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Using Copyright Notices

This fact sheet explains copyright notices and how to use them to best effect in protecting your work.

Copyright notices

1. **What is a copyright notice?**
   A copyright notice is a piece of text which accompanies a work and expresses the rights and wishes of the copyright owner(s).
2. **Do I need a copyright notice?**
   There is no legal requirement to include a copyright notice. Whether a notice is used or not will not change the fact that copyright exists in the work. It is however strongly recommended that you include one on your work if at all possible to deter copyright infringement. The aim of a copyright notice is to:
   - Announce that copyright exists in the work.
   - Provide a means of identifying the copyright owner.
   - Deter infringement or plagiarism.
3. **What does a copyright notice consist of?**
   - **Copyright**
     Some countries will not accept the copyright symbol, they also require the word Copyright to appear in order to consider the notice valid. Using the word ensures that there can be no confusion.
   - **©**
     The normally recognised copyright symbol. Most countries across the world accept this as the correct manner of displaying copyright.
   - **Year of publication**
     In case of a dispute of ownership of a work, the date plays an important part. If your work was developed and published before any potential opponents then you can usually expect to win any case which challenges your rights.
     In the case of work which is continually updated, (for example a website), the year of publication may be shown as a period from first publication until the most recent update, (e.g. 2000-2026).
     In the case of unpublished work, it is the common practice to state the year of creation.
   - **Copyright owner name**
     This may only be one person, or it may be a collective, a band, group or team for example: If one person owns the rights to a work their name will appear on its own. If however, your work is owned by several people then you may choose to include the name of each member of the collective, or include the name of the collective itself.

     This would give your copyright notice the following appearance:

     Copyright © 2026 Bobby Smith.
4. **Using a pseudonym**
   Although it may not be technically correct (it does not state the name of the legal entity that is the copyright owner), it is very common for an identifiable pseudonym or trading name to be used in the copyright notice to afford the copyright owner some degree of anonymity through obfuscation.
5. **Attribution**
   If your work includes excerpts, quotes, images, etc. from other people's work, or adapts another work, you should also include acknowledgements for the copyright of any parts that you have used which are not your own. Also ensure that you obtain permission for use before publishing such a work.
4. **Where should the notice be placed?**
   The rule to adopt is to ensure that anyone with access to your work is aware of the copyright. If your work can be broken up into several pieces, then the notice should appear on each part. If it would normally be viewed as a whole then one will suffice.
   i. **Written work**
      For books, manuscripts, and other written documents, you should only need one notice, typically this is on the first page or inside the front cover.
   ii. **Leaflets, commercial documents, etc.**
      Each item should contain a notice.
   iii. **Websites**
      Websites should have one on every page.
   iv. **Music**
      For physical media, one is placed on the Compact Disc, cassette, LP (etc.) itself, and one is included on the accompanying sleeve or booklet.
      For electronic files it is normally possible to add a notice to the file metadata (e.g. ID3 tags).
   v. **Photographs and designs**
      Place a notice at the bottom or on the reverse of the work, or as a watermark across the image.
   vi. **Films**
      Place one notice on the DVD, BluRay Disc or video cassette, and one on any accompanying sleeve or booklet. It is normal to also place a notice at the start of the film itself before any protected material may be displayed.
5. **Copyright in sound recordings ℗**
   Sound recordings have a copyright separate from the underlying musical composition, and a sound recording should carry a phonographic copyright notice (denoted by the P in a circle) for the recording itself.
   The standard © notice should also be used, but in the case of sound recordings this is used to protect the cover design, lyric sheets or other printed material included with the sound recording.

   In our example, this would give the appearance of the notice as:

   Copyright © 2026 Bobby Smith, ℗ 2026 Bobby Smith.
6. **Copyright symbols**
   - **©**
     Most word processing programs the © symbol can be found under the 'Insert' menu either under 'Symbol' or 'Special Character'.
     For websites the HTML entity is ©
   - **℗**
     On most computers the ℗ symbol can be found within the Webdings font.
     For websites the HTML entity is ℗

You may also wish to increase your notice in order to clarify any further wishes you have as the copyright owner, this is dealt with in the following sections.

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Extending your copyright notice

7. **Why extend your notice?**
   This may be useful if there are certain conditions you wish to attach to the work, for example licensing requirements.
   In some circumstances it may be beneficial to allow some activities that would normally be prohibited. You may include instructions about what conditions must be met, or how to apply for a licence to carry out these actions.
   In other cases you may wish to simply make it clear that you are withholding all rights, and often the notice is simply extended purely to emphasise the author's strong stance on copyright protection.
   To extend your notice, you should simply include a statement that explicitly sets out these terms, the statement should appear as a sentence after the copyright notice.
8. **Wording your statement**
   There are several items to think about when wording your statement. Decide in relation to your work, what you wish to permit. Be specific in your wording, make it clear what you will allow and what is prohibited.
   Probably the best starting place is to think from the point of view of withholding all rights and then carefully word any allowances as exceptions, making sure it is clear that these are the only allowances you will make.
   Here are some areas to consider:
   i. **Copying, duplication, reproduction**
      The right to produce a copy of the work.
      Do you wish certain groups to be able to copy your work? if so what terms would you attach?
   ii. **Selling, hiring**
      Normally this would be expressly forbidden without the copyright holders consent.
   iii. **Distribution**
      You may for example have written a software program that you allow to be shared so long as you are identified as the author.
   iv. **Commercial, personal, or educational usage**
      Will you allow your work to be used differently by certain groups or individuals?
      Educational or private study use is generally permitted under law in any case, but you may want to allow copying for private use but not for commercial gain.
   v. **Licences**
      For software, commercial, and educational documents in particular, the copyright notice may carry information about obtaining a licence to reproduce the work
      By not obtaining a licence, use of the work may be considered in breach of copyright.
9. **Right to be identified as the author**
   If for example, the work is distributed without your control, you will wish to ensure that you are still identified as the author/copyright owner.

   Note: Copyright is not normally infringed by acts done in the course of private research or study, criticism, or news reporting.
10. **Examples of statements**
    "*All rights reserved.*"

    A simple cover all statement. It simply means that you withhold all rights to the maximum extent allowable under law. This is in fact the default position, (legally it is the same as having no statement), but the statement is commonly used by authors to emphasise that they take their rights seriously.

    "*Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or recording will constitute an infringement of copyright.*"

    Again this is reiterating the default position (it does not provide any additional legal protection) but you will commonly see such statements added as an attempt to deter infringement. This one is designed for use on sound recordings, but can easily be adapted to apply to other types of work. The wording makes it clear that the authors rights are taken very seriously. For maximum effect you can combine these two examples.

    "*Permission granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only. Commercial copying, hiring, lending is prohibited.*"

    For businesses and organisations this kind of notice can be of mutual benefit as allowing reproduction may help to promote their message.

    "*May be used free of charge. Selling without prior written consent prohibited. Obtain permission before redistributing. In all cases the copyright notice must remain intact.*"

    This is the type of notice often used for software distributed as "freeware" or "shareware", by specifying that the copyright notice remains intact you ensure that all copies will identify you as the author.

    Remember, copyright notices are straightforward statements, there is no need to get tied up with legal jargon, the point is to state your wishes clearly and succinctly.

Additional deterrent against infringement

11. **Notice of registration**
    Works that have been registered with Copyright Witness may also include a statement to that effect. This is an additional deterrent which notifies others that there is very strong evidence with which to pursue a case if the work is infringed. The notice would normally appear next to or below the copyright notice and state. 'This work is registered with Copyright Witness'. The statement may also include the registration number.

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