

**FROM THE LEGAL WRITING CLINIC**  
**WRITING TIP OF THE WEEK**

**ITS VERSUS IT'S**



Don't make the mistake of confusing the possessive "its" with the contractive "it's." "Its" is a pronoun meaning "belonging to it." Like the other possessive pronouns (my, mine, your, yours, his, her, hers, ours, their, and theirs), "its" does not take an apostrophe. Conversely, "it's" with an apostrophe is a contraction meaning "it is" or "it has."

**Here is the simple rule: if you mean "it is" or "it has," use "it's" with an apostrophe. Otherwise, always use "its" without the apostrophe.**

- *Example:* It's important to let justice take its course. (first "it's" is a contraction meaning "it is," so use the apostrophe or write it out; second "its" is possessive, so no apostrophe)
- *Example:* It's been a long time since he visited the site. (contraction meaning "it has," so use the apostrophe or write out the words "it has")
- *Example:* The company will not voluntarily release its financial records. (possessive, so no apostrophe)
- *Example:* The court heard its first case this week. (possessive, so no apostrophe)

Because legal writing is a formal style of writing, however, you will rarely use contractions like "it's." Thus, you will normally write out "it is" or "it has" and use only the possessive "its."

Anne Enquist & Laurel Currie Oates, Just Writing 148, 239, 320 (4th ed. 2013); Laurel Currie Oates & Anne Enquist, The Legal Writing Handbook 680, 775 (5th ed. 2010); Lawmanac—Clickable Help for Legal Writers, "Punctuation, Capitalization & Typeface" (follow "Apostrophe" hyperlink; then follow "Contractions" hyperlink) (C. Edward Good ed., 2009).