When to Use Them and When to Not

While contractions are used in everyday speech, there are certain situations where you can use them effectively and other situations where you may choose not to. For example, using contractions in academic writing, such as a research paper, is usually not encouraged because it can make your writing sound informal. In writing situations that are informal, such as blog posts or personal narratives, using contractions is acceptable, unless your professor states otherwise. Informal pieces also have a more conversational tone to them compared to an academic paper that has an authoritative tone.

How to Use Contractions

Contractions are a way to mash together two words in order to make them shorter. They also are a way to make your writing seem more conversational and have the reader feel included in the writing. Apostrophes are a necessary when creating contractions; apostrophes replace letters that are dropped from the second word of the contraction.

Examples

Contractions that take out the first letter of the second word:
- I’m = I am
- They’re = They are
- I’d = I had
- She’s = She is
- How’s = How is

Contractions that take out the second letter of the second word:
- Note: Contractions that use the word “not” will replace the “o” with an apostrophe (’).
- Shouldn’t = Should not
- Wouldn’t = Would not
- Couldn’t = Could not
- Don’t = Do not
- Isn’t = Is not
・ Wasn’t = Was not  
・ Hasn’t = Has not  
Constructions that drop the first two letters of the second word:  
Note: Words using “will” replace the “wi” with an apostrophe (’).  
・ It’ll = It will  
・ He’ll = He will  
Exceptions: Contractions that do not follow rules:  
・ Won’t= Will not  

**Contractions vs Possessive Pronouns**

The English language includes words that sounds the same but have different spellings and meanings. Often contractions can be confused with possessive pronouns. While contractions use apostrophes, possessive pronouns do not.  
・ Your = Possessive pronoun for “you”  
  o Example: Your dog is very cute.  
・ You’re = Contraction for “you are”  
  o You’re the best student in the class.  
・ Its = Possessive pronoun for “it”  
  o The spider ate the fly that was in its web.  
・ It’s = Contraction for “it is”  
  o It’s fine that you cannot come into work tomorrow!  
・ They’re = Contraction for “they are”  
  o They’re coming into town tomorrow.  
・ Their = Possessive pronoun for “they”  
  o Their dog ran away but thankfully they found him.  
・ There= Shows location of an idem  
  o The stapler is over there.