

## What Is U.S. Copyright Law?

The US Copyright Law grants rights to individuals for the works they create. The US Copyright Act of 1790 has changed over the years. The current basis of US copyright law is based on the Copyright Act of 1976. US copyright law is relatively automatic. Once someone has an idea and produces it in tangible form, the creator is the copyright holder and has the authority to enforce his exclusivity to it. In other words, the person is the owner of the creation. It is not necessary that a person register their work. However, it is recommended and it can serve as evidence if someone ever violates a copyright. It is interesting to note that when an employer hires an employee to produce a work that the copyright is given to the employer.

Violations of US Copyright Law are generally enforced in a civil court setting. However, there could also be criminal sanctions brought against someone who violates US copyright law. Someone in serious violation of US Copyright Law, such as counterfeiting, can find themselves on the inside of prison looking out. People need to understand the copyright symbol is not a requirement. Someone may have a copyright, yet their work may not have a copyright notice or symbol.

US Copyright Law covers a wide range of things that are derived from artistic expression, intellectual or creative work. This includes things such as literary works, music, drawings, photographs, software, movies, choreographic works such as ballets and plays, poems, paintings and more. The law covers the form of expression, not the concept, facts or the actual idea of the work. This means that someone can use another person's idea or concept and produce their own take on it. However, copying another person's work is a violation. Some things may not be copyrighted but they may be protected by a patent or trademark.

Individuals who have a copyright on a particular piece of work can do with it what they will. They may choose to copy it and sell it. They may display their work or perform it in public and charge admission, or they can assign or sell the work to someone else. Individuals who have a copyright can also choose to do nothing with their work, if that is their desire. However, if someone comes along and takes the work and tries to use it in some way, that person is still in violation of the owner's copyright. Copyrights cover published and unpublished work.

Anyone who is in the creative arts arena should be very careful that they do not violate US Copyright Law. For that matter, anyone who is a fan of the creative arts should make sure they are not in violation of a copyright. Simple things like uploading, downloading and sharing music or movie files can result in serious charges and fines being brought against them. The popularity of the Internet and file sharing software has increased copyright violations. Copyright owners are starting to take a stand against copyright violators and are hunting down the perpetrators. Be careful you are not overstepping your boundaries and violating someone's copyright law.

## About the Author

Richard Cunningham is a freelance journalist who covers [copyright law](#) for [www.ResearchCopyright.com](http://www.ResearchCopyright.com). Download his free e-book, "Copyright Basics" at [ResearchCopyright.com](http://www.ResearchCopyright.com).

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