

Missing Letters: How Apostrophes Turn 'Do Not' into 'Don't'

An apostrophe can show where letters are missing: 'do not' becomes 'don't'. This guide introduces a proposed short video and printable matching game for Year 2 children, with gentle ways to explore contractions at home. The activity supports England's English curriculum; schools decide when to teach this content.

What it is

A contraction is a shortened form of a word or group of words. In examples such as 'don't', two words become one, with some letters left out. An apostrophe is the small punctuation mark (') that shows where those letters are missing. Punctuation means the marks we use to help make writing clear.

The proposed Education Makes Sense video and printable activity would turn this into a missing-letter detective game. Children would explore 'do not' and 'don't', 'I am' and 'I'm', and 'we are' and 'we're'.

The Department for Education's English Appendix 2 includes apostrophes for missing letters in Year 2. The game is an optional way to explore that learning, rather than a required school activity.

What happens

In the proposed video, children would see the full words first, then watch which letters disappear as the shortened form is built. For 'do not', the 'o' in 'not' is left out and the words join to make 'don't'. For 'I am', the 'a' is missing in 'I'm'. For 'we are', the 'a' is missing in 'we're'. The apostrophe marks the place of the missing letter in each example.

The printable activity would offer matching pairs: full words on one card and their contraction on another. Children could point to or move the cards, then explain their match. To check, they would expand the contraction, meaning turn it back into the full words. An adult could read the cards aloud or write down the child's explanation.

What it means for your child

The Year 2 English programme includes learning to spell more shortened word forms and use their apostrophes correctly. This activity would give your child a small, clear example to explore before trying a contraction in a sentence of their own.

English Appendix 2 explains that its year-by-year table shows when ideas should first be introduced, rather than when every child must understand them completely. Earlier learning should be revisited. There is no national requirement to teach this particular activity in the autumn term; the school's order of teaching may vary.

If your child has special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), or is learning English, ask their teacher which examples and ways of taking part would suit their current learning. You can keep the activity gentle and familiar.

How you can help at home

Try a brief detective moment while sharing a book or writing a little note together. If you spot 'I'm', say, 'That means I am. Which letter is missing?' Look at both forms together and let your child point to the

answer. You could also write 'we are' and 'we're' on separate scraps of paper and invite them to find the matching pair.

Start with one familiar example and stop when your child has had enough. There is no need for a timed challenge or a page of repeated writing. You can do the writing while your child chooses, points or explains.

For a child learning English, talk about what the full words mean before shortening them. Ask their teacher for examples that connect with classroom learning.

Questions parents often ask

Does the apostrophe always replace one letter? No. It can mark more than one missing letter: 'I will' becomes 'I'll', with 'wi' left out. Begin with the simpler examples in this game.

Does every apostrophe show missing letters? No. Year 2 also includes apostrophes showing that something belongs to someone, as in 'the girl's book'. That is a different use; this activity focuses on missing letters.

Must my child learn this in autumn? The curriculum does not set an autumn deadline for this topic. Ask their teacher when it fits into the school's teaching.

What if my child puts it in the wrong place? Look at the full words together, find the missing letters and rebuild the contraction calmly. Ask the teacher which examples to revisit if your child needs more support.

Sources

- Department for Education — English Appendix 2: Vocabulary, grammar and punctuation, particularly the introduction and Year 2 punctuation content. [Official document] (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7d913aed915d3fb959486f/English_Appendix_2_-_Vocabulary_grammar_and_punctuation.pdf).
- Department for Education, published on GOV.UK — National curriculum in England: English programmes of study, particularly School curriculum, Year 1 word reading and Year 2 spelling and punctuation. [Official guidance](<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-english-programmes-of-study>).