

When to Use Contractions

A contraction is a word that combines two words in a shortened form, usually with an apostrophe taking the place of a letter or letters. Contractions help make prose less formal and more conversational. However, business communicators sometimes wonder when exactly to use a contraction.

In general, contractions should not be used in the following cases:

- in formal writing such as academic papers and legal documents
- when the apostrophe indicates the possessive and could be mistaken for a contraction (the department's copier)
- when the contraction is uncommon (it'd for it would or who're for who are)
- when the contraction requires multiple apostrophes (she'd've for she would have)

In business writing the question of using a contraction depends on the audience and purpose of the communication. For example, when writing important instructions, writers would not use contractions because a formal tone is a signal to readers to consider the content important. On the other hand, using words such as *cannot* and *would not* instead of *can't* and *won't* would sound unnatural in a text message between colleagues.

Your task. In the sentences below, test your knowledge of contractions. Circle the correct choice of a contraction or two separate words and write down the reason that prompted you to make that choice.

1. Don't/Do not use the toaster near water.
2. Hey, Benny, I will/I'll let you know tomorrow when I can drop off the new laptop.
3. Mr. Chen should not have/shouldn't've criticized Maggie in front of everyone.
4. Do not/don't tamper with the blood specimens before they are picked up.
5. The volunteers said they'd/they would hand out water bottles before the movie began.
6. You are/you're invited to join us at Manfield Park for a laid-back barbeque on Labor Day.
7. Effective communication would have/would've led to enhanced productivity, heightened customer satisfaction, and significant cost savings.
8. Although I'm/I am hesitant to be leaving Next.com., working at such an innovative start-up has been a memorable experience.
9. After the interview, I am/ I'm even more excited to become a part of FarmToTable.
10. Passengers shouldn't/should not open the door until the vehicle comes to a complete stop.