Apostrophes—the elevated comma!

Use apostrophes in three situations:

I. To indicate the plural of letters and numbers

   Example: She often forgets to dot her i's and cross her t's. or My 9's look like 4's.

II. To indicate the omission of letters in a contraction

   Examples: do not = don’t, it is = it’s, it has = it's (while these two may seem confusing, they are not in practice. It's cold today. It’s been raining all morning. The first is it is and the second is it has), they are = they’re, you are = you’re, who is = who’s, who has = who's (like it’s above...not confusing), I have = I've, could have = could’ve.

III. To indicate possessive of nouns and all pronoun except the personal pronouns
   a. Use apostrophe s to show the possessive of all singular nouns, pronouns, and irregular plurals (plurals not formed by s)

      Examples: The boy’s bike (one boy owns a bike); the child’s toy (one child owns the toy); the man’s car (one man owns the car); someone’s dog; the men’s committee (plural is irregular); the children’s hour (irregular plural)

   b. Use apostrophe after the s of regular plurals

      Examples: the boys’ bikes (more than one boy); the babies’ room (more than one baby); the ladies’
      c. With proper nouns that end in s, use your ear to determine whether you add an additional s for possessive

      Example: Lois’s purse but James’ shoes....

   d. NO PERSONAL PRONOUN USES AN APOSTROPHE IN THE POSSESSIVE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

   Examples: singular personal pronouns               plural personal pronouns

   I           my, mine                               we           our, ours
   you         your, yours                             you          your, yours
   he          his                                    they         their, theirs
   she         her, hers                               who          whose
   it          its

Problems—

1. Confusion of contractions with possessives. Most college instructors do not allow the informal contraction in their assignments. If you have a paper with its or whose, determine whether you have a contraction by trying to expand the phrase. If you have a contraction, use the full phrase. If you do not have a contraction, you have a possessive...no apostrophe.

2. There is often confused with their......there is an adverb, the opposite of here.
EXERCISE 36–3 The apostrophe

Circle the correct form of the word in parentheses. The first one has been done for you.

Loreta Velazquez was not the only woman (who’s, whose) help was used during the Civil War, nor was being a foot soldier the only way women served in that war.

She was not in combat, but Mary Walker, then in her (thirties, thirty's), served in the Union army. She served with such distinction that she became the first woman to receive the Medal of Honor, the (military's, militarys') highest-ranking medal. It is awarded only to members of the armed (forces, force's) and only for gallantry in action.

Mary (Walker's, Walkers) specialty was surgery. Just as shocking as her profession—the role of military surgeon was not (everyone's, everyones') idea of the proper role for a woman in the 1860s—were Dr. Walker's opinions on how women should dress. She said that women (shouldn't, shouldn't) wear tight corsets because such corsets were injurious to (women's, womens') health. She even considered long skirts unhealthy. She felt so strongly on the subject of women's attire that she herself determined to wear long pants. Army (regulations, regulations') did not permit such attire for a woman. (Who's, Whose) permission was required for her to do so? It required special permission from the U.S. Congress, but Dr. Mary Walker finally won that battle of the Civil War.

She did not live to see the ending of her final battle. After the war, she went back to her private practice of medicine and began fighting for a constitutional amendment to allow women to vote. Congress passed the Twentieth Amendment in 1920. But Mary Walker died before (its, it's) adoption.
EXERCISE 36–2 The apostrophe

A. Each of the following sentences has two words containing apostrophes. Only one of the apostrophes is used correctly in each sentence. Delete or move the other apostrophe. Example:

Further back in American history, one woman's soldiering had made her famous; no one
has yet had a story to match her's.

1. Deborah Sampson never dreamed that she would someday fight in battles' for Amer-
ician independence, much less that the battles' outcomes might depend on her.

2. Because her parents' income was not enough to support their children, Deborah was
sent to live with relatives of her parents' in another town.

3. Later she was sent to live in a foster family with ten sons'; the sons' acceptance of
her was wholehearted, and one son became her fiancé when she grew up.

4. The Revolutionary War wasn't over when news of his death reached Deborah; she
wasn't long in making a major decision.

5. Using a false name, she enlisted to take his place—determined to mind her ps' and
q's so well that she would not be detected.

B. The following sentences contain no apostrophes. Add any that are needed. If a sentence is
correct, mark it "OK." Example:

Who's  who's
Whose to say who's right about Deborah Sampson's decision?

6. If men have the right to fight for their beliefs, should women have the right to fight
for theirs?

7. It's clear that Deborah Sampson thought so; she enlisted twice to fight for hers.

8. On her first attempt, Sampson enlisted almost at the end of the day—and was
discovered before its end arrived.

9. Though drinking was not a habit of hers, she spent her first evening as a soldier
copying other new soldiers behavior.

10. Coming to the aid of this very noisy, very drunk, and very sick "buddy" of theirs,
they soon were asking, "Whose this?"