

# Ownership of copyright

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Copyright is generally owned by the creator of the work in the first instance. However, copyright ownership depends on a number of different things such as the type of work created or how the work was created, for example by an employee as part of their job. Determining who owns copyright in a work can be complex.

[Information about copyright ownership in material created by staff and students.](#)

Material can have multiple copyright owners. They will all have equal rights in the material, unless there is an agreement in place.

There may be more than one copyright owner in certain types of works where there are layers of copyright. For example in films, copyright in the soundtrack, screenplay and the film itself may be owned separately.

If the creator or copyright owner dies, copyright passes to the estate or a nominee.

Where the copyright owner or creator cannot be identified, the work becomes an orphaned work. Orphaned works can still be used as permitted under copyright, but if you need to seek permission [contact the Copyright Office.](#)

Copyright ownership may also be subject to a legal agreement such as a research, funding or publishing agreement or it can be transferred or assigned to a third party.

In Australia, copyright applies to material as soon as it is created. You do not need to register or publish material for your work to be protected or to assert your ownership. See [protecting your work](#) for more information.

More information about copyright ownership in specific types of work:

- [Artistic works \(photographs, paintings, sculptures, etc\).](#)
- [Films and television broadcasts](#)
- [Sound recordings and radio broadcasts](#)

# Physical and copyright ownership

Copyright ownership is separate from owning the physical object/work. Just because you physically own an item does not mean that you will own the copyright in the item. An author or creator may sell you their work, but they will retain ownership of copyright. Unless you made an agreement with the author/creator to transfer copyright, you will *not* own copyright. The creator will still have the right to reproduce, publish or communicate the work (as well as grant those rights to other people) that you own. If you do not own copyright in the work, you will not be allowed to use it without permission from the author or creator.

Similarly, the University does not necessarily own copyright in material held in its libraries and other [Cultural Collections](#). When material or collections are donated to or purchased for the library, unless there is an agreement negotiated regarding the transfer of copyright, copyright will remain with the creator or copyright owner.

## Read also

- [What is copyright?](#)
- [Duration of copyright](#)
- [Rights of copyright owners](#)
- [Using copyright material](#)

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