

# Dear Apostrophe (A Love Letter)



By [Tiffany Markman](#)

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You and I have come a long way together. We began our collaboration some 25 years ago, when you'd regularly forgive my crayoned abuse of your good nature. Then, we became allies: just you and me, against the world, using permanent marker to 'correct' the punctuation on signs proclaiming Ladies Room.

And now, as the rest of the world conspires to neglect you or violate you, I hope you'll accept this token of my love, understanding and undying support.

For starters, Apostrophe, I get you. I know that you're not all things to all people. You can't be used creatively. You can't be manipulated to fashion effect or emphasis. You can't be plugged in impulsively where people think you 'look nice'. You're not over-sensitive (unlike the semi-colon) - you're just a simple creature with simple needs and two key contributions to the English language:

## 1. You make our language sound and look more natural (contraction).

Darling Apostrophe, the fact that global English has evolved to accommodate a more natural, more engaging turn of phrase, is partially down to you. Because you're the chief protagonist of contraction - in short, phrasal shrinkage.

I appreciate that, like a good diuretic, you're able to help us to pare down chubby phrases, removing a couple of letters along the way, and making the whole construction more streamlined and more 'speakable'. Some examples:

- I am -> I'm
- Cash and Carry -> Cash 'n Carry
- It is -> it's
- Do not -> don't

I applaud you, Apostrophe, for your unapologetic indication that the letters a, a-d, i and o have been shaved - contracted - from the above four examples.

## 2. You create relationships between people and things (possession).

Apostrophe, my friend, I see how you build bridges between people and other people (the boss's mistress) and people and stuff (the mistress's Louboutins). You clarify what belongs to whom, and how many whos there are (if there are several mistresses, and they all have Louboutins, it's the mistresses' Louboutins).

I commend your courage under fire, when it comes to forcing the subject of the phrase or clause to take ownership, as in the following helpful examples:

- The decision of the committee -> the committee's decision
- The CEO of the organisation -> the organisation's CEO
- Fans of Bizcommunity -> Bizcommunity's fans
- The many obsessions of Ms Markman -> Ms Markman's many obsessions

Finally, Apostrophe, I admire your brave refusal - amidst all of your hard work - to be cowed by the shameful title That Thingy That Looks Like A Lifted-Up Comma.

## I KNOW YOU DON'T MAKE PLURALS

Unlike some of my comrades, I know you well enough to know that you don't attach yourself to nouns to make them plural. You're more subtle than that.

You're like a vegan at a braai: mostly ignored, largely misunderstood and usually stuck in the wrong place in frantic desperation, like next to the lamb's on the spit.

Apostrophe, I know that, if it's not contraction or possession I'm after, I don't need you. I should just take a breath and stick the s on: BMWs, photos, 1990s.

My blessing for you, into the future, is that English-users exercise more restraint; that they take the time to ask, 'Am I shortening words or phrases? No. Am I showing possession or belonging? No. Right: no apostrophe.' In the interim, I intend to broadcast your message - and my admiration - as widely as possible.

Your #1 Fan,  
Tiffany

## ABOUT TIFFANY MARKMAN

I spend 10 hours a day writing - and teaching others to write. I was South Africa's Freelance Copywriter of the Year in 2020 and one of the world's 'Top 50 Female Content Marketers' in 2021.

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