

Apostrophes and Plurals: Acronyms and Initials.

Acronyms and initials are used in many fields as short forms for titles. This handout explains when and how to use apostrophes with them. It has three sections:

1. The difference between initials and acronyms.
2. Straightforward plurals, which have no apostrophe.
3. The Possessive apostrophe, first with singular nouns and secondly with plural nouns.

Please note that apostrophes are also used for contractions, such as “isn’t” and “don’t”.
You should avoid using contractions in formal academic writing.

The difference between initials and acronyms.

Letters used as short forms are only acronyms when they can be pronounced like a word. Otherwise, they are simply initials. Apostrophes are used the same way with them both.

Table of Examples:

Type	Short Form.	Written in full.	Short Form.	Written in full.
Initials.	B.A.	Bachelor of Arts.	B.S.T.	British Summer Time.
Acronyms.	T.E.S.	Times Educational Supplement.	U.F.O.	Unidentified Flying Object.

Straightforward plurals.

Straightforward plurals do not have apostrophes.

Example:

Those UFOs are huge.

Possessives.

Possessives show ownership or in some sense belonging to something.

Singular examples:

The TES’s story about the UFOs was interesting.

There is a UFO overhead. The UFO’s lights are very bright.

Think: one UFO, or one TES, *then apostrophe s*.

Plural Example:

There are five UFOs over there. The UFOs’ lights are different colours.

Think: two or more UFOs, as a straightforward plural, *then apostrophe*.

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