Contractions list for kids: 40 common ones, by the word they hide

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A list of 40 common contractions for kids, grouped by the hidden word (not, is, are, will, have, would), with the apostrophe rule and free practice.

A contraction is two words joined into one, with an apostrophe where letters were left out, and most of them hide one of six little words: not, is, are, will, have or would. Learn those six and the 40 contractions below, and a child can read and write nearly every one they meet in a story. Peabody's contractions page has a definition, examples and three questions with answers, free through the end of 2026, with no sign-up and no ads.

The list is grouped by the hidden word because that is how children learn them best. When a child sees "don't", the useful thought is "that is do plus not".

The list

Contractions with not

- Contraction: isn't · Two words: is not · In a sentence: The soup isn't hot.
- Contraction: aren't · Two words: are not · In a sentence: The shoes aren't dry.
- Contraction: wasn't · Two words: was not · In a sentence: It wasn't raining.
- Contraction: weren't · Two words: were not · In a sentence: We weren't late.
- Contraction: don't · Two words: do not · In a sentence: I don't like mud.
- Contraction: doesn't · Two words: does not · In a sentence: The dog doesn't bark.
- Contraction: didn't · Two words: did not · In a sentence: She didn't see the bus.
- Contraction: can't · Two words: cannot · In a sentence: I can't find my hat.
- Contraction: couldn't · Two words: could not · In a sentence: He couldn't reach the shelf.
- Contraction: won't · Two words: will not · In a sentence: The door won't open.
- Contraction: wouldn't · Two words: would not · In a sentence: I wouldn't pet that bee.
- Contraction: shouldn't · Two words: should not · In a sentence: We shouldn't run inside.
- Contraction: haven't · Two words: have not · In a sentence: They haven't eaten.
- Contraction: hasn't · Two words: has not · In a sentence: The cat hasn't moved.

Contractions with is (and I'm, which hides am)

- Contraction: I'm · Two words: I am · In a sentence: I'm ready for lunch.
- Contraction: he's · Two words: he is · In a sentence: He's at the door.
- Contraction: she's · Two words: she is · In a sentence: She's my sister.
- Contraction: it's · Two words: it is · In a sentence: It's snowing.

- Contraction: that's · Two words: that is · In a sentence: That's my seat.
- Contraction: what's · Two words: what is · In a sentence: What's for dinner?
- Contraction: where's · Two words: where is · In a sentence: Where's my shoe?

Contractions with are

- Contraction: you're · Two words: you are · In a sentence: You're my friend.
- Contraction: we're · Two words: we are · In a sentence: We're going to the park.
- Contraction: they're · Two words: they are · In a sentence: They're in the garden.

Contractions with will

- Contraction: I'll · Two words: I will · In a sentence: I'll help you.
- Contraction: you'll · Two words: you will · In a sentence: You'll like this book.
- Contraction: he'll · Two words: he will · In a sentence: He'll be here soon.
- Contraction: she'll · Two words: she will · In a sentence: She'll call after school.
- Contraction: we'll · Two words: we will · In a sentence: We'll go after lunch.
- Contraction: they'll · Two words: they will · In a sentence: They'll win the game.

Contractions with have

- Contraction: I've · Two words: I have · In a sentence: I've lost a sock.
- Contraction: you've · Two words: you have · In a sentence: You've grown a lot.
- Contraction: we've · Two words: we have · In a sentence: We've finished the puzzle.
- Contraction: they've · Two words: they have · In a sentence: They've fed the fish.

Contractions with would

- Contraction: I'd · Two words: I would · In a sentence: I'd like a pear.
- Contraction: you'd · Two words: you would · In a sentence: You'd love this game.
- Contraction: he'd · Two words: he would · In a sentence: He'd come if he could.
- Contraction: she'd · Two words: she would · In a sentence: She'd rather have toast.
- Contraction: we'd · Two words: we would · In a sentence: We'd like to play.
- Contraction: they'd · Two words: they would · In a sentence: They'd bring snacks.

That is 14 with not, 7 with is or am, 3 with are, 6 with will, 4 with have and 6 with would, which makes 40. Some of them, such as "he'd", can also stand for "he had", so the sentence tells you which one is meant.

The apostrophe rule

The apostrophe goes where the letters came out, not where the two words met. Take did and not. Join them and the o of not drops out: didn't. The apostrophe sits in the gap where the o was, between the n and the t.

- Two words: did not · Letters left out: o · Contraction: didn't
- Two words: I am · Letters left out: a · Contraction: I'm
- Two words: we will · Letters left out: wi · Contraction: we'll
- Two words: they have · Letters left out: ha · Contraction: they've

Two contractions do not follow the pattern. Won't comes from will not and the vowel changes, and can't comes from cannot, which is one word to start with. Teach those two as sight words.

The three that trip everyone

Three contractions sound exactly like other words, so children write the wrong one all the time. Teach the test: say the long form out loud, and if it fits, use the apostrophe.

- Word: it's · Means: it is · Test: "It is raining" works, so it's raining.
- Word: its · Means: belongs to it · Test: "The dog wagged it is tail" does not work, so its tail.
- Word: you're · Means: you are · Test: "You are my friend" works, so you're my friend.
- Word: your · Means: belongs to you · Test: "Put on you are coat" does not work, so your coat.
- Word: they're · Means: they are · Test: "They are late" works, so they're late.
- Word: their, there · Means: belongs to them, a place · Test: Neither means "they are".

The homophones page has three ready questions on these pairs.

When to teach them

Children usually read contractions in 1st grade, because they show up in every early story. Writing them with the apostrophe in the right place is a 2nd grade skill (L.2.2c). Start with the six hidden words, then add the contractions one hidden word at a time. The contractions page has the definition, three examples and three questions to try.

Practice that takes five minutes

1. Say it long, then short. You say "do not" and your child says "don't". Swap roles and make it a race.
2. Hunt in a story. Open one page of a story from the library and find every contraction. Ask what two words each one hides.
3. Match the pair. Write the contraction on one card and the two words on another, mix the cards and match them.

Peabody does not have a contractions game. It has a page for the skill, flashcards linked from that page, and the grammar hub with the other skills.

Questions grown-ups ask

What is a contraction?

A contraction is a shortened form of two words, written with an apostrophe in place of the missing letters. Don't is do not, and we'll is we will.

What grade are contractions taught?

Children meet them in reading in kindergarten and 1st grade, and the Common Core standard for using an apostrophe to form contractions is in 2nd grade.

Is "won't" a contraction?

Yes. It is the short form of will not, but it does not follow the usual pattern, so it is best learned as a word.

Should children use contractions in school writing?

In stories, letters and everyday writing, yes. In formal reports, teachers may ask for the long forms. Ask your child's teacher which they want.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/contractions-list-for-kids