should be written in full.

Possession
Apostrophes are also used to show that something belongs to something else, for example:
- The girl’s hat - means that the hat is owned by the girl.
- The girl’s hats - means that the girl owns more than one hat.
- The girls’ hat - means that the girls all share ownership of one hat.
- The girls’ hats - means that the girls own several hats (or one each).