

CONTRACTIONS IN INFORMAL ENGLISH

It's quite common and natural in everyday English to use such forms as *it's* /ɪts/, *I've* /aɪv/, *isn't* /ɪznt/, *there's* /ðəz/ and others. These are **contractions** and are shortened forms of a word or words. They represent the grammar or spelling of **informal writing**, and the pronunciation of **informal speech**. Though found in informal language only, they are, nonetheless, important when writing informal letters, postcards and notes to friends or even informal emails. Of equal importance is not only using but pronouncing contracted forms correctly when speaking English. Contractions help make your speech sound natural.

STUDY TIPS

Communicating effectively and naturally in English means using contractions in everyday conversational speech.

It is also beneficial to put this into practice for the IELTS Speaking test to capture the rhythm of English in your speech.

Extending the use of contracted forms to informal writing is important because it is common, correct and natural for that style of writing.

Identifying contractions

Contractions are formed with **auxiliary verbs** *be, have* and *do*, and **modal auxiliaries**, including *can, could, might, shall, should, will, would, ought, must* and the semi-modal *need*. They are also formed with **irregular verbs** *be, have* and *do* when they're not auxiliary verbs.

There are two kinds of contractions.
For example:

pronoun noun question word other	}	+ (auxiliary) verb
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They're travelling in China.
 The **weather's** cold.
Where's the party?
Here's the book.

(auxiliary) verb	+	not
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She **won't** be attending the meeting.
 John **can't** have the car tomorrow.

Here is a list of contracted forms.

IRREGULAR VERBS

BE /bi/

Forms	Contractions			Negative Contractions
	Pronouns	Nouns	Question Words	
present tense - 1 st person singular am /æm/ 'm /m/	I'm /aɪm/	∅	∅	
3 rd person singular is /ɪz/ 's /z/ or /s/	he's /hɪz/ she's /ʃiːz/ it's /ɪts/	friend's /frɛndz/ Jack's /ɔːks/ other words: here's /hɪəz/ there's /ðɪəz/ now's /naʊz/	where's /wɛəz/	isn't /ɪznt/ she isn't compare: she's not
other are /a/ 're /ə/ or /rə/	you're /jʊ(r)/ we're /wɛ(r), /wɛ/ or /wɛ(r)/ they're /ðɛ(r) or /ðe(r)/	friends're /frɛndzər/ or /frɛndzə/ sisters're /sɪstəzər/ or /sɪstəzə/ other words: here're /hɪərər/ or /hɪərə/ there're /ðɛərər/ or /ðɛərə/	what're /wɔːtər/ or /wɔːtə/	aren't /ant/ or /arnt/ they aren't compare: they're not
Past tense 1 st and 3 rd person singular was /wɔːz/ or /wəz/	∅	∅	∅	wasn't /wɔːznt/ I wasn't he wasn't she wasn't it wasn't
other were /wɛ/ or /wɛr/	∅	∅	∅	weren't /wɛnt/ or /wɛrnt/ you weren't we weren't they weren't

HAVE /HÆV/

Forms	Contractions			Negative Contractions
	Pronouns	Nouns	Question Words	
present tense - 3 rd person singular has /hæz/, /həz/ or /əz/ 's /z/, /s/	he's /hiz/ she's /ʃiz/ it's /ɪts/	friend's /frɛndz/ Jack's /ɔækz/ other words: there's /ðəz/	where's /wɛəz/	hasn't /hæznt/ he hasn't compare: he's not
other – singular and plural have /hæv/, /həv/ or /əv/ 've /v/ or /v/	I've /aɪv/ you've /juv/ we've /wiv/ they've /ðeɪv/	tables've /teɪblzəv/ sisters've /sɪstəzəv/	what've /wɒtəv/	haven't /hævnt/ they haven't compare: they've not
Past tense singular and plural had /hæd/, /həd/ or /əd/ 'd /d/ or /əd/	I'd /aɪd/ you'd /jud/ he'd /hid/ she'd /ʃɪd/ it'd /ɪtəd/ we'd /wid/ they'd /ðeɪd/	friends'd /frɛndzəd/ sister'd /sɪstəd/ other words: there'd /ðəəd/	who'd /hud/	hadn't /hædnt/ he hadn't compare: he'd not

DO /DU/

Forms	Contractions			Negative Contractions
	Pronouns	Nouns	Question Words	
present tense - 3 rd person singular does /dɔz/ or /dəz/	∅	∅	∅	doesn't /dɔznt/ he doesn't compare: he does not
other – singular and plural do /du/ or /dɔ/	∅	∅	∅	don't /doʊnt/ I don't you don't we don't they don't compare: they do not
Past tense singular and plural did /dɪd/	∅	∅	∅	didn't /dɪdnt/ I didn't you didn't he didn't she didn't it didn't we didn't they didn't compare: he did not

MODALS

WILL /W ɪ/

Forms	Contractions			Negative Contractions
	Pronouns	Nouns	Question Words	
singular and plural will /wɪ/ or /wɪl/ 'll /l/ or /ɪl/	I'll /aɪ/ you'll /ju/ he'll /hi/, /hɪ/ she'll /ʃi/ it'll /ɪt/ we'll /wi/, /wɪ/ they'll /ðeɪ/	friend'll /frɛndəl/ Jim'll /dʒɪməl/ other words: there'll /ðeə/	who'll /hu/	won't /wɒnt/ he won't compare: he will not

WOULD /W ɔː, W əd/

Forms	Contractions			Negative Contractions
	Pronouns	Nouns	Question Words	
singular and plural would /wɔːd/ 'd /d/ or /əd/	I'd /aɪd/ you'd /juːd/ he'd /hiːd/ she'd /ʃiːd/ it'd /ɪtəd/ we'd /wiːd/ they'd /ðeɪd/	friends'd /frɛndzəd/ Sally'd /sæliːd/ other words: there'd /ðeə/	where'd /wɛəd/	wouldn't /wɔːdnt/ he wouldn't compare: he would not

OTHER MODALS

Form stressed and unstressed pronunciation	Negative Contraction	Meaning
can /kæn/, /kən/	can't /kænt/ (Australian English, North American English), /kant/ (Australian English), /kɒnt/ (British English)	cannot
could /kɔːd/, /kəd/	couldn't /kɔːdnt/	could not
might /maɪt/	mightn't /maɪtnt/	might not
shall /ʃæl/, /ʃəl/	shan't /ʃænt/ (British English)	shall not
should /ʃʊd/, /ʃəd/	shouldn't /ʃʊdnt/	should not
ought /ɔːt/	oughtn't /ɔːtnt/	ought not
must /mʌst/, /məst/	mustn't /mʌsnt/	must not
need /niːd/	needn't /niːdnt/	need not

Here is a summary of question and other words, which are commonly contracted.

what's	when's	who's	where's	how's
what'll	when'll	who'll	where'll	how'll
		who'd		
here's	there's	that's		

there'll that'll

Stress in contractions

In spoken English the following type of contraction is unstressed. These contractions are pronounced shorter and quicker, and, therefore, sometimes difficult to hear. It is an important aspect of casual, conversational English.

pronoun noun question word other	}	+	(auxiliary) verb
<p>They'll /ðeɪl/ be living in Thailand.</p> <p>The weather's /wɛðəz/ been warm.</p> <p>How've /haʊv/ you been?</p> <p>There's /ðɜːəz/ been a fire.</p>			

When an auxiliary verb is stressed at the end of a sentence or clause, contractions cannot be formed. For example,

Is he upset?
 Yes, **he is**. ~~Yes, he's.~~

The other type of contraction can be stressed. These are auxiliary verbs in negative contractions, which can, in distinction, be stressed at the end of sentences or clauses. Negatives are stressed in English, and so a contraction containing a negative is usually stressed.

(auxiliary) verb	+	not
<p>He won't /wɒnt/ be sitting the test.</p> <p>You were late today?</p> <p>No, I wasn't /wɒznt/.</p>		

Contractions – confusing forms

Though spelt differently some contractions have the same pronunciation as other grammatical forms. This can cause confusion and misspellings.

Here is a list of such forms.

Word	Pronunciation	Grammar	Example
it's = 'it is' or 'it has'	/ɪts/	contraction	It's been raining all day.
its		possessive	The tree lost its leaves.
you're = 'you are'	/jʊ/	contraction	You're driving too fast.
your		possessive pronoun	Your driver's licence expires today.
they're = 'there are'	/ðeə/	contraction	They're sightseeing today.
their		possessive	They've postponed their holiday.
there		adverb	They'll be travelling there tomorrow.
who's = 'who is'	/huz/	contraction	Who's going tonight?
whose		possessive	Whose tickets are these?

Remember that 'is' ('to be') and 'has' ('to have'), as well as 'had' ('to have') and 'would' ('would'), when used as auxiliary verbs contract to the same form 's' and 'd', respectively. For example:

It's burnt. → It **is** burnt. I'm sorry, I'll lower the setting on the toaster.

It's burnt. → It **has** burnt. I'm sorry, I wasn't watching the time.

They'd travelled to China. → They **had** travelled to China.

They'd travel to China. → They **would** travel to China.

If there is any confusion, the context and grammar would make the meaning clear.