

Contractions

By definition, a contraction is a shortened form of a group of words. Contractions are used in both written and oral communication. When a contraction is written in English, the omitted letters are replaced by an apostrophe.

Common Contractions

Here are some common contractions and the groups of words that they represent.

aren't → are not	there's → there is; there has
can't → can not	they'd → they had; they would
couldn't → could not	they'll → they will; they shall
didn't → did not	they're → they are
doesn't → does not	they've → they have
don't → do not	we'd → we had; we would
hadn't → had not	we're → we are
hasn't → has not	we've → we have
haven't → have not	weren't → were not
he'd → he had; he would	what'll → what will; what shall
he'll → he will; he shall	what're → what are
he's → he is; he has	what's → what is; what has
I'd → I had; I would	what've → what have
I'll → I will; I shall	where's → where is; where has
I'm → I am	who'd → who had; who would
I've → I have	who'll → who will; who shall
isn't → is not	who're → who are
let's → let us	who's → who is; who has
mightn't → might not	who've → who have
mustn't → must not	won't → will not
shan't → shall not	wouldn't → would not
she'd → she had; she would	you'd → you had; you would
she'll → she will; she shall	you'll → you will; you shall
she's → she is; she has	you're → you are
shouldn't → should not	you've → you have
that's → that is; that has	

One contraction that is not on the above list is “it’s.” It is useful to note that “it’s,” a contraction, is often confused with “its,” a possessive pronoun. Remember,

it's → it is

and

its → possessive pronoun

Here they are used in sentences.

Examples of It's and Its

It's nice outside today. → **It is** nice outside today.
The dog ate **its** food. (The food **belongs** to the dog.)

Contraction Usage

You probably use contractions when you speak to your friends and family members every day; however, it is important to note that contractions are often considered inappropriate in formal writing. Professors, employers, and other professionals like to see that you have taken your time on a document, and using contractions is sometimes seen as a shortcut. To be safe, never use contractions when writing for a class or when writing a professional document, such as a personal statement or cover letter.

Activity 1

Each of the following sentences can be rewritten to contain one or more contraction(s). Using the provided list as a reference, rewrite the following sentences.

1. I have been studying for hours, but I still do not feel ready for the exam.
2. You were not at the coffee shop yesterday.
3. The paint she picked out was a lovely color, but it did not match the trim.
4. We would go to the beach with you; however, we have got too many chores to do.
5. You should not use contractions in formal writing.

Answer Key for Activity 1

1. I've, don't
2. weren't
3. didn't
4. We'd, we've
5. shouldn't

Activity 2

Each of the following sentences contains one or more contraction(s). Rewrite each sentence, replacing any contractions with the groups of words they represent.

1. I can't go with you because I'm busy that day.
2. It's clear that the dog is frightened because he keeps placing his tail between his legs.
3. They've been trimming the trees at the park since this morning; I haven't been able to sleep since they started.
4. You mustn't pester your grandmother like that.
5. She'll bring Jonathan with her if he's willing to chip in for gas.

Answer Key for Activity 2

1. can not, I am
2. It is
3. They have, have not
4. must not
5. She will, he is

References

Nordquist, Richard. "A List of Standard Contractions in English." *About Education*. About.com, n.d. Web. 28 July 2014.