

"THE TRACTABLE APOSTROPHE" *

In her book *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, Lynne Truss offers a list of “the various important tasks the apostrophe is obliged to execute every day” (40).

1. It indicates a possessive

Ex. The student’s papers (one student)

Ex. The students’ papers (more than one student)

What about the possessive of proper names ending in “s”? Some guidelines:

a. When a modern name ends in “s,” a second “s” is required after the apostrophe:

Ex. Lynne Truss’s book

b. For names from the ancient world, a second “s” is not required:

Ex. Achilles’ heel

c. If the name ends in an “iz” sound, a second “s” is not required:

Ex. Bridges’ suitcase

d. A second “s” is required for all biblical names *except* Jesus.

Ex. Jesus’ disciples

Ex. Moses’s tablets

2. It indicates time or quantity

Ex. In three week’s time

3. It indicates the omission of figures in dates

Ex. The summer of ’68

4. It indicates the omission of letters

Ex. “We can’t go to Jo’burg (We cannot go to Johannesburg—perhaps because we can’t spell the middle bit)” (42).

5. It indicates strange, non-standard English

Ex. “‘Appen yer’d better ’ave this key, an’ Ah min fend for t’ bods some other road” (from *Lady Chatterly’s Lover*, quoted in Truss 2003:44).

6. It features in Irish names such as O’Neill and O’Callaghan

7. It indicates the plurals of letters

Ex. How many A’s did you get this semester?

8. It also indicates plurals of words

Ex. What are the do’s and don’t’s?

*Material taken from Truss, Lynne, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, New York: Gotham Books, 2003, Pp. 35-67.