THE APOSTROPHE

The apostrophe first appeared in the English language in the 16th century. In the 17th century, printers started introducing an apostrophe before the 's' in singular possessive cases (Stuart's book).
In the 18th century, printers started putting it after plural possessives as well (the girls' books).

It indicates a possessive in a singular noun:
Stuart's book

When the possessor is plural, but does not end in an 's', the apostrophe precedes the 's':
The children's toys
Men's toilets

It indicates time or quantity:
In one week's time
Two weeks' notice

It indicates the omission of figures in dates:
The winter of '99

It indicates the omission of letters:
It's (it is, it has)
Who's (who is)
We can't go to Jo'burg (Johannesburg)

However, other familiar contractions such as flu (influenza) or photo (photograph) no longer require apostrophes.

It indicates the plurals of letters:
How many t's are there in Stuart?

It indicates the plurals of words:
What are the do's and don'ts in this company?

The possessive of proper names ending in "s":
With modern names ending in 's' (including biblical names, and any foreign name with an unpronounced final 's'), the 's' is required after the apostrophe:
Keats's poems
Mrs. Jones's book
St James's Square

With names from the ancient world, it is not required:

ENGLISH 4 PROFESSIONALS
—— NEVER STOP LEARNING ——

Archimedes' screw
Achilles' heel

If the name ends in an "iz" sound, an exception is made:
Bridges' score
Moses' tablets
Jesus' disciples
The Joneses' house

Extracts from: **Eats, shoots & leaves**, Lynne Truss, 2003. Profile books ltd.

Examples:
For goodness' sake
In two years' time. In two years.
Earlier, employers' group CBI called on the government to…
Mr. Balls' move to try and gain extra money…
A drying up of orders has hit shipyards' cash-flow…
The boom years' excesses…
Purchasing managers' indices…
… a deficiency of shareholders' funds.
Advanced countries' deficits…
The 17% cut announced fell short of environmental groups' hopes…
A bailout that was a consequence of Lloyds' rescue of rival HBOS
Protect investors' interests…
The banks' shareholders may protest but…
The flight assistants' union…
The United Nations' top climate change official said…
Voters' discontent
The UK is being left behind in the international race for a well-qualified workforce, a lecturers' union has said.
Barclays' third-quarter results were published in November.
The treasury was justified in using taxpayers' money to bail out banks.
Place the burden squarely on the taxpayers' shoulders.
Vast reserves of cash lie ready to keep rich nations' economies afloat in time of crisis.
Banks' current profits have less to do with skill than access to free loans from central banks.
Satisfying voters' demand for fairness justifies a one-off bonus tax.
Japan's high national savings' rate is well known.
… companies' dividend policies are conservative.
The shipyards' survival until now was a result of the boom years' excesses.
Purchasing managers' indices showed activity expanding quickly.
… weaken the Democrats' hold on the Senate.
The windfarm will be Wales' largest.
The Conservatives' position
… has over 20 years' experience.
The US' fast growing debt…