

Requesting Permission

In the course of your teaching or writing, you are likely to be in situations when you want to use someone else's copyrighted material. Your first step is to determine whether you can reasonably make a fair use of the material - visit the section on [fair use](#) to determine if you can use the material. If you decide that your use is probably not a fair use, your next step is to ask for permission.

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Identify the copyright holder

To begin with, you need to identify the copyright holder. For many works, the publisher is the copyright holder. Look for a copyright notice such as "© 2003 Imaginary University Press" or "copyright by C. Holder, 2003." Unfortunately, not all works will include a copyright notice, and it is also possible that the copyright has changed hands since the notice was printed.

For older works, especially for materials like photographs and audio recordings, it may be impossible to identify and locate the copyright holder - these are called "orphan works." Always keep documentation of your search for a copyright holder. There is still some risk associated with using orphan works, and in the event that you cannot find the copyright holder but decide to use the material anyway, documentation of your search could prove useful.

There are a number of organizations that can help you identify and contact copyright holders. The [Copyright Clearance Center](#) handles a large quantity of academic permissions requests, and may be a good

place to start your search. The Columbia's [list of Collective Rights Organizations](#) can help you locate rights clearance organizations for many different types of creative work, including print, dramatic, and musical works. If you are trying to determine whether an older work is still under copyright, one place to look is the [Stanford Copyright Renewal Database](#).

Ask for permission

Once you have identified the copyright holder, the next step is to ask for permission. An increasing number of publishers prefer that you make your request using a form on their websites. Others may require that you make your request via fax or email. Whenever possible, make your request in the format preferred by the copyright holder.

If the copyright holder does not have a set form for permission requests, send a letter. Below is a sample of a permission request letter that you can modify to suit your needs. Always keep copies of your correspondence, especially the signed permission forms. If you are sending your letter by mail, include an extra copy for the rights holder to keep, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for the reply.

- [Requesting permission for use in a publication \(PDF\)](#)

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