The Writing Center

at

Trident Technical College

Apostrophes ''

The apostrophe has three uses:

- **To indicate letters left out in contractions**—ex. Do not = don't, I am = I'm
- **To indicate the plural of letters, numerals, symbols, and certain abbreviations** (ex. I was born in the 1960's, I made all A's in my English class.)
- **To form the possessive case of nouns and certain pronouns**—this is the most problematic use of the apostrophe for student writers

- Use **an apostrophe and the letter *s*** to form the **possessive of a noun that does not already end in s**
  > Ex. The woman's dog chased the neighbor's cat.

- Use **only an apostrophe** to form the possessive case of a **plural noun that already ends in the letter *s*:**
  > Ex. The ladies' hats; the students' books

- Use **only an apostrophe OR an apostrophe and an *s*** to form the possessive of **singular nouns ending with the letter *s*:**
  > Ex. James' (or James's books), Jesus' (or Jesus's) works

- **For compound nouns, use the apostrophe and the letter *s* on the word closest to the object possessed**
  > Ex. My mother-in-law's pen, somebody else's pet

Tip:

Using the apostrophe to form a possessive means the noun that takes the apostrophe will be followed by another noun, sometimes along with an adjective. To be sure you need to use an apostrophe rather than simply an s to form a plural is to see if you've used two nouns together in a sentence.

Ex. The *boy's cars* had flat tires.

The *boy's car* had many tires that were flat.

My *parents' house* is on the beach.

My *parents* eat dinner at home every night. (no apostrophe on parents because this is a plural, not a possessive—notice that *parents* is followed by the verb *eat*, not a noun)

Apostrophes, Semi-colons, & Colons

<u>Semi-colons</u> ;

The semi-colon *<u>separates two independent clauses</u>* that are too closely related to justify being put into separate sentences.

Ex. I read the story from beginning to end in one evening; I could not put it down.

The semi-colon is never used to introduce information.

Don't overuse the semi-colon, as this can be distracting for the reader.

Using the words "however" and "therefore" in sentences often causes problems for student writers. Use a semi-colon before these words (and a comma after) when they are used as an introductory word for the second independent clause.

Ex. I eat vegetables almost every day; however, I don't enjoy the taste of them.
        The teacher is very demanding; therefore, I must study for hours before each test.

**(Remember: The semi-colon separates the two independent clauses;
the comma joins the introductory word to the second independent clause.)**

Tip: A semi-colon can be used to correct a comma splice (an error that occurs when two independent clauses are joined only by a comma). However, the relationship between the two independent clauses must be clear in order for the semi-colon to be used correctly. Another choice to correct a comma splice is to use a comma along with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS—For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So). In this case, the *conjunction* indicates the relationship between the two independent clauses.

<u>Colons</u> :

Colons are used to introduce information or to signal to the reader to expect information that is forthcoming. What comes before the colon is the introductory sentence, and what comes after the colon is usually a list, examples, or some other explanatory information. The colon is also used to separate introductory information from a long quotation.

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