



Contraction (noun): a shortened form of a word or group of words, with the omitted letters often replaced by an apostrophe, such as “isn’t” for “is not”

1. Formally Fine

Yes! You **can** use contractions in formal writing.

From [PlainLanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov/):

Contractions make your writing more accessible. Research shows that they also enhance readability. “Write as you talk” is a common rule of writing readably. People are accustomed to hearing contractions in spoken English; therefore, using them in your writing helps people relate to your document. Don’t use contractions wherever possible, but wherever they sound natural.

2. Standard vs. Nonstandard

In formal writing, stick to standard, common, recognized contractions.

Yes: Statistics alone can’t explain the problem.

No: The sources’ll back up what I’m saying.

Yes: The team members didn’t have the proper equipment.

No: Unfortunately, my results’re useless.

3. Erroneous “of”

These phrases are **ALWAYS** incorrect:

- Could of
- Would of
- Should of
- Might of

These are the correct phrases:

- Could have
- Would have
- Should have
- Might have

In formal writing, it's best to use both words instead of "could've," "would've," "should've," or "might've."

4. Tricky Contractions

It's/Its

"It's" is a contraction, short for "it is" or "it has."

- It's a more environmentally friendly method.
- It's been too long!

"Its" is a pronoun that shows possession.

- CDC is known for its outbreak response.

Use an apostrophe **ONLY** when you mean "it is" or "it has."

You're/Your

"You're" is a contraction, short for "you are."

- You're the authority on this subject.

"Your" is a pronoun that shows possession.

- We need your help with explaining mitosis.
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They're/Their/There

"They're" is a contraction, short for "they are."

- Residents know they're expected to evacuate.

"Their" is a pronoun that shows ownership.

- Medical staff members keep their possessions in lockers.

“There” is an adverb that shows location.

- Everyone wants to train there.

Test Yourself!

1. It's/its looking as if the hospital has really improved it's/its contamination procedures.
2. The “mad scientist” theme made you're/your going-away party one they're/there/their never going to forget.
3. You're/your going to have to convince Captain Mills to approve they're/there/their request.
4. They're/there/their can't be unsupervised visitors in the lab.
5. Manuel asked if you're/your sure the journal they're/there/their submitting the article to has changed it's/its requirements for publication.
6. It's/its inability to replicate is called “replicative senescence.”

Sources

- [Plainlanguage.gov: Use Contractions](#)
- [What are contractions?](#)
- [Using Contractions Correctly](#)

Answers

1. It's, its
2. your, they're
3. You're, their
4. There
5. you're, they're, its
6. Its