

## definition

### What is copyright?

Copyright is a bundle of exclusive legal rights for authors and creators that protect the substance and form of their work for a defined period of time. Copyright includes the right to:

- Reproduce or copy the work.
- Prepare derivative works (new versions or adaptations).
- Distribute and sell the work.
- Display the work publicly.
- Perform the work publicly.
- Authorize any or all of the above rights to others.



Architectural rendering, Firestone Library, Princeton University  
Courtesy of Frederick Fisher and Partners

### What types of works are protected by copyright?

Copyright protection extends to a wide array of creative works in physical and digital formats:

- Music (songs, arrangements, scores, recordings, and performances)
- Writing (articles, novels, poems, stories, journalism, plays, blog posts, and websites)
- Visual art (paintings, drawings, cartoons, photography, and sculpture)
- Dance choreography and performances
- Movies, television broadcasts, and videos
- Architecture
- Computer software

## helpful links

### Princeton University Copyright Website

[bit.ly/pucopyright](http://bit.ly/pucopyright)

### Princeton University Copyright Policy

[bit.ly/pucopypol](http://bit.ly/pucopypol)

### Princeton University Acceptable Use Policy

[bit.ly/puusepol](http://bit.ly/puusepol)

### Attributing Copyrighted Materials

[bit.ly/copyattrib](http://bit.ly/copyattrib)

### Copyright and Fair Use, Stanford University

[bit.ly/stancopyfair](http://bit.ly/stancopyfair)

### Copyright Explained for Students: Do Not Get Caught Out

[bit.ly/copyout](http://bit.ly/copyout)

### A Copyright Guide to Image Use for MA Theses and PHD Dissertations

[bit.ly/copyimage](http://bit.ly/copyimage)

### Copyright for Music Librarians, Music Library Association

[bit.ly/mlacopy](http://bit.ly/mlacopy)

### Copyright: Obtaining Permission

[bit.ly/pucopyperm](http://bit.ly/pucopyperm)

### Public Domain: Everything You Need to Know, UpCounsel

[bit.ly/uppubdo](http://bit.ly/uppubdo)

## contact

The links above are for general information purposes only. If you have any questions, please contact [copyright@princeton.edu](mailto:copyright@princeton.edu).

A PDF of this brochure is available online at:  
[copyright.princeton.edu](http://copyright.princeton.edu).

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# Copyright or Copywrong?

what you need to know



[copyright.princeton.edu](http://copyright.princeton.edu)



## common copyright myths

### 1. Everything online is free, and I can use online content whenever I want.

*False. You must determine the copyright status and decide if you need to obtain permission to use the material.*

### 2. Educational use is always fair use, and I can use the material in whatever way I want.

*False. Rules governing fair use for educational purposes are very specific, and you must assess your use based on these four factors:*

- The purpose and character of your use
- The nature of the copyrighted work
- The amount and substantiality of the portion taken
- The effect of the use upon the potential market (for full details, see [bit.ly/fairusefactors](http://bit.ly/fairusefactors))

### 3. I don't see a copyright notice on the item, so I can use it because it's not protected by copyright.

*False. Since 1989, copyright protection is automatically applied to creative work and registration is no longer required to protect it. The lack of a copyright notice with the symbol © does not mean that the work is unprotected by copyright law.*

### 4. The creator owns the copyright.

*Not always true. Copyright usually originates with the creator of a work, but can be sold, traded, or inherited by others (e.g., the publisher of a book or song).*

### 5. If I give credit, I can use material and don't require permission.

*Maybe. Giving credit may help you avoid plagiarism but not necessarily copyright infringement.*

## infringement & plagiarism

### What are copyright infringement and plagiarism?

Copyright infringement is the unauthorized use of someone else's copyrighted material without obtaining permission. It is a violation of the owner's legal rights.

Plagiarism entails copying verbatim or closely imitating the language and thoughts of another author without permission or misrepresenting the author's work as one's own by not crediting the original author. It is a violation of ethical, academic, and industry standards.

### How do I avoid them?

To avoid copyright infringement, obtain explicit permission to use copyrighted material (sometimes including paying a licensing fee), incorporate existing work according to the rules of fair use, consider content from the public domain or open-license content from a creative commons, or create your own material.

To avoid plagiarism, properly quote or paraphrase.

## public domain

### What does public domain mean?

Creative works in the public domain have no exclusive intellectual property rights, such as copyright, trademark, or patent, and can be freely used by anyone without getting prior permission or paying a fee. For copyright purposes, works are in the public domain if:

- The copyright has expired (in 2020: any work published before 1925).
- The owner dedicates the work to the public domain by intentionally giving up creative rights, such as any material with a Creative Commons Zero (CCO) license.
- Copyright law does not protect the type of work in question (such as the titles of books or movies, names, facts, or ideas).
- The work was created by the U.S. government.



Gil Zetbase, commons.wikimedia.org

## fair use

### What is fair use?

### How do I know if my use is fair use?

In its most general sense, fair use is the reuse of copyrighted material done for a limited, non-commercial and "transformative" purpose, such as to comment upon, analyze, criticize, or parody the work of others. No permission is required from the copyright holder. Fair use can thus become a defense against a claim of copyright infringement. If your use qualifies as fair use, then no infringement has occurred.

Whether any particular use would qualify as a fair use under the law is a judgment call and depends on all the facts and circumstances. Courts use four factors to resolve fair use disputes:

- The purpose and character of your use (are you using the material to create something new or just copying verbatim?)
- The nature of the copyrighted work (copying from highly-creative works is less likely to be fair use)
- The amount and substantiality of the portion taken (copy only what you need)
- The effect of the use upon the potential market (are you possibly depriving the copyright owner of income?)

It is important to understand that these factors are only guidelines and there is a lot of gray area. The outcome for any given fair use case can be challenging to predict.

*To be or not to be;  
that's what I was thinking.  
By Alex Jackson*