Molly Kleinman

CC HowTo #1: How to Attribute a Creative Commons licensed work

Posted on **August 15, 2008**

All Creative Commons licenses require future users to attribute the works they use:

You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work)

The Creative Commons FAQ has this to say about attributing CC-licensed works:

If you are using a work licensed under one of our core licenses, then the proper way of accrediting your use of a work when you're making a verbatim use is: (1) to keep intact any copyright notices for the Work; (2) credit the author, licensor and/or other parties (such as a wiki or journal) in the manner they specify; (3) the title of the Work; and (4) the URL for the work if applicable.

You also need to provide the URL for the Creative Commons license selected with each copy of the work that you make available.

If you are making a derivative use of a work licensed under one of our core licenses, in addition to the above, you need to identify that your work is a derivative work, ie. "This is a Finnish translation of the [original work] by [author]" or "Screenplay based on [original work] by [author]."

These instructions are clear in theory, but many people who apply CC licenses to their work do not specify how they would like to be attributed. On sites like Flickr or ccMixter, you might not be able to determine the creator's real name, and sometimes the work doesn't have a title. If part of the goal of Creative Commons is to reduce transaction costs, then there must be some way

to use those works without having to contact the creator to ask about proper attribution.

In practice, here's how you can handle the attribution requirements listed above:

1. "Keep intact any copyright notices for the Work": If a work you're using has a notice that says "© 2008 Molly Kleinman", reproduce that notice when you credit the work. If such a notice does not appear, don't worry about it.
2. "Credit the author, licensor and/or other parties (such as a wiki or journal) in the manner they specify": If a creator has a note attached to her work that says, "Please attribute Molly Kleinman as the creator of this work," then attribute Molly Kleinman. If there is no note, but there is a copyright notice (see above), attribute the copyright holder named in the copyright notice. If there is no note or copyright notice but there is a username, check the creator's profile to see if it specifies how to attribute the creator's work. If it doesn't, attribute the username. If there is no creator or author name of any kind, but there is a website (like ~~Wikipedia~~ Wikinews), attribute the website by name.
3. "The title of the Work": If the work has a title, call it by name. If it doesn't, you can just say "This work by Molly Kleinman…" or just "Untitled, by Molly Kleinman…" Whatever seems appropriate.
4. "The URL for the work if applicable": Link back to the original source of the work. I would argue that this is the most important part of the attribution notice. It can help creators keep track of places where their work appears by seeing what links are driving traffic to their websites. It also gives users of your work an easy way to track down the original source. If you are reproducing a CC-licensed work in a print format, you might prefer not to include a long and ugly URL, and there might be situations where leaving out a URL is appropriate. But in general, the link is the most valuable part of the attribution.
5. "The URL for the Creative Commons license": Link to the license. The original work should have a link to the license under which it was released; link to the same place. You do not need to include the full text of the license when you reproduce a CC-licensed work.

There is no standard way to format the attribution of a CC-licensed work, and you can adapt the style or phrasing to suit your needs or the standard citation style of your discipline.

Here are a few examples:

An Ideal Attribution
This video features the song "Play Your Part (Pt.1)" by Girl Talk, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial license. © 2008, Greg Gillis.

A Realistic Attribution
Photo by mollyali, available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial license.

A Derivative Work Attribution
This is a video adaptation of the novel Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom by Cory Doctorow,

available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike license. Copyright © 2003 Cory Doctorow.

One last thing: The licenses do not require you to inform a creator that you are using her CC-licensed work, but it's a nice thing to do. Most people are very happy to learn that someone is using and building upon their creations; that's why they use Creative Commons licenses in the first place.

[This is a new project of mine inspired by some conversations on the cc-community listserv lamenting the lack of understanding among many users of Creative Commons-licensed work. The Creative Commons website has so much information on it that it can be hard to find a basic, bite-sized howto. I'm taking the material I use in my workshops, mixing it up with CC's extensive documentation, and posting the results here. If anyone has ideas for topics they'd like me to cover, let me know. If you think I got something wrong, please let me know so I can fix it. And since the whole blog is CC-licensed, go ahead and use/adapt these however you like.]

Updated on August 22nd, 2008, at 9:23 pm

This entry was posted in **Creative Commons Evangelism**, **HOWTO** by **Molly**. Bookmark the **permalink [http://mollykleinman.com/2008/08/15/cc-howto-1-how-to-attribute-a-creative-commons-licensed-work/]** .

41 THOUGHTS ON "CC HOWTO #1: HOW TO ATTRIBUTE A CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSED WORK"

Greg
on **August 15, 2008 at 4:30 am** said:

Awesome idea Molly.

mrgarin
on **August 15, 2008 at 4:32 am** said:

Hey, thanks for the informative post. well timed, too, with the Jacobsen case.

Andrea
on **August 15, 2008 at 10:48 am** said:

Hey, this is a handy little post! I often use CC images from Flickr in presentations, so I've typically just included the link to the work since they don't always provide a name. I think in a display format like Powerpoint slides, the link (in your realistic attribution) isn't as functional as the URL. And also being realistic, including the license type in the slides… Yeah, sure. 😊

Pingback: Creative Commons HowTo - Creative Commons

Pingback: RSS4Lib

Jordon
on **August 17, 2008 at 4:48 am** said:

This is a good idea for a post. Here I thought I was the only one who tried to attribute properly — I don't even think Lawrence Lessig does it. Hypothetical question: if I'm using BY-SA licensed songs in a video, I know that the video (a derivative work) should be released as BY-SA also, but should the copyright notices for the songs be part of the copyright notice for the video? As in, "This video is released as CC BY-SA. Copyright 2006 Original Artist 1, Copyright 2007 Original Artist 2, Copyright 2008 Me"?

Molly
on **August 17, 2008 at 12:52 pm** said:

@ Andrea and @Jordan: For something like a video or a PowerPoint presentation, a nice way to handle CC attributions is to include them in credits at the end. In print books you often see the copyright notices for works used with permission on the same page as the copyright notice for the book itself, but in movies there is usually a screen (or several) that displays the copyright notices for the songs that are included. Those notices are separate from the copyright notice of the movie, which makes sense, because they are separate copyrighted works. A credits slide at the end of a slideshow can sit on screen during the question and answer session.

Pingback: Derecho&Tecnología » Creative Commons "HowTo"

Diba
on **August 18, 2008 at 10:51 am** said:

1. You are SO right – it's frustratingly hard to find a basic, bite-sized howto on how to attribute works on the The Creative Commons website.

So, thanks for your examples 😃

2. A question: Within the CC scheme what exactly does 'commercial' use imply?
In my layman's understanding of the terms, it's about making profits from selling goods. But this sentence by Peter Shanks (creator of the flickrcc search engine) really made me think:
"Recently I've been doing some work on wikiversity, and needed some images to liven up some otherwise boring entries, so I needed to find images licensed for commercial use (a reqirement of the wikimedia GPL), so I added a 'commercial' checkbox which restricts search results to CC Attribution and Attribution-ShareAlike License".
I realize wikimedia are free to make their own choices in the matter, but I for one don't associate wikimedia with commercial interests, so I started thinking about my own use of CC works – could my site be viewed as commercial? And should I thus limit my search/use as Peter does?
I work for a non-profit organization (under a ministry) that develops network-related services offered to higher education in my country. The websites (where I use CC images by/by-sa/by-nc/by-nc-sa) are offered to the general public whereas the webapps are intended for university use only (no CC images there). We are not in it for the money/to make money – as implied by the 'non-profit'-label – but the costs of running the services are covered through membership charges (only officially acknowledged universities and research institutions can become members).
I sense my use of CC works could be in the grey zone, but I can't find any clarifying info on the CC website as to what exactly constitutes *commercial use* in this context. I just think, that if wikimedia thinks only commercially cleared stuff is okay, loads of us doing non-profit things on the web have to revise our CC usage policy – or am I being paranoid? Help/Links to clarifying ressources on the matter is MUCH appreciated 😃

BTW: Love your title "multipurpose librarian 😃

Molly
on **August 18, 2008 at 8:00 pm** said:

Thanks, Diba! While I can't tell you whether or not the use your organization makes is non-commercial (I Am Not A Lawyer and all that), I can give you some context for the

Wikimedia Foundation's preference for licenses that permit commercial use.

As you probably know, Creative Commons licenses are not the only alternative copyright licensing system on the block. In fact, compared to some licensing systems, CC is a relative newcomer. Many of these systems were created for open source software, though some of them have also been adopted for other kinds of copyrighted work. One of the older and more widely used of these licenses are the GNU General Public License (GPL) for software, and the GNU Free Documentation License (FDL), for software documentation. Wikipedia is licensed under the GNU FDL. The terms of the GFDL are long and complicated, and I'm not a fan for a number of reasons, but a lot of people like it, and it's what Wikipedia uses, so we're stuck with it for awhile.

In the last couple of years, the people at CC have done a lot of work to make some Creative Commons licenses compatible with other free licenses, including the GFDL. Lawrence Lessig explained the process a few years ago, and his explanation is worth a read. As a result, the most recent release of CC licenses – the 3.0 release – included a version of BY-SA that was approved by the Free Software Foundation as GFDL-compatible.

The GFDL permits downstream commercial use (which would prohibit a Noncommercial clause), and requires that all derivative works are licensed under the same license (like Share Alike). Therefore, the only CC license that could be made GFDL-compatible was the BY-SA license. And, because the Wikimedia Foundation uses the GFDL license, only works that are either licensed under the GFDL, licensed under a GFDL-compatible license (CC BY-SA), or in the public domain are acceptable for use in its products.

In short, the Wikimedia Foundation requires contributors to include works with licenses that permit commercial use because of the ideology behind its licensing, not necessarily because its works are commercial in nature. If you are trying to determine whether or not your use is commercial, comparing yourself to Wikipedia won't help.

BTW, I'm planning a howto for each different license element: how to use a noncommercial licensed work, how to use a share alike licensed work, etc. You're not alone in finding the distinctions difficult to make.

Pingback: A2K » Guía para utilizar material licenciado con Creative Commons

notafish
on **August 22, 2008 at 7:00 pm** said:

Hi Molly. First a thumbs up for starting this, it's great. However, there is one thing that was pointed out to me:

"If it doesn't, attribute the username. If there is no creator or author name of any kind, but there is a website (like Wikipedia), attribute the website by name."

Wikipedia is a poor example to pick in that context, as _no_ image on Wikipedia is attributed to Wikipedia. They all either have an author, real or user name, or at best are Public Domain. But attributing any Wikipedia images *to* Wikipedia is a mistake. Granted, the image information is not always very intuitive to find, but if you click on any image on Wikipedia, you will get the author information. Would you mind changing this in your post, and maybe altogether remove the "example" or find another more relevant? Thanx!

Molly
on **August 22, 2008 at 8:23 pm** said:

Hi Notafish. Thanks for raising your concern. I understand your point, but I'm going to leave the example as it is. This how-to isn't just about attributing images, it's about any licensed content. People regularly ask me how to attribute text from Wikipedia (and similar wikis) because most of the text on Wikipedia has no single identifiable author, and I chose it as an example on purpose. I understand your point that images on Wikipedia can and should be credited to individual creators, but for much of the content on Wikipedia that's not the case, which makes it a very relevant example in this context.

Brian Rowe
on **August 22, 2008 at 8:58 pm** said:

Great post, very practical useful advice. I reposted a lot of it to the FFIP Blog and look forward to reading more. http://freedomforip.org/2008/08/22/how-to-attribute-a-cc-licensed-work/ Keep up the great work.

drini
on **August 22, 2008 at 11:01 pm** said:

So, could you pick a different example other than wikipedia?

Since:
1. It gives the impression Wikipedia is CC licensed (and it's not)
2. All articles contributors can be listed using historial, and author credits for images can be found clicking on images themselves.

Therefore you're inadvertly encouraging people to take Wikipedia content, licensing it under CC and not attributing authors, both things being wrong

drini
on **August 22, 2008 at 11:04 pm** said:

Since, after all, it's an article talking about how properly attribute the license and author, so it's just fair asking not to mislead.

Molly
on **August 23, 2008 at 1:26 am** said:

Okay, I updated the example to use something that is actually licensed under CC (GFDL is not the same thing, I get it). But I stuck with a wiki because I think it's unreasonable to expect people to try to dig through history log files and try to trace all the authors of an article, many of which are likely to be anonymous. Citing the wiki is enough.

Pingback: Community Generated HowTos - Creative Commons

Pingback: Virtual Turntable

Andrea
on **August 27, 2008 at 9:15 pm** said:

I can handle putting together a "credits" slide in PowerPoint presentations – that's a nice, convenient solution. Thanks!

notafish
on **August 28, 2008 at 10:41 am** said:

Hi Molly, Wikinews is actually exactly the right example so thank you for changing this. I agree with drini, it is extremely important not to mislead people in crediting things they take under a free license. This is, in my opinion, the only way we'll make sure that free licenses are upheld and used in the best of ways.

Krystle
on **September 8, 2008 at 6:41 pm** said:

Hey! Just wanted to thank you far writing and sharing this. It's been republished on wikiHow.com. Check it out!

http://www.wikihow.com/Attribute-a-Creative-Commons-Licensed-Work

Pingback: Recent Links Tagged With "attribution" - JabberTags

Rob Betts
on **November 1, 2008 at 9:04 am** said:

Hi Molly

Your notes say "5. "The URL for the Creative Commons license": Link to the license." How would you attribute the CC licence itself in a printed work (distributed as a PDF via email), where typically the reader won't be able to use the link?
Many thanks
Rob

Pingback: mycket jobb för att vara laglig! … « Pataphysics of Simulacra

Pingback: University of Michigan Library | Educationload.com

RJ
on **May 13, 2009 at 3:10 am** said:

Molly, any ideas on how to attribute a whole bunch of works reproduced in a later work. I'm talking- about 100 or so? Do you think it would be appropriate to do a blanket link to the URL of the CC licence, rather than linking each licence?

Donald
on **July 7, 2009 at 1:16 pm** said:

In comment#22 above Krystle writes "Hey! Just wanted to thank you far writing and sharing this. It's been republished on wikiHow.com. Check it out! http://www.wikihow.com/Attribute-a-Creative-Commons-Licensed-Work"

Wikihow is a commercial website. It is listed as the 1000 most popular website on the web, with 16 million visitors a day ($$$$$$$$) in this recent Google Adsense article: http://adsense.blogspot.com/2009/07/speeding-up-attracting-more-visitors.html

According to wikiHow, How to Properly Attribute wikiHow In Online Media, http://www.wikihow.com/wikiHow:Attribution
" Attribute prominently with human and machine followable links (i.e., do not use no-follow links). Attribution to wikiHow should be at least as prominent as any attribution to other sources on your website or publication"

That seems a bit hypocritical considering they don't follow their own advice.
Krystle one of many Authors at WikiHow copies Molly Kleinman entire article and pastes it on the WikiHow website.
The attribution appears underneath the article with the heading, "Sources and Citations", however the link back to Molly Kleinman's article has a rel="nofollow" tag .
How can this satisfy the requirement for an attribution?
I think that a link with rel="nofollow" is not a valid Attribution. A large portion of the value of a link is the number of visitors it will drive to the owners website. All websites recieve some volume of traffic from Search Engines such as Google. All 3 major search engines put tremendous value on links when evaluating relevancy for the Search Results. A link with rel="nofollow" is not allowed to be followed by Google and is useless as far as search engines are concerned.

mark
on **July 22, 2009 at 10:27 am** said:

""The URL for the work if applicable": Link back to the original source of the work."

what if you provide a link to the original content but the site that you are linking to where the content is posted refers you to a web page other than where the content is posted that requires the user to click a second time to get to the original content..
this issue has raised it's head at a forum i help administer. the website that content has been copied from insists on link backs to the original content but they have some sort of referal in place so that any links from our site get redirected to a different page and require clicking on another link to get to the page.

Pingback: University of Michigan Library - Creative Commons

Juan
on **November 13, 2009 at 11:38 am** said:

Hi! This is the best way to attribute creative commons works:

The article is in spanish so I'm linking the translated version. Excellent tutorial.

http://translate.google.com/translate?
u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.estilocss.com%2Ftutoriales-de-xhtml%2Fcomo-usar-creative-
commons%2F&sl=es&tl=en&hl=en&ie=UTF-8

Pingback: Techrisk » Bilderkännande i presentationer

Pingback: University of Washington TRIO Training

Sam
on **August 29, 2010 at 10:13 pm** said:

Hi Molly! Great work on clarifying a lot of stuff regarding the CC-BY License. I have a

question. If I'm going to sell online the photos that are under the CC-BY license and if they're going to be distributed through printed media like gift cards or canvas prints, do I have to overlay the photo with the attribution like for example "Artwork cc by Newbie Photographer"? Or, can I just upload the photo as is and put the attribution in a description box somewhere in the artwork page along with all the other attribution info such the CC license URL, etc.?

Thanks so much!!!

Muri
on **April 12, 2011 at 2:37 pm** said:

Sorry, I still don't get it. If I'm interested in a photo licensed with CC and I comply with attribution and use of the item accordingly to the license. Do I still have to ask for permission to use to the license holder?
Thanks for your guide on this!
M.

Pingback: Contenido encontrado en internet y cómo referenciarlo | Oscilaciones Harmónicas

Harry
on **April 26, 2011 at 10:51 pm** said:

I am a teacher librarian in a K – grade 8 school. Students in Grade 4 are using images from various websites with little understanding … "I can copy it so it must be fine." I am introducing CC images and find the requirements for attribution beyond what many students can handle. 100% of the content is used to supplement/complement assignment/inquiry project work. F0r Grades 3 – 8 is it acceptable for them to just cite the URL and the creator name? To fully comply seems impossible for the lower grades.

Pingback: University of Washington TRIO Training

Pingback: A change in direction | Molly Kleinman

Mila
on **January 6, 2012 at 12:59 am** said:

Hi Molly,

At my images released with Creative Commons license I provide my name and link to my website. Must a publisher attribute it the way I did, in other words provide my name and the link to my web site?

Thank you.

Pingback: » Creative Commons and Blogging RSS4Lib

Comments are closed.