Three Ways to Use the Apostrophe

1. **The possessive case.** Use the apostrophe to show that something belongs to someone or to several people.

   - The student’s workbook was left in the cafeteria.
   - The students’ books remained open during the test.
   - The children’s toys were scattered on the floor. (Children’s is a plural noun.)
   - Cary’s and Bill’s books are covered in brown paper.

   *Note:* If one thing belongs to several people who are named, use the apostrophe s after the name just before the noun.

   - Steven and Maria’s house is blue.
   - Cathy, David, and Simone’s father has his own business. (They all have the same father)

2. **The contraction** (to show that letters are missing from a word).

   - We can’t wait any longer.
   - Here’s the list of students who passed the test.

   *Note:* Don’t confuse the contraction it’s (which means it is) with the possessive noun its.

   - It’s the beginning of exam season, which will be followed by graduation.

   *Note:* Never use an apostrophe with a possessive noun.

   - My glasses fell out of its case.
   - This book is yours.

3. **The plural.** The apostrophe is sometimes used to form a plural. For lowercase letters, add apostrophe s.

   - Mind your p’s and q’s.
   - Use x’s and y’s to label the axes on the graph.

   *Notes:* For capital letters, numerals, and abbreviations, just add an s.

   - Mary got all Bs on her report card.
   - The PPWs met for their annual conference.
   - That school was built in the early 1980s.
   - For noun coinages (words and phrases used as nouns) just add s or es.

   - Students must turn in their reports; there are no ifs, ands, or buts about that rule.

   Know the dos and don’ts before you begin.

See the *MCPS Editorial Stylebook*, page 6, for more on the apostrophe. Also, check Webster’s dictionary, 11th edition, when in doubt, or send e-mail (Donna_M_Marks@mcpsmd.org) to me with your questions.