

## Introduction to free licenses

Wikipedia and many other websites use material that is not covered by regular copyright. Why? What does it mean? And why should you care?

### Free licenses

*"Think of 'free' as in 'free speech', not as in 'free beer'."  
Richard Stallman, founder of Free Software Foundation and GNU*

A license is a legal text that explains what is allowed to do with a work. As a creator of an image or a text, you can choose to make it easier for others to reuse the material by putting a free license on it. Since this encourages people to spread the material, this is a good way to make sure that the material will stay available for a long time.

For people who look for material on internet or in books, free licenses mean that you can use the material directly, without asking for permission. The license itself tells you how to give credit. New works based on this (for example a collage of freely licensed pictures) must get the same license.

You can find many works published under a free license on **Wikimedia Commons**, the media archive of Wikipedia. There are more than 7 million photos, sounds and films on Wikimedia Commons (as of September 2010). All are free to reuse. Go to <http://commons.wikimedia.org> and start your browsing.

Wikipedia and Wikimedia Commons is a part of a growing "copyleft" movement to support free licenses. Others in the same movement is Creative Commons (which provides free licenses with various conditions), Mozilla, GNU/Linux and OpenOffice.org.

Free licenses are not in opposition to making money off your works. You can upload mid-resolution to Wikimedia Commons and keep high resolution for commercial purposes.

#### Buzz Aldrin on the moon, 1969.



This image is freely licensed, so you can reuse it.  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aldrin\\_Apollo\\_11.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aldrin_Apollo_11.jpg)

### Copyright-protected material

*"Copyright is monopoly, and produces all the effects which the general voice of mankind attributes to monopoly."  
Thomas Babington Macaulay, British politician*

Many images you find on the internet, and in books and magazines, are protected by copyright laws. In essence, you cannot copy or spread them, without the copyright-holder's consent.

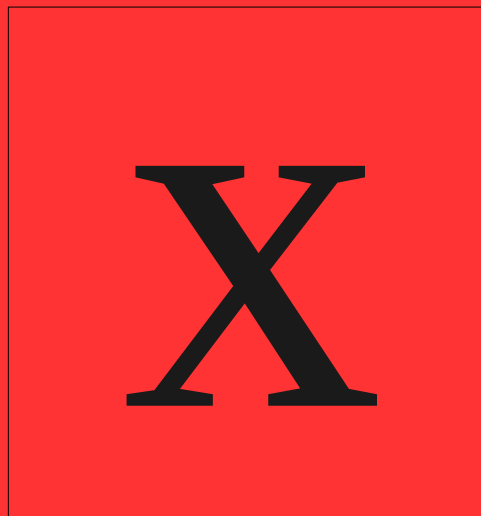
Works do not need the © logo to be copyrighted. It need only to reach the threshold of originality. Copyright is not the same as trademarks, which are registered signs to identify a company, etc.

Copyright in general is a good thing. But copyright, licenses, patents and other restrictions can hinder progress and they have been extended more and more the last decades. Copyright for most works are now 70 years after the creator died.

If you want to use copyrighted works, it might be difficult to find the creator, or you have to pay much money – often even not to the creator, but to a publisher.

A common interpretation of copyright is that ensures that the creator gets credit or gets paid in a way that free licenses does not. Considering how many people copy things off of the internet without giving credit, this is false.

#### European Space Agency satellite SMART-1 on the moon, 2006.



We wish that we could have shown this image, but it's copyrighted by the European Space Agency.

Copyrighted images can become free.

### Public domain

Some images have previously been copyrighted, but some time after the artist's or photographer's death, it is considered to be in the public domain. All of Shakespeare's texts are in the public domain, for instance, as are Leonardo Da Vinci's paintings. You are absolutely free to use such works. Even if you would plagiarize them, you could not be taken responsible for copyright violations. In the United States, material produced by the Federal government are placed in public domain, because the taxpayers have already paid for it once.