

Functional Skills

English

Level 2 Writing W5b

Punctuate Written Text using Apostrophes Accurately
v1.0

Functional Skills English:

Level 2

Skill Standard:

Writing W5b

Coverage and Range:

Accurately punctuate written text using apostrophes.

'This builds on the requirement for accuracy in the use of full stops, capital letters and question marks at previous levels, including correct use of standard punctuation.

'A high level of accuracy is essential if the writing is to be functional – not only to be understood but presented in the most effective way with no negative impact on the outcome or reader.

'Learners should understand how incorrect punctuation can alter the meaning and emphasis of written text and is likely to reduce both comprehension and interest.'¹

¹ QCA Functional Skills guidance: amplification of the standards June 2008 QCA/08/3700

Possessive Apostrophes

Formally, apostrophes are used for two main purposes, the first of which is to show a relationship between one thing and another. These are known as *possessive* apostrophes.

The purpose of possessive apostrophes is to show ownership of, or a relationship between, a possessor and a possession. They must only be used where there is a sense of *belonging*. Note, though, that whilst possessive nouns do take apostrophes (as will be shown below), possessive pronouns do not. *Yours, his, hers, its, theirs* and *ours* do show possession, but none of them ever need an apostrophe. (*It's* is merely a contraction of *it is* or *it has*.)

Nouns

The term **singular** refers to just one of something, e.g. jockey, islander or audience, whereas **plural** refers to more than one of something, e.g. tigers, cherries or children.

When determining whether a possessor is singular or plural, do not be confused by collective nouns, e.g. *choir, herd* or *team*. Although these words do refer to multiple people or animals, they do so **collectively**. Unless they are themselves clearly pluralised, e.g. *choirs, herds* or *teams*, they should be considered to be singular.

Exercise 1

To test your understanding, circle all the singular nouns in this table.

army	Amy	gateaux	band (elastic)
classes	lice	cacti	band (musical)
diagnoses	father	phenomenon	radius
strata	swarms	oxen	zoos

Possessives

Imagine that a boy called Julian has misplaced his frisbee. If we wish to describe this scenario without using an apostrophe, we are restricted to saying:

The frisbee of Julian has been lost.
 possession possessor

Although this makes sense, it does sound slightly awkward. What would be better would be to **reverse** the positions of the possession and the possessor, and then make use of an apostrophe to demonstrate the relationship:

Julian's frisbee has been lost.
 possessor possession

In this new sentence style, the key points to note are that:

- the possessor **always** appears first;
- the apostrophe **always** goes with it;
- the possession **always** comes next (except where there's a needless duplication*);
- possessors and possessions can be made of single or multiple words;
- possessions **never** take apostrophes;
- the change can occasionally require other words to be removed** (in the above case **the**);
- and you should typically pronounce an extra '**zz**' sound at the end of the possessor.

Also, don't get hung up on the terms *possessor* and *possession*. It might strike you as odd to think of someone *possessing* their parents, or how abstract terms can possess anything at all, but it makes things easier if you focus on the idea of it being a relationship (*Jennifer's mum and dad*) or a sense of belonging (*in an hour's time*).

* The 'needless duplication' referred to above is in sentences such as:

Finlay's grades were better than Hannah's ~~grades~~.

I went to my mum and dad's ~~home~~ yesterday.

As we're clearly referring to Hannah's **grades**, we can freely omit the second instance of that word because it is obvious what is being written about. Likewise, in this informal context, and absent any reference to a boat, villa, house or other location, the speaker can only be referring to their parents' **home**, hence there's no need to say it.

** In terms of words moving, the typical examples are where negative sentiments are expressed at the beginnings of sentences:

'Weren't they meant to be in detention?' becomes *'Were they **not** meant to be in detention?'*, rather than *'Were **not** they...'*

'Couldn't you have sorted this yesterday?' becomes *'Could you **not** have sorted this yesterday?'*, rather than, *'Could **not** you...'*

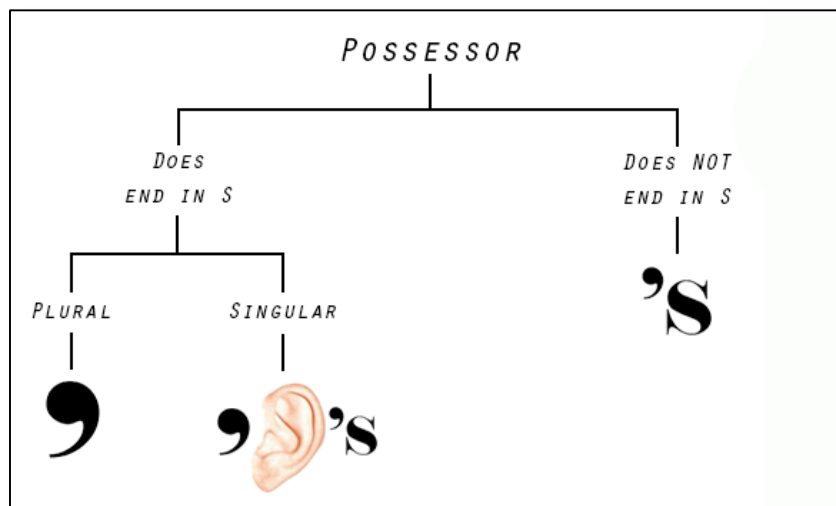
Exercise 2

Fill in the blanks by correctly rearranging these sentences into their traditional forms.

Traditional Possessive Form	Apostrophic Form
The weather of next Tuesday	Next Tuesday's weather
The throne of King James	King James's throne
My heel of Achilles	My Achilles' heel
In the time of a moment	In a moment's time
The dresses of the girls	Girls' dresses
The former country homes of the duke	The duke's former country homes
The wife of the uncle of my mother	My mother's uncle's wife
_____	Henry the third's armour
_____	The sun's rays
_____	The White Star Line's flagship
_____	My brother's friend's sister

In the examples above, you will hopefully have noticed that the name of the possessor can include *more than one word*, and that whilst some possessors are followed by just an apostrophe, others have an apostrophe and an s. This latter difference is caused by two factors: whether the possessor *ends in s or not*, and whether it is *singular or plural*.

Take a look at this flowchart:



Possessors that do not end in s

As the chart shows, regardless of whether the possessor is singular or plural, if it *doesn't* end in s you always need to add both the letter and an apostrophe and pronounce the 'zz':

New Zealand's constitution	All the president's men	In one month's time
The public's opinions	The audience's favourite	My best friend's opinion
The man in the moon's smile	The world's best restaurant	Great aunt Daisy's garden
1990's best-selling album	1929's Wall Street Crash	Peter Piper's pickled peppers
Matthew and Sarah's wedding	An exhibition of Picasso's, Vermeer's and Dali's art.	

Note: When plural possessors are used in a pair or a group, i.e. they have *shared* possessions, only the last of them carries an apostrophe, e.g. Matthew is marrying Sarah, so the wedding belongs to them as a couple. However, where several possessors each own separate possessions, all of them require apostrophes, e.g. an exhibition of the art of Picasso, the art of Vermeer and the art of Dali, rather than an exhibition of art that the three of them made together.

Plural possessors that end in s

Where the possessor already ends in **s**, a distinction has to be made. If the possessor is plural, add an apostrophe in every instance and don't pronounce the 'zz':

The teachers' pension fund	The astronauts' landing module
The turtles' pizzas	The super heroes' powers
The 1980s' best band was...	The nineteen-eighties' best band was...
Manchester Girls' Grammar School	Potatoes' skins with sour cream
The Wilsons' home	Johnsons' crisps are my favourite.

Where the possessor is a pluralised surname that originally ended in s, the suggestion is to rewrite your sentence so as not to use a comma. This potentially avoids any issues with the Joneses' house (the house of the Jones family), the Hopkinses' car (Mr and Mrs Hopkins' car), or the Knowleses' party (the Knowles family's party).

Singular possessors that end in s

If the possessor ends in **s** and is singular, however, the suggested response is to *typically* add an apostrophe and an s at the end of the possessor, e.g.

Thomas's bike	James's rowing boat
Dallas's football team	My boss's pay rise

As expected, the addition of an apostrophe and an s brings with it the **'zz'** sound when you say these out loud. Whilst in the above cases this is fine, in other cases it can sound awkward. For these singular possessors just add an apostrophe and don't say the **'zz'**:

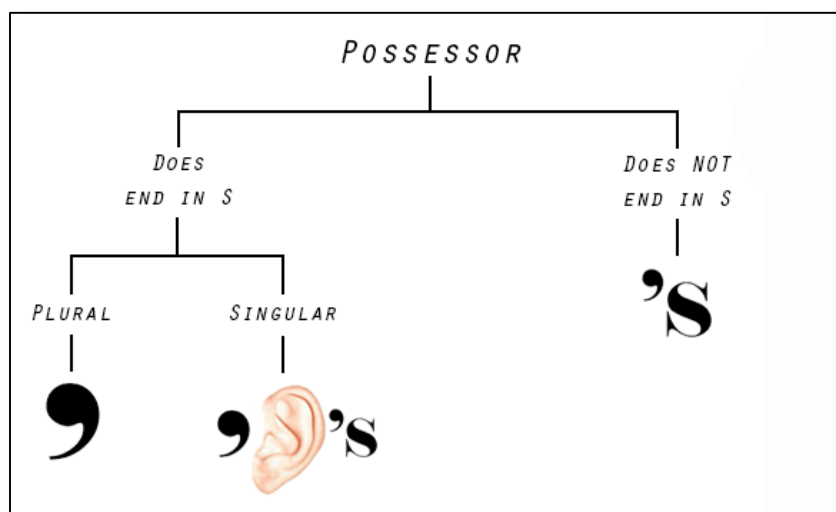
✓	✗
Jimmy Connors' racquet	Jimmy Connors's racquet (Connorsz)
Kingston-upon-Thames' mayor	Kingston-upon-Thames's mayor (Thamesz)
St. Helens' Rugby Club	St. Helens's Rugby Club (St. Helensz)
Cowes' harbour wall	Cowes's harbour wall (Cowesz)
The Middle Ages' worst jobs	The Middle Ages's worst jobs (Agesz)
Athens' tourist sites	Athens's tourist sites (Athensz)
The East Midlands' premier conference venue	The East Midlands's premier conference venue (Midlandsz)

Exercise 3

Identify whether the possessors in these sentences are *singular* or *plural* and circle your answer.

- | | |
|---|-------------------|
| a) The holidaymakers' chalets were out of this world. | Singular / Plural |
| b) Anne Frank's parents, Otto and Edith. | Singular / Plural |
| c) The hurricanes' trails of devastation were easy to see. | Singular / Plural |
| d) My family's doctor is actually Elizabeth's father. | Singular / Plural |
| e) The white-tailed eagle's range extends over almost all of Eurasia. | Singular / Plural |
| f) Fishing's popularity has exploded in recent years. | Singular / Plural |
| g) Steve Ovet and Sebastian Coe's rivalry was intense. | Singular / Plural |
| h) Katy Perry's latest album has sold very well. | Singular / Plural |
| i) Rain, snow and sleet from the 1 st to the 31 st . December's forecast is the worst I've ever seen. | Singular / Plural |
| j) The editors-in-chief's annual ball is sold out. | Singular / Plural |
| k) Farmers' markets are very popular in rural counties. | Singular / Plural |

To test your understanding, answer all the questions below. We have reproduced the flowchart here in order to assist you.



Exercise 4

Convert all these sentences from the traditional possessive form by rearranging the possessors and possessions and adding apostrophes where needed. Take care!

a) The boots of the farmer were covered in mud from the field.

b) The headlights of both of the cars were damaged during the collision.

c) Whilst on holiday, I visited the beaches of the Gold Coast.

d) During the match, the goalkeeper of France fouled the captain of the England team.

e) The mother of Megan saw the father of Robert whilst she was out shopping.

f) The car park of the ground was crowded with the vehicles of the away fans.

Exercise 5

In the following blog post there are several words which require apostrophes. Insert them.

My Favourite Animals

The Himalayan pika is a small, mountain-dwelling mammal related to rabbits and hares. Typically about 6 inches long, pikas are so cute and adorable I just love them.

Bengal tigers are my next best animal, as I once saw one in the wild. The tigers black and orange coat was lovely and its eyes glinted in the light from the setting sun. It was magical.

Dolphins squeaks endear them to me, so they take third place in my list. Highly intelligent, they have been known to help drowning humans.

Blue whales come next. They are the longest and heaviest animals to have ever lived, and that takes some doing. Whales songs can be heard more than 500 miles away.

Blyth's Kingfisher is fifth and last in my list. Named after the English zoologist, Edward Blyth, many of these kingfishers homes are under threat from illegal logging.

Exercise 6

A tough one. The sentences below need proofreading. Several are missing one or more apostrophes and/or an extra letter s, some need these features moving or removing, whilst others are fine as they are.

Proofread each sentence and amend where necessary.

- a) The unicycles tyres are flat.
- b) Both the footballers heads were injured during the collision.
- c) Johns and Edwards birthday is on Wednesday. They're identical twins.
- d) Maries' holiday has been cancelled.
- e) The buses will arrive in twenty minutes.
- f) I was only given two day's notice of the changes.
- g) I lived overseas for almost five years.
- h) Martin's mothers' yoga class has been moved to Tuesday evening.
- i) The party at Chris' house is going to be great.
- j) I own all the bananas' in that field.
- k) The kids's club at our hotel last year was brilliant.
- l) Great albatrosses wingspans are the biggest of all living birds.
- m) Greengocers' often mispunctuate the words fruits' and vegetables'.
- n) In Greek mythology, Zeus home was said to be atop Mount Olympus.
- o) The Ross and Davis seas are both in the southern ocean.

Exercise 7

You're reading a magazine whilst on holiday in which appears the article below. Read it and then both insert missing possessive apostrophes and remove any unnecessary ones.

The Lowe Down: Highway Crimes' and Misdemeanours'

By Simon Lowe

On average, more than 100 cyclist's are killed each year on Britains roads, whilst almost 20,000 more are injured, many seriously. Indeed, many motorist's attitudes towards bike riders are grotesquely inconsiderate and bone-headed, often blaming them for causing delays' and worsening traffic problems, neither of which is true.

Everyone also recognises that cycling, in and of itself, is hugely beneficial. 'Spoke jockeys' live longer, take fewer days off work, are more productive, happier and fitter than their four-wheeled compatriots. In the UK, however, government spending on cycling infrastructure is, by all international standards', pathetic. Whilst investment in London has increased recently, it is still poor compared to other major cities, with matters outside the capital shoddy and sporadic at best and wilfully neglectful at worst. Cycle lanes are rare if non-existent, signage is conflicted, and the whole attitude of officialdom smacks of anything but support.

Despite the obvious risks of road riding, in legal terms it remains unlawful for cyclists to use their conveyances on Britains' pavements'. With the roads so unsafe, however, I am calling for this to change. Queen Victoria was on the throne when this law was passed and cars hadn't even been invented, so it is high time that this relic was brought up to date to take into account the realities' of the 21st century.

Are you nodding your head at Simons' article, or have his claims got your blood pressure to boiling point? Either way, let us know your thoughts by emailing

newsdesk@cyclotronmagazine.com

Exercise 8

You're reading an online newspaper and see the following pop-up advert. Read it and then both insert missing possessive apostrophes and remove any misplaced ones.

Earthquake Response Relief (E.R.R.) Emergency Appeal

During the night of 12th July, a magnitude 8.5 earthquake struck the area in the immediate vicinity of Yakutsk, eastern Russia. Even though the locality is sparsely inhabited, the quake has caused numerous casualties' and extensive damage.

According to early local reports received on long wave emergency radio transmitters, the vast majority of the housing stock and municipal buildings have been destabilised, with approximately a quarter of all building's completely destroyed. The local TV transmitting tower has collapsed, as has the only bridge over the local river and the airports sole control tower. Gas leak's and fire's are widespread, and the power supply from the towns' only generating station has failed.

Yakutsk (population 290,000) is the capital of the Sakha Republic, the biggest of all of Russias' internal regions and historically deemed part of Siberia. Despite its size and scale, it has fewer than 1 million people occupying an area just smaller than India (population 1,210 million).

There are also only two nearby cities' (Chita and Khabarovsk), but this is a purely relative term a search of them is over 1,200 miles away. To make matters worse, the only motor way is on the eastern side of the river Lena, whilst the city is on the west. With the bridge destroyed and the airport out of action, at present the city is completely cut off.

We Need Your Help

The ERR has launched an emergency appeal to collect funds in aid of the people of Yakutsk. The situation is described as dire and the victims plight is desperate. Whilst aid convoys will depart immediately for the site, we need to helicopter engineers in to repair the vital infrastructure that will allow the road-borne provisions to make it to the city.

Please give what you can. Thank you.

Omissive Apostrophes

The second main purpose of apostrophes is to show where letters have been removed from a word or words. These are known as **omissive** apostrophes.

Standard shortened words (known as contractions) make use of apostrophes to replace the letter or letters which have been missed out. There are also lots of non-standard or colloquial contractions such as *ain't* (am not / are not) or *gi'o'er* (give over, i.e. stop it), but these should be avoided in writing and speech. Standard omissive apostrophes tend to be used informally, so if you are writing a formal piece of text such as a job application letter, you should proofread your work to make sure that it contains no contractions.

Example Standard Contractions

had	-d
did	
would	
are	-re

not	-n't
of / of the	o'-
will	-ll
shall	

is	-s
does	
has	
have	

Typical examples therefore include:

could not	couldn't
we have	we've
was not	wasn't
I would	I'd
should have	should've
it is / it has	it's
might not	mightn't
let us	let's
I am	I'm
o'clock	of the clock
it was	'twas

In most these cases you can see that there is a regular pattern, whereby letters are removed and an apostrophe is put in their place. There are, however, exceptions to this rule, some of which include:

will not	won't
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This is probably because in Middle English **will** was sometimes spelt **woll**.

are you not	aren't you
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When shortened, the word order of "*are you not*" is effectively changed to "*are not you*", which in turn gives us "*aren't you*".

will you not	won't you
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"*Will you not*" acts likewise ("*will not you*") in order to become "*won't you*".

there are	there's
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"*There are*" should, in theory, become "*There're*", but in reality this is almost never used. In fact you're 350 times more likely to see these words contracted to "*There's*", which nowadays serves as the shortened form of both "*there are*" and "*there is*".

there are	there's
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On rarer occasions, typically in speech and informal language, there can be more than one apostrophe in a word, e.g. 'If I'd known you were coming ***I'd've*** baked a cake.'

it would have	it'd've
she would have	she'd've
might not have	mightn't've
forecastle (on a ship)	fo'c's'le

Exercise 1

Where *possible*, rewrite the following sentences to include contractions.

a) I did not expect that.

b) My ISA has not got much money in it.

c) The busker near the station is great.

d) They had said yesterday was really cold.

e) The car's engine cannot be started.

f) I have not got a clue.

g) It was the night before Christmas.

h) They would have been cheaper elsewhere.

i) I would not do that if I were you.

j) That is the correct answer.

Exercise 2

Identify the contractions in the following sentences and then write in their original, uncontracted forms.

a) It'd've been nice to see the show.

b) Who's going to pay for this?

c) I was left thinking: hadn't we been here before?

d) She simply couldn't bear it.

e) Weren't you at the last party in June?

f) You won't forget to give her a ring will you?

g) We're all going on holiday tomorrow!

h) Who're you going with?

i) Mightn't it look better over here?

j) What've you done that for?

Exercise 3

Proofread the extract from a formal email (below) and remove any contractions.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I'm writing to you to complain about the three-month old fridge freezer that I bought from your company in June. I've had to endure its banging and crashing for too long now and I would like a replacement sending out. Please don't try and fob me off with yet another engineer's visit as I have seen two already, and whilst both claimed to have fixed the problem, neither has. The fridge freezer itself frequently sounds like a rusty old car being hand-cranked into life. It's so loud that when it starts making noises in the night it's capable of waking me and my wife up!

There's clearly an issue with the compressor fan, which is where the noise is coming from. If I had to speculate, I'd say that there's a leak which is causing a build-up of ice inside the freezer compartment. When this gets thick enough and the compressor kicks in, it must start to interfere with the rotation of the fan blades – hence the racket.

I'm deeply unimpressed with this entire situation and still waiting for you to reply to the last email I sent out.

I can't afford to buy a new fridge freezer, and it's still under warranty. I'd been led to believe that your customer service was the best in the industry, but from what I've experienced I have yet to see this be the case.

I'll look forward to hearing from you by return of post.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Ricky Fritchley

Informal Apostrophes

Whilst apostrophes should formally be either *possessive* or *omissive*, they can informally sneak into a handful of other written situations.

Informal Language

To represent accents in written texts, some authors use apostrophes to show dropped letters:

"I'm goin' 'ome," said Stan, stomping along the cobbled road from the mill.

Rusty waved from the back of his horse. "Y'all have a good time, y'hear."

Wheear 'ast tha bin sin' ah saw thee? (Where have you been since I saw you?) On Ilkla Moor baht 'at. (On Ilkley Moor without a hat.)

*'Arry was 'ere. 'Ere 'Arry was. Was 'Arry 'ere? Course 'e was!
(Harry was here. Here Harry was. Was Harry here? Of course he was.)*

Plurals

It was stated earlier that standard plurals and possessions never take apostrophes, and this rule should always be adhered to. To add to the confusion surrounding this topic, though, some writers still insist in using them in a handful of unusual instances, one of which is when pluralising letters, numbers and already apostrophised words:

Always remember to dot your i's and cross your t's.

We're at 6's and 7's in here.

Possesses possesses five s's.

The do's and don't's of diving.

None of the above forms are recommended, though sometimes they are inescapable. In order to avoid them where possible, the alternative options include:

Always remember to dot each I and cross every T. (Not using plurals.)

We're at sixes and sevens in here. (Using words in lieu of numbers.)

Possesses possesses five esses. (Using names instead.)

The DOs and DON'Ts of diving. (Or using upper case letters.)

Conclusion

Possessive Apostrophes:

The most important things to remember about **possessive apostrophes** are as follows:

1. They show a relationship (a sense of belonging) between a noun and another noun (or pronoun);
2. They only ever go on the end of the possessor – never on the possession;
3. They are used to replace the words 'of' or 'of the' within a sentence;
4. They can be used in series (mother's friend's husband's budgie);
5. And they are never to be used with simple standard plurals.

Omissive Apostrophes:

are used to replace a letter or letters in a word;

and should not be used in formal writing.

Exercise 4

1. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) Japanese's isn't my favourite subject.
- B) Japanese is n't my favourite subject.
- C) Japaneses' is not my favourite subject.
- D) Japanese isn't my favourite subject.

2. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) I have'nt heard from my sister-in-law since last weekend.
- B) I have n't heard from my sister-in-law since last weekend.
- C) I havn't heard from my sister-in-law since last weekend.

3. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) Mrs Jones willn't forgot to pick up the dry cleaning.
- B) Mrs Jones will not forgot to pick up the dry cleaning.
- C) Mrs Jones wont forgot to pick up the dry cleaning.
- D) Mrs Jones won't forgot to pick up the dry cleaning.

4. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) It mightn't be a good idea to go in there
- B) It might'nt be a good idea to go in there.
- C) It might not be a good idea to go in there.

5. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) Wards 21 and 23 hadn't been swept properly.
- B) Wards 21 and 23 hadnt been swept properly.
- C) Wards 21 and 23 had'nt been swept properly.

6. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) Whats the time, Mr Wolf?
- B) What's the time, Mr Wolf?
- C) Whats' the time, Mr Wolf?

7. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) *Its* is often mistaken for *it's* in sentences such as, 'The dogs wagging its tail.'
- B) *Its* is often mistaken for *it's* in sentences such as, 'The dogs' wagging it's tail.'
- C) *Its* is often mistaken for *it's* in sentences such as, 'The dog's wagging its tail.'
- D) *Its* is often mistaken for *it's* in sentences such as, 'The dogs wagging it's tail.'

8. Choose the sentence(s) which are correctly punctuated.

- A) The cities' parks arent pleasant places in summer.
- B) The cities' parks ar'nt pleasant places in summer.
- C) The cities' parks are'nt pleasant places in summer.
- D) The cities' parks aren't pleasant places in summer.

9. Choose the correct sentence.

- A) Mr Andreou said hell return to Cyprus very soon.
- B) Mr Andreou said he wi'll return to Cyprus very soon.
- C) Mr Andreou said he'll return to Cyprus very soon.
- D) Mr Andreou said he' will return to Cyprus very soon.

10. Choose the correct sentence.

- A) The sales manager should've seen this coming.
- B) The sales manager shouldve seen this coming.
- C) The sales managers shou'ldve seen this coming.

