Students and Copyright

What is copyright?

A simple definition of copyright is that it is a bunch of rights in certain creative works (literary works, artistic works, musical works, computer programs, sound recordings, films and broadcasts) which can be used to stop others from copying the creative works without permission.

At its most basic, copyright is simply the exclusive right to copy.

The rights are granted exclusively to the copyright owner to reproduce (copy, scan, print) and communicate (email, put on Internet) the material, and for some material, the right to perform or show the work to the public. Copyright owners can prevent others from reproducing or communicating their work without their permission. Only the copyright owner can licence or sell these rights to someone else.

Why is copyright important?

Copyright is important because it gives creators control over their creative works. This means they can decide who uses their work, how it can be used and if they will charge a fee to other people who want to use it. This gives creators the ability to earn a living from their works and/or to control how their works are used or disseminated.

What does copyright protect?

Copyright does not protect ideas, concepts, styles or techniques. For example, copyright will not protect an idea for a film or book, but it will protect a script for the film or even a storyboard for the film. Basically, copyright only protects creativity that is in a tangible medium.

The types of works copyright protects include:

Artistic Works - paintings, photographs, maps, graphics, cartoons, charts, diagrams and illustrations

Literary Works - novels, textbooks, poems, song lyrics, newspaper articles, computer software, computer games
Musical Works - melodies, song music, advertising jingles, film scores

Dramatic works - plays, screenplays and choreography

Films and Moving Images - Feature films, short films, documentaries, television programs, interactive games, television advertisements, music videos and vodcasts

Sound Recordings - MP3 files, CDs, DVDs, vinyl and tape recordings, podcasts.

Broadcasts - Pay and Free to air television and radio

It is important to note that online text, images, broadcasts, videos and music on websites, wikis, blogs and social networking sites are all protected by copyright. See Public Domain below.

When does copyright apply?

In Australia, copyright protection is automatic. This means that a work does not need to be registered or have a copyright notice on it to be protected by copyright. A work will be protected as soon as it is put into material form, such as being written down or recorded in some way (filmed or recorded on an audio tape).

Copyright and plagiarism

The relationship between copyright and plagiarism can be tricky to understand. Plagiarism is a type of misconduct that, in some cases, may also give rise to copyright infringement.

Plagiarism occurs where a student uses someone else’s ideas or words in their work and pretends they are their own. If the student has used a lot of someone else’s words without that person’s permission, copyright infringement may also occur.