



Dare to know

Requesting Copyright Permission Checklist

Once you have done your due diligence and confirmed the materials are neither in the public domain nor under fair use requisites:

Identify the copyright holder.

- Locate the publisher of the source periodical, book, or website. Any or all of these may include a copyright notice.
- Retrieve copyright and contact information embedded in the metadata of digital images.
- Search for the copyright holder's official website or social media account(s).
- Speak to a copyright collective such as the Copyright Clearance Center.

Identify the rights required.

- Every copyright owner controls a number of rights, including the right to reproduce, distribute, and modify a piece of work.
- Specify the rights needed (e.g., reproduce a photograph in a journal article or reprint a poem as a book's epigraph).

Contact the copyright holder.

- Email or mail a permissions request letter, including details on the proposed use of the material; or,
- Telephone the rights holder, then follow-up with a written permission letter.
- Regardless of the means of communications, the best practice is to accumulate a written record to document the process.

Numerous copyright holders who grant permissions in the normal course of business will have formal request procedures. For those who do not follow this practice, a permissions request letter will be necessary. There is no standardized form, but there are certain details that should be considered:

- A personal description (e.g., faculty member, student, independent researcher).
- A brief but accurate description of the copyrighted material in question (e.g., title, creator, identifying designator(s), copyright year).

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- The medium in which the material will appear (e.g., print publication, video footage, website).
- The amount of copyrighted materials that will constitute the final product (e.g., one table on webpage, two audio segments, three illustrations in an article).
- The size of the expected audience.
- Whether the requested rights are exclusive or non-exclusive. Most agreements are for non-exclusive usage.
- Whether the request is for a one-time usage or over the course of a specific span of time. This is often called the “term of use.”
- The geographic region to which the use of the copyrighted material will be restricted (e.g., North America). This is referenced on permission agreements as the “territory.”

For additional assistance, see the sample letter located on the Barton Library’s Copyright Permission page.

Be aware that copyright holders have the prerogative to require a usage fee, which may be based on a sliding scale according to format, medium, and term of use. This is typically paid before the permission is granted.

Gaining permission can take time, sometimes several months. Anticipate a delay and make the request as soon as possible.

Secure written permission.

Do not rely on oral agreements. Misunderstandings without documentation may lead to lawsuits where the copyright holder will naturally possess the stronger legal position. Written permission in the form of an email, letter, or formalized document is the best option.