

How to use contractions in a sentence

Used every day orally but also in writing in a familiar language register, contractions (or *contracted forms*) are part of the basic things to know in English: it is relatively simple, it is just a matter of shortening and combining two words by putting an apostrophe where the letters have disappeared.

Contractions can be made with the auxiliary verbs be, have and do, and modal auxiliaries. In affirmative sentences, only be, have, will/shall and would have contracted forms.

BE

In the affirmative form:

Only the forms of the present tense are contracted:

- I am = I'm
- you are = you're
- he is = he's
- she is = she's
- it is = it's
- we are = we're
- they are = they're

Examples:

- Hi, I'm Kevin → Salut, je suis Kevin
- She's very kind → Elle est très gentille

In negative form:

To make the negative form of the first person singular, simply contract **I am (= I'm)** and add **not**: **I am not** becomes **I'm not**

- I'm not going to the party.

Be careful, in interro-negative sentences and tags, **am not** becomes **aren't**:

- Aren't I going to see you again?
- She is right, aren't she?

are not becomes **aren't**

- Aren't you Frank's sister?

was not becomes **wasn't**

- The water **was not** cold.

is not becomes **isn't**

- This **isn't** free.

were not becomes **weren't**

- Why **weren't** you at school?

HAVE

The forms of the present and the past can be contracted:

In the affirmative form and in the present

- I have = I've
- you have = you've
- he has = he's
- she has = she's
- it has = it's
- we have = we've
- they have = they've

Examples:

- I've been to New York twice (= I have been to New York twice)
- My sister's got married (= My sister has got married)

⚠ **has is usually not contracted with a subject when it is the main verb of the sentence. Instead, we use got (which is the past participle of get):**

- We have a yellow house : we don't say *We've a yellow house* but *We've got a yellow house*
- I have good news : we don't say *I've good news* but *I've got good news*

⚠ **How not to confuse has and is when they are contracted?**

The contraction -'s can be put in place of **is** as well as **has**:

She's forgotten can mean the following:

- She **has** forgotten.
- She **is** forgotten.

To distinguish them it is simple: when it is followed by the past participle, it means that the contraction has been formed with **has**. In other cases, it is a question of **is**:

- He's eaten = He **has** eaten
- He's eating = He **is** eating
- It's rained = It **has** rained

- It's rain = It **is** rain

HAVE contracted in the past

- I had = I'd
- you had = you'd
- he had = he'd
- she had = she'd
- it had = it'd
- we had = we'd
- they had = they'd

Examples:

- I'd decided to leave (= I had decided to leave)
- He'd changed his mind (= He had changed his mind)

HAVE contracted to negative form:

have becomes haven't

- We **haven't** eaten yet.

has becomes hasn't

- He **hasn't** got it.

had becomes hadn't

- I **hadn't** seen my parents in five years.

WILL

Will is transformed into 'll with a contracted form:

- I'll come tomorrow.
- It'll be all right.

WOULD

Would is transformed into **d'** in the contracted form:

- Tina said she'd help me.
- I'd rather have juice.

ATTENTION

The **-'d** contraction can be put in place of **had** as well as **would**. The **-d'** used for had only appears in past perfect sentences and is always followed by a past participle.

I wish that he'd leave can mean the following:

- I wish that he **had** left.
- I wish that he **would** leave.

Other common contractions

- that is / that has = that's
- that will = that'll
- that would = that'd
- that had = that'd
- there is / there has = there's
- there has = there's
- there will = there'll
- there had = there'd
- there would = there'd
- let us = let's
- here is = here's
- what is / what has = what's
- what will / what shall = what'll
- where is / where has = where's
- who is / who has = who's
- who have = who've
- who had / who would = who'd
- who will / who shall = who'll

Negative contractions

DO

do becomes don't

- I don't live here.

does becomes doesn't

- She doesn't agree.

did becomes didn't

- Why didn't you tell me?

MODAL AUXILIARIES

In negative and interrogative sentences, all auxiliaries have contracted forms (except *may*):

can becomes can't

- Sarah **can't** speak french.

could becomes couldn't

- When I was young, I **couldn't** eat cheese.

should becomes shouldn't

- You **shouldn't** smoke.

would becomes wouldn't

- I **wouldn't** say that if I were you.

must becomes mustn't

- You **mustn't** be so slow.

will becomes won't

- I **won't** go to Japan.

need becomes needn't

- You **needn't** call him. He will be here in five minutes.

might becomes mightn't

- He **mightn't** have come.

CONTRACTIONS: SOME TIPS TO KNOW

⚠ **Contractions with BE cannot be used alone, in response to a question**

- Who is leaving? → I am. ~~I'm.~~
- Is it ok? → Yes, it is. ~~Yes, it's.~~
- Are they gone? → Yes, they are. ~~Yes, they're.~~

⚠ **Do not confuse the 'd' of the contracted form of would and had**

The auxiliary verbs **would** and **had** both contract with 'd. How to distinguish them?

Would is always followed by an infinitive verb (without *to*)

- I'd like some water please. (= I would like some water please.)
- I'd be glad to meet her. (= I would be glad to meet her.)

Had is followed by a past participle and allows to conjugate to the perfect past, EXCEPT for some expressions (had better, had best...) that use *had* without being followed by a past participle:

- She'd been in my room for three hours. (= She had been in my room for three hours.)
- He'd been watching TV for hours. (= He had been watching TV for hours.)

- Would rather / had rather ? -

In the contracted form, they cannot be distinguished... but they mean the same thing:

- I'd rather stay at home tonight = I **would** rather stay at home tonight / I **had** rather stay at home tonight

⚠ In spoken and familiar language, and especially in American English, the preposition sometimes contracts with the verbal form or name preceding it:

- I gotta go (= I got to)
- She's kinda strange (= kind of)
- I'm gonna kill you! (= going to)
- Where are y'all at? (= Where are you all at?)

⚠ Be careful not to confuse it's and its in writing!

it's is the contraction of **it is** or **it has**

- I think it's going to rain on Friday.

its is a possessive pronoun:

- That's its car.

To find out if you should use **it's** or **its** in writing, just try to replace the word with it is or it has and see if it makes a correct sentence.

"Its raining outside" doesn't mean anything, for example. We must therefore say: **It's (= It is) raining outside.**

⚠ They're, Their and There

Be careful not to confuse the three!

- They're = they are (They're happy to see me)
- Their = possessive pronoun (What is their phone number?)
- There = indicates the location (There is a present on the table)

⚠ A few contractions formed by compressing a word:

Mr. = Mister

Dr. = Doctor

Prof. = Professor

o' = of

o'clock = of the clock

Ma'am = Madam

⚠ An apostrophe does not necessarily mean that it is a contraction

You can add an apostrophe to a name to indicate ownership, belonging:

- Sam's house = The house belongs to Sam
- The dogs' food = The food belongs to the dogs

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