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Oops!

Do I Do That?

Its
vs.
It's

It's is used only as a contraction for *it is* or *it has*. Even when writing about something belonging to *it*, do not use the apostrophe to indicate possession. (You can think of *its* like *his* or *hers* - indicating possession without an apostrophe.)

NO:

Can you make sure the DVD is back in its case?

NO:

I'm surprised its this warm outside today.

YES:

It's been a hard year.

YES:

Do you know if the cat has had its shots yet?

The Scoop on Compound Adjectives

Don't be intimidated by the title; you probably know what compound adjectives are even if you couldn't provide a formal definition.

Compound adjectives are 2 or more adjectives that work together to describe something; consequently, they should be hyphenated (with one major exception, below). Some examples:

- chocolate-dipped strawberries
- well-known mechanic
- expensive-looking jewelry
- fast-acting cleanser
- first-, second-, or third-trimester pregnancy

One easy-to-remember exception: if any of the words preceding the noun end in *ly*, don't use a hyphen. Other examples:

- quickly moving van
- rapidly flowing water

The hyphenation rule with compound adjectives only applies when they come *before* the noun. If you move a sentence around, you'll need to remove the hyphens. One last example:

- Mrs. B became a really well-known teacher after her picture was in the paper.
- Ever since her picture was in the paper, Mrs. B is really well known.

In summary: hyphenate 2 or more adjectives if they come before a noun (unless they end in *ly*), and don't worry about hyphenating compound words at all if they come after the noun.

Nifty Word of the Month

jeune, adjective:

(1) lacking nutritive value; (2) devoid of significance or interest: dull.

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, Jan. 4, 2009)

Start the Year off Right: Know Your 13 Punctuation Marks

Can you name all 13 punctuation marks? Do you know how to use them properly? Make sure 2009 gets off to a good start by providing yourself with a quick refresher:

- | | |
|----------------------|-----|
| 1. Apostrophe | ' |
| 2. Brackets | [] |
| 3. Colon | : |
| 4. Comma | , |
| 5. Dash | — |
| 6. Ellipsis | ... |
| 7. Exclamation Point | ! |
| 8. Hyphen | - |
| 9. Parentheses | () |
| 10. Period | . |
| 11. Question Mark | ? |
| 12. Quotation Marks | " " |
| 13. Semicolon | ; |

The 2009 List of Banished Words

Lake Superior State University (MI) has released its annual List of Banished Words. Started in 1976 by LSSU Public Relations Director W.T. (Bill) Rabe, the list is released every New Year's Day. Some of this year's highlights: *green*, *maverick*, *first dude*, and *bailout*. See more at <http://tinyurl.com/48cj6>.

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