

Apostrophe Apocalypse: Five Sins of Punctuation

Sin #1: Add an apostrophe to a singular verb ending in s

Sinful	Righteous
The cafeteria serve's lunch daily.	The cafeteria serves lunch daily.
Solar power provide's 60% of their electricity.	Solar power provides 60% of their electricity.

Sin #2: Add an apostrophe to a plural noun

Sinful	Righteous
The musician's play every Thursday.	The musicians play every Thursday.
The Joneses' raise chickens in the city.	The Joneses raise chickens in the city.

Sin #3: Add an apostrophe to an already-possessive personal pronoun

Sinful	Righteous
The antique harp is her's. It's strings are original.	The antique harp is hers. Its strings are original.
The home is their's now. It's no longer your's.	The home is theirs now. It's no longer yours.

Sin #4: Use an apostrophe to indicate plural abbreviations, dates, and number or letter characters*

Sinful	Righteous
The university awarded 300 BA's last year.	The university awarded 300 BAs last year.
The 1990's were fashion-backward.	The 1990s were fashion-backward.
Replace two E's with two 3's for text messaging.	Replace two Es with two 3s for text messaging.

Sin #5: Use an apostrophe + s to indicate possession for a multisyllabic noun ending in s, rendering the word difficult to pronounce.

Sinful	Righteous
Dickens's novel <i>Bleak House</i> was originally published in 20 installments.	Dickens' novel <i>Bleak House</i> was originally published in 20 installments.
Jesus's life is recorded in the Bible.	Jesus' life is recorded in the Bible.

Based on: Aaron, Jane E. "Uses and Misuses of the Apostrophe." *LB Brief*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson, 2005. 364.

*This rule is in flux: Many style guides recommend against using the apostrophe. However, many publications still use the apostrophe in this case. Neither is incorrect. Consistency is key.