8 Apostrophes

Singular	Plural (-s, -es)	Singular Possessive (-'s)	Plural Possessive (-s')
Scientist	Scientists	Scientist's	Scientists'
Business	Businesses	Business's	Businesses'

To form the **plural** of a noun, add *-s*. When a singular noun ends in *-s*, add *-es*. Do **not** add an apostrophe.

Correct: The **birds** are flying. = More than one bird is flying.

Correct: The **businesses** are open. = More than one business is open.

To form the possessive of a singular regular noun, or an irregular plural noun (below), add *apostrophe* + *-s*.

Correct: The **bird's** wings are red. = The wings of the bird are red.

Correct: The **business's** policy is new. = The policy of the business is new.

Correct: The **children's** growth = The growth of the children

Singular	Plural
Child	Children
Fish	Fish
Foot	Feet
Man	Men
Mouse	Mice
Person	People
Woman	Women

To form the possessive of a regular plural noun, add an apostrophe after the *-s* or *-es*.

Correct: The **birds'** wings are red. = The wings of the birds are red.

Correct: The **businesses'** policies are new. = The policies of the businesses are new.

***Note:** For well-known names ending in *-s*, the possessive can be formed by adding only an apostrophe (e.g., Dickens' works = the works of Dickens), but you do not need to worry about this exception for the SAT.

The construction *apostrophe* + *–s* is also used to form a **contraction** between a noun and the verb *is* or *has*. This usage has not traditionally been a major focus of the SAT; however, you should be comfortable distinguishing it from the usage indicating possession.

Correct: The **newspaper's** distributed nationally. = The newspaper **is** distributed nationally.

Correct: The **study's** been released. = The study **has** been released.

If apostrophe questions involve nouns, either one or two of these words may be underlined, with the answers providing various combinations of possessives and plurals.

Studies have suggested that memories are stored as unique firing patterns of the_____ When a memory is retrieved, those patterns are replayed.

1 Mark for Review

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

Ⓐ brains neuron's.

Ⓑ brain's neurons.

Ⓒ brains' neurons.

Ⓓ brain's neuron's.

Shortcut: A noun followed by another noun should contain an apostrophe, whereas a noun followed by any other part of speech should not contain an apostrophe. When you think about it, this is only logical: the only thing a noun can possess is another noun.

For example, in the above question, the first noun in the phrase "brain's neurons" requires an apostrophe because "brain" possesses "neurons" (= the neurons <u>of</u> the brain). That eliminates (A).

(D) can be eliminated automatically as well because "neuron's" is not followed by another word, and a noun must possess something in order to take an apostrophe.

Be careful with (C): "brains'" is possessive, but the apostrophe after the *-s* indicates a plural noun. The singular must be used to refer to the brain in general, so this answer can be eliminated as well.

(B) correctly makes the first noun singular and possessive, and the second noun plural only.

Note that the apostrophe-no apostrophe pattern can be applied even when a single noun is involved. You just need to look at the word right <u>after</u> the blank. If, for example, only the word "brain" were omitted in the question above, you would look at the following word in the passage and see that it was a noun as well. That would tell you an apostrophe was necessary.

Plural and Possessive Pronouns

To review: a pronoun is a word such as *it*, *s/he*, or *they* that can replace a noun in a sentence. For example, the sentence *I.M. Pei is a well-known architect* can be rewritten as *He is a well-known architect.*

Apostrophes are used differently for pronouns than they are for nouns.

- Possessive forms **do not take an apostrophe.**
- To form a contraction with the verb *is* or *are*, add *apostrophe* + *–s* or *–re*.

Important: the main pronouns tested with apostrophes on the SAT are *it* and *they*, and they should be your primary focus.

A. It's vs. Its

It's = it is, it has

Its = possessive of *it*. Used before a noun.

Its' & Its's = do not exist. Answers with these constructions can be eliminated immediately.

The easiest way to choose between *its* and *it's* is simply to plug in *it is*. If *it is* makes sense in context, you need the apostrophe. If *it is* does not make sense, the apostrophe is incorrect.

Incorrect: Some critics of the Internet have argued that it is a danger because **it's (it is)** vastness threatens people's intellectual health.

Incorrect: Some critics of the Internet have argued that it is a danger because **its'** vastness threatens people's intellectual health.

Correct: Some critics of the Internet have argued that it is a danger because **its** vastness threatens people's intellectual health.

B. They're, Their, and There

Although the same apostrophe rules apply to *they're* vs. *their* as apply to other pronouns, an extra degree of confusion is often present because of a third identical-sounding pronoun: *there*.

They're = they are

Their = possessive of *they*. Used before a noun.

There = a place

In general, it is easiest to think of *there* as separate from *they're* and *their*, which both involve *they*.

To check *their* vs. *they're*, plug in *they are*. If you can plug in this phrase, the apostrophe is necessary. If you can't plug it in, no apostrophe should be used.

To check *there*, simply ask yourself whether the pronoun is referring to a place. The passage will make it clear whether this is the case.

They're

Incorrect: Although **their** usually powered by rowers, canoes may also have sails or motors.

Incorrect: Although **there** usually powered by rowers, canoes may also have sails or motors.

Correct: Although **they're** usually powered by rowers, canoes may also contain sails or motors.

Because you would say, *Although they are usually powered by rowers*, the apostrophe is required.

Their

Incorrect: Deactivated viruses form the basis of many vaccines known for **they're** effectiveness in preventing disease.

Incorrect: Deactivated viruses form the basis of many vaccines known for **there** effectiveness in preventing disease.

Correct: Deactivated viruses form the basis of many vaccines known for **their** effectiveness in preventing disease.

Because you would not say, *Deactivated viruses form the basis of many vaccines known for they are effectiveness*, no apostrophe is needed. The sentence does not refer to a place, so *there* is not correct either.

There

Incorrect: Because Denver is located close to the Rocky Mountains, snow often falls **they're**.

Incorrect: Because Denver is located close to the Rocky Mountains, snow often falls **their**.

Correct: Because Denver is located close to the Rocky Mountains, snow often falls **there**.

Because the sentence is clearly talking about a place, *there* is required.

C. You're vs. Your

You're = you are

Your = possessive form of *you*. Used before a noun.

To determine which version is correct, plug in *you are*.

Incorrect: The first few hours of the workday can have a significant effect on **you're** level of productivity over the following eight hours.

Correct: The first few hours of the workday can have a significant effect on **your** level of productivity over the following eight hours.

Because you would not say, *The first few hours of the workday can have a significant effect on you are level of productivity*, no apostrophe should be used.

D. Who's vs. Whose

Who's = who is, who has

Whose = possessive form of *who*. Unlike *who*, *whose* can be used to refer to both people and things.

To determine which version is correct, plug in *who is*.

Incorrect: Frank Gehry is an American architect **whose** known for his original and sometimes outlandish designs.

Correct: Frank Gehry is an American architect **who's (who is)** known for his original and sometimes outlandish designs.

BUT:

Incorrect: Frank Gehry is an American architect **who's (who is)** designs are famous for their boldness and originality.

Correct: Frank Gehry is an American architect **whose** designs are famous for their boldness and originality.

Exercise: Apostrophes (answers p. 212)

1. Because the lemur, a small animal native to Madagascar, shares some traits with other primates, _____ frequently mistaken for an ancestor of modern monkeys and apes.

- Ⓐ its
- Ⓑ it's
- Ⓒ its'
- Ⓓ their

2. Throughout his 1986 novel-in-verse, *The Golden Gate*, Vikram Seth maintains a stubborn resistance to traditional structure. The narrator does not hesitate to interrupt the story in order to explain a shift in the plot or to comment on the _____.

- Ⓐ novels characters
- Ⓑ novel's characters
- Ⓒ novels character's
- Ⓓ novels' character's

3. The woolly mammoth's appearance and behavior have been studied more than those of most other prehistoric animals because _____ have been discovered in many different locations around the world.

- Ⓐ it's bones
- Ⓑ its bone's
- Ⓒ its bones
- Ⓓ its bones'

4. The modern rodeo has its roots in Mexico, where in the early nineteenth century ranch hands called *vaqueros* developed and perfected the roping and riding skills that are performed in _____ They also gave the rodeo its name: the word *rodeo* derives from the Spanish verb *rodear*, which means to round up.

- Ⓐ today's competitions.
- Ⓑ todays competitions.
- Ⓒ todays' competitions.
- Ⓓ today's competition's.

5. Flavonoids— naturally occurring substances found in many common foods and beverages such as tea, oranges, and nuts—have long been known to have many health benefits. However, new research shows _____ may be even more wide-ranging than scientists realized.

Ⓐ	they're positive effects
Ⓑ	they're positive effect's
Ⓒ	their positive effects'
Ⓓ	their positive effects

6. Although the physical differences between humans and non-human primates are quite distinct, their brains may be remarkably similar. However, even the most minute distinctions may make a big difference in various _____ development.

Ⓐ	species'
Ⓑ	specie's
Ⓒ	species
Ⓓ	species's