

One punctuation mistake that I see a lot these days is people putting an apostrophe in a simple plural. It's what's known as "the grocer's apostrophe". I think that's because it originated on market stalls where people were putting signs with prices, and they would put things like "mangos" and "tomatos". But they spelt them incorrectly without the "e" at the end, and so then when they looked at it, they thought it looked strange, and you could read it as "mangoss" and "tomatoss".

So they put in an apostrophe, helpfully, to make it easier to read. That then spread to "apple's" and "cabbage's", and absolutely everything, and now I see it all the time.

I quite regularly get emails saying "The Moore's are having a party". So that's a family called "Moore", and they spell Moores "Moore's". It doesn't need an apostrophe; it's just a plural.

I think it's particularly tempting when we're dealing with numbers or when we're dealing with capital letters. So "I collect DVDs" – people feel a great urge to put an apostrophe after the capital letters and before the "s". "I was born in the 1960s" – again, people feel the urge, after the numbers, to put an apostrophe before the "s".

The rule is a very simple one. Don't use apostrophes in simple plurals.