

# What is copyright?

**Copyright** is a bundle of rights which visual artists, musicians, writers and video and film makers own in relation to their work. It exists in every kind of creative work you can imagine.

**Copyright** exists automatically once you create a work and is free.

**Copyright** can be shown by a symbol that looks like this: ©

**Copyright** is one of the most powerful rights you can own as a creator. It enables you to:

- control your work
- get money for your work

**Copyright** can be owned by anyone who creates a work, including:

- visual artists
- musicians
- writers video and film makers
- performers

**Copyright** gives you:

- ownership rights relating to your work
- automatic and free legal protection as soon as you create your work
- the support of Australian and international laws

**Copyright does not protect ideas and styles. For copyright protection to exist you must express your idea in some physical, material or digital form.**

## What does copyright mean?

Copyright means that only you have rights to do certain things with your work. You have the right to:

- reproduce or copy your work
- communicate your work to the public, for example by broadcasting (TV, radio), by email or on the internet
- publish your work
- perform your work
- adapt your work

Other people need your permission to do any of these things, even if they have bought or own the original work. This is because copyright ownership is different from ownership of the [physical work](#) you created.

For example, if you create an oil painting on canvas, the physical work is the canvas with the oil paint you used. You own it until you have sold it or given it to someone else. Once you have done that, you do not have ownership of the physical painting but you still own copyright in relation to the image you painted.

### **How long does copyright last?**

Copyright begins when a work is created. It continues for your lifetime and for up to 70 years after your death.

### **What does copyright protect?**

Copyright protects the following categories of creative works:

#### **Artistic works**

- paintings
- drawings
- engravings
- photographs
- sculptures
- installations
- cartoons and graphic art
- craftwork
- maps and plans

#### **Dramatic works**

- choreography
- theatre plays
- screenplays
- mime

## **Musical works**

- melodies
- tunes
- compositions

## **Literary works (material in text form)**

- short stories or novels
- poems
- song lyrics
- scripts
- letters or articles in a newspaper
- reports

## **Sound recordings**

- compact discs (CDs)
- tapes
- digital recordings

## **Broadcasts**

- television
- radio
- internet podcasts
- films

This protects the visual images and sounds in films, videos and DVDs, including

- short films
- feature films

- documentaries
- corporate or training videos

## Licences

- For someone to use your work, you must first give them your permission. When you give permission to use your work, you should use a written [licence](#).
- If a theatre director wants to use your painting for the set of a play, or a composer asks to use your poem for a song you would ask them to draft a license or contract. You can learn more about this in the [What is a Contract?](#)section.

## Copyright infringement

- A copyright [infringement](#) is when someone does not ask your permission before using, changing or showing your work for the first time.
- Learn how to protect yourself against a copyright infringement in [Taking action: what are the legal steps?](#)

## Summary

- Copyright automatically gives you, the creator of a work, legal protection and is free.
- © is the symbol used to show copyright. It shows that your work is protected. Write it by putting a circle around a 'c'.
- Copyright lasts for your lifetime and up to 70 years after your death.
- Nobody can use or change your work, unless you say they can.
- If you say that someone can use your work, or if someone says you can use their work, it is best to make a contract in writing.
- No one is allowed to use your work without your permission.
- If someone uses your work without your permission, this is called copyright infringement. The law gives you protection if your copyright is infringed.

## Legal tips

- Keep drafts, photos, sketches or notes about your work.
- These are proof of you creating your work.
- Show you own the copyright by adding to your work:
  - the copyright notice: ©
  - your name
  - the year you made it
  - Example: © Name Surname 2010.
  - A visual artist would put this on the back of an artwork.
  - A film maker would put this in the end-credits of a film.
  - A musician would put this on a CD.
- There are situations where you might not own copyright, for example:
  - if you are employed to create a work
  - if you are paid to make portraits or photographs for private use
  - If someone has infringed your copyright, take action straight away.

## What is Raw Law?

[Learn more](#) about these resources developed with Arts Access Victoria.