Dear Miss Hyphen,
I don't know where to put an apostrophe, so I just don't use them. What's your advice?
Dont Know,
Utah

Dear Don't,
Don't worry, dear. Most of Great Britain has the same problem, and they invented the language!
Here are the rules for apostrophes. I hope you're successful in improving your punctuation.
Sincerely,
Miss Hyphen

The simple contraction:

Do not becomes don't. The apostrophe replaces the characters that are missing, (in this case the letter o) and always faces left. Examples:
We will becomes We'll
You are becomes You're
You-all becomes Y'all
He will becomes He'll.
This also works with numbers like dates, where characters are missing:
Back in the 1950s (a simple plural) becomes Back in the '50s. The missing characters 1 and 9 are replaced by an apostrophe. It is very common to see 50's, but this is incorrect as 50 in this case does not own anything. It's also common to see '50s. What on Earth does that mean? Don't do this! Use '50s instead.

Possessives:

When a person owns something, the apostrophe is used to connote ownership: Bill's bike, Mary's avocado, Samantha's cold-fusion experiment. When two or more people own something, like a house, the possessive is indicated by an apostrophe after the plural noun: The Smiths' house, Ten years' time (a single year's time is singular). More than one Smith owns the house, ten years own the time.

The Quayles (plural) made punctuation history (along with much of the nation) by putting The Quayle's on their mailbox. The mailbox is owned by the Quayles. But it is not indicated by this bizarre use of punctuation. The mailbox should read: The Quayles. Or, it could read: Quayle meaning that this is the residence of a family named Quayle. In a sentence you could say that there was something (a package from the Unabomber, perhaps) in the Quayles' mailbox; in this case, the Quayles (more than one of them) own the mailbox. The apostrophe indicates possession. The mailbox indicates that this is the house of The Quayles (plural – not possessive).

Some style manuals say that when a person's name ends in s that a singular possessive should be made with just an apostrophe: Janis' hemoglobin (singular). Other style manuals say you should add 's to this: Janis's deoxyribonucleic acid – because that is the way we pronounce it (Janis-es). Curiously, they do it this way in the United Kingdom, though they don't do it consistently. Jones's Dark Ale is a fine, amber example.