



Fair Dealing: What Can I Use Without Permission?

The *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth) allows people to use copyright material without the copyright owner's permission in certain situations. These include making a "fair dealing" for certain purposes.

The purpose of this information sheet is to give general introductory information about copyright. If you need to know how the law applies in a particular situation, please get advice from a lawyer.

We update our information sheets from time to time. Check our website at copyright.org.au to make sure this is the most recent version, and for other information such as our seminar program.

Key points

- The Copyright Act allows "fair dealing" with copyright material for certain specified purposes.
- Unlike US copyright law, Australian law does not have a general "fair use" defence.

When are the fair dealing exceptions relevant?

The fair dealing exceptions are relevant when you are using copyright material in one of the exclusive ways reserved for the copyright owner (eg., reproduction), and:

- a) copyright has not expired (see our information sheet [Duration of Copyright](#));
- b) you do not have permission from the copyright owner (see our information sheet [Permission: Do I Need It?](#)); and
- c) you are using the whole or a substantial part of the material (see our information sheet [Quotes & Extracts](#)).

Where these three conditions are met, in order for your use to not be considered an infringement of copyright, it must fall under a copyright exception.

This information sheet deals with the fair dealing exceptions. Other important exceptions include:

- Special provisions for educational institutions (see our information sheet [Education: Copyright Basics](#));
- Special provisions for libraries (see our information sheet [Libraries: Introduction to Copyright](#));
- Special provisions for governments (see our information sheet [Government: Commonwealth, State and Territory](#));
- Private copying exceptions (see our information sheet [Copying & Converting Formats for Private Use](#));

- Other special cases (see our information sheet [Special Case or Flexible Dealing Exception: Section 200AB](#)).

A complete list of all the exceptions in the Copyright Act may be found in our information sheet [Exceptions to Copyright](#).

The “fair dealing” exceptions to infringement

There is no general exception for using copyright material simply because you think it is fair or because you are not making a profit. The Copyright Act allows you to use copyright material without permission if your use is a “fair dealing” for one of the following purposes:

- research or study;
- criticism or review;
- parody or satire;
- reporting news;
- enabling a person with a disability to access the material; or
- professional advice by a lawyer, patent attorney or trade marks attorney.

What does “fair dealing” mean?

In this context, a “dealing” with copyright material means using the material in any of the ways reserved to the copyright owner.

Whether a person’s use of copyright material is “fair” depends on the circumstances of the case. In one case, the Federal Court stated that whether a dealing is fair or not “is to be judged by the criterion of a fair minded and honest person”.

Courts will look at whether an objective viewer would consider that:

- the person is genuinely using the material for one of the purposes set out in the Act; and
- their use of it is fair in that context.

Factors that may be taken into account to determine whether a use is “fair” include whether the person using the material is doing so for commercial purposes, and whether the copyright owner is out of pocket from the use (for example, where a person copies the whole of a work that is available for sale). The mere fact that the person using the material is not making a profit does **not** make it fair.

In general, a person or organisation can rely on a fair dealing defence only for his, her or its own use of copyright material. For example, it would not be regarded as a fair dealing for criticism or review to reproduce a photograph and invite other people to critique it. Rather, the person making the reproduction must themselves be making the criticism or review.

Fair dealing for research or study

Use of copyright material for the purpose of research or study will not infringe copyright, provided the use is “fair”.

The Copyright Act states that if you use less than a certain amount of a copyright item for research or study, the use is **deemed** to be fair. If the amount used exceeds these limits, the Act sets out a number of factors to be taken into account to work out whether the use of the material is “fair”, if you are reproducing the material. This provision is discussed in our information sheet [Research or Study](#).

Fair dealing for criticism or review

People can use copyright material for the purpose of criticism or review without infringing copyright, provided they acknowledge the author and title of the work, and provided the dealing is “fair”. The criticism or review may relate to the work being used or to other material. For example, television film reviewers may show clips from other films as well as the one they are reviewing, in making their criticism or review.

The Federal Court has stated that “criticism and review” involves making a judgment of the material concerned, or of the underlying ideas. Criticism and review may be strongly expressed, and may be expressed humorously, and need not be balanced. The defence can apply where the criticism or review takes place in a commercial context, such as in published books or newspapers or on commercial television.

However, the court emphasised that **the purpose of criticism or review must be genuine**. If the person has other motives – especially if these motives involve using the material to make a profit, or using a competitor’s material to divert customers from the competitor – the fact that they have also engaged in a form of criticism or review is not enough to prevent the use from infringing copyright.

Fair dealing for parody or satire

You can use copyright material for the purposes of parody and satire, provided your use is “fair”.

The terms “parody” and “satire” are not defined in the Copyright Act and have not yet been considered by Australian courts, but it is likely that a court would look at dictionary definitions of the words to work out what they mean. The *Macquarie Dictionary* includes the following definitions:

“Parody”:

1. a humorous or satirical imitation of a serious piece of literature or writing.
2. the kind of literary composition represented by such imitations.
3. a burlesque imitation of a musical composition.
4. a poor imitation; a travesty.

“Satire”:

1. the use of irony, sarcasm, ridicule, etc in exposing, denouncing, or deriding vice, folly etc.
2. a literary composition, in verse or prose, in which vices, abuses, follies etc are held up to scorn, derision, or ridicule.
3. the species of literature constituted by such composition.

A parody is an imitation of a work, and may include parts of the original. In some cases, a parody may not be effective unless parts of the original are included. It seems that the purpose of a true parody is to make some comment on the imitated work or on its creator.

The purpose of satire, on the other hand, is to draw attention to characteristics or actions – such as vice or folly – by using certain forms of expression – such as irony, sarcasm and ridicule. It seems that both elements are required: the object to which attention is drawn (vice or folly etc) and the manner in which it is done (irony, ridicule etc). It is not clear, for example, that a work which uses irony or ridicule about something other than something like vice or folly would be satire.

The provision does not directly affect a creator’s right to take legal action if his or her work is treated in a derogatory way, infringing the creator’s moral right of integrity. However, in many cases, the use of a copyright work for parodic purposes may be defensible as “reasonable” under the moral rights provisions.

It is not so clear that use of a copyright work for satiric purposes would be as likely to be “reasonable”. This is because, unlike parody, the object of satire is generally not the copyright material itself or its creator(s). The copyright material used may enhance a work that has a satirical purpose, but is unlikely to be necessary for the satirical purpose.

The use of copyright material for parody or satire must be “fair”. It is unclear how courts will assess “fairness” when it comes to this new exception. However, factors such as the following could be relevant:

- how much of the copyright material is used;
- the context in which the parody or satire is used; and
- whether or not the copyright owner generally licenses such uses.

Fair dealing for reporting news

Copyright material may be used in reporting news in a newspaper, magazine (similar periodical), in a film, or by means of a broadcast, provided the use is “fair”. The author and title of the work must be acknowledged. However, music in news reports is not covered by this provision, unless the playing of the music is part of the news being reported. The use of music and sound recordings in this context is usually covered by broadcasters’ licences from the Australasian Performing Right Association and the Phonographic Performance Company of Australia. For further information on these licences, see our information sheet [Copyright Collecting Societies](#).

The Federal Court has held that “news” is not restricted to current events. For example, old material, or footage that was never related to a current event, may be relevant to current news events. Alternatively, under this provision investigative journalists may be able to use copyright material they have discovered that relates to past events.

In looking at whether a person’s use of copyright material comes within the exception of fair dealing for reporting news, courts are likely to require more than simply a connection with a newsworthy topic. The crucial element in determining whether the exception applies seems to be whether the **primary purpose** is to report or comment on news. Although courts have held that reporting news may involve the use of humour, it seems that where a court considers the purpose of using the material is primarily to entertain, the presence of newsworthy issues is not sufficient to make the use a fair dealing.

Fair dealing for access by persons with a disability

The *Copyright Amendment (Disability Access and Other Measures) Act 2017* introduced two exceptions regarding access for people with a disability, in line with Australia’s obligations under the Marrakesh Treaty. They are:

- a fair dealing exception for the purpose of giving one or more people with a disability access to the material (section 113E); and
- an exception allowing certain organisations to use material for the purpose of assisting people with a disability to access material in their required format (section 113F).

These exceptions took effect when the amendments commenced on 22 December 2017. Further information on the amendments may be found in our information sheet [Copyright Amendment \(Disability Access and Other Measures\) Act 2017](#).

For the purpose of these new exceptions, a person with a disability means a disability that causes difficulty in reading, viewing, hearing or comprehending copyright material in a particular form. This means that, for example, a person with a hearing disability who is unable to watch a movie without closed captions, or a person with an intellectual disability who cannot easily read text, can use copyright material under this exception, however a person who is mobility disabled but has no difficulty reading or listening will not.

In order for the section 113E exception to apply, the use of copyright material must be for the purpose of access by people with a disability. In addition, section 113E requires that the following fairness factors be considered:

- a) the nature of the copyright material (eg., is it published or unpublished);
- b) the effect on the potential market or value of the material (eg., is the use likely to harm the market for the material); and
- c) the amount and substantiality of the dealing (eg., how many copies will be made).

In order for the section 113F exception to apply, the user must be an organisation that assists people with a disability. This includes educational institutions and not-for-profit organisations with a primary function of providing assistance to persons with a disability. Such organisations can provide copyright material in an accessible format to people with disabilities, however unlike section 113E, they must first check whether an accessible version can be obtained on the commercial market. If an accessible version is not commercially available (ie., cannot be obtained in the appropriate format within a reasonable time at an ordinary commercial price), then the organisation may itself make an accessible format copy and supply it to the person with a disability under section 113F.

Finally, the exceptions also extend to the importation or exportation of copyright material in an accessible format, provided that the copy is not infringing under Australian law, and is not imported/exported for commercial purposes.

For more information about disabilities and copyright, see our information sheets [Disabilities: Copyright Provisions](#) and [The Marrakesh Treaty](#).

Fair dealing for professional advice

It is not an infringement of copyright to use copyright material for the purpose of giving professional advice by a lawyer, patent attorney or trade marks attorney. Again, the use of the material must genuinely be for the purpose of giving such advice, and must be "fair". For example, if an item is available for sale, it is unlikely that this provision would allow a person to copy the entire item for the purposes of legal advice. There are also special exceptions allowing use of copyright material for the purpose of a legal proceeding (eg., for use in court).

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Someone has reproduced my work without my permission and is claiming that their use is a fair dealing. What can I do?

In this case, you should try to find out the exact circumstances of the person's use of your work and the basis on which he or she considers the use was a fair dealing. Before taking legal action, you should seek legal advice. For further guidance on infringement, see our information sheet [Infringement: What Can I Do?](#)

Can we reproduce material in an educational textbook for users of the textbook to critique?

The reproduction may be a fair dealing if the textbook criticises or reviews the material. If, however, there is no criticism or review in the textbook, and the criticism or review is to be done by people using the textbook, then the reproduction would not be fair dealing for criticism or review. Permission from the copyright owner would be needed.

Can our photocopying business copy for students for their research or study?

A photocopying business is not entitled to photocopy material requested by students for their research or study. Even if the person requesting the copy genuinely needs it for their research or study, the purpose of the photocopying business in making the copy would be to make a profit, and

it could not rely on a fair dealing defence. However, it might be able to obtain a licence from Copyright Agency allowing it to make some copies in these circumstances (for example, 10% or one chapter of a book). See also our information sheet [Copying Services](#).

The Australian Publishers' Association has taken action against at least one photocopying business that was copying entire textbooks for sale to students.

Is it fair dealing for research or study if I copy 10 per cent of a literary work or 30 seconds of a sound recording?

The Copyright Act deems copying for research or study of 10 per cent of the number of pages or a single chapter to be a "reasonable portion" and a fair dealing. The Copyright Act does not have a similar deemed amount for sound recordings. Our information sheet [Research or Study](#) provides further guidance on this issue.

Can our school make an audio version of a book for students who are blind?

The fair dealing exception for the purpose of providing access to people with a disability allows educational institutions to make accessible copies of copyright material for print-disabled users, under some conditions. If you can easily purchase an audio version of the book, either in Australia or from overseas on the Internet, you should purchase that audio copy. If no audio version exists, then you may make your own audio version of the book for those students.

What is fair use and how is it different to fair dealing?

Fair use is an exception in United States copyright law and applies only in that jurisdiction. Fair use applies more broadly than fair dealing, but is far more uncertain than fair dealing. The Australian Law Reform Commission has recommended that Australia adopt fair use. For further guidance on fair use see our information sheet [Fair Use & the ALRC Inquiry](#).

Is it fair dealing if I copy material from the internet?

You should first check the website for any statements about copyright which apply to the material you want to copy – the copyright owner may expressly allow you to print and/or download material, possibly under stated conditions. Otherwise, you may print and/or save material if:

- it is for one of the fair dealing purposes; and
- the copying is fair, having regard to the five fairness factors.

It is unlikely to be either for research or study, or fair, to provide copies of the material you have downloaded to other people (e.g. as an email attachment or post it on Facebook).

I want to make a list of my favourite quotes by my favourite authors and put it on my website and if it goes well, publish a book – is this fair dealing?

There are some preliminary questions you will need to ask:

- am I taking a substantial part – see our information sheet [Quotes & Extracts](#)
- if I am taking a substantial part, is the proposed use a fair dealing?

If you aren't commenting on the quotes, making parodies or satire, or reporting the news, it is unlikely that putting the quotes on the website would be a fair dealing. Furthermore, publishing a book of the quotes is highly unlikely to be a fair dealing. You would need permission from the copyright owner to put the quotes on your website and publish them in a book. For further guidance on parody and satire, see our information sheet [Parodies, Satire & Jokes](#).

Further information

For further information about copyright, and about our other publications and training program, see our website (copyright.org.au).

If you meet our eligibility guidelines, a Copyright Council lawyer may be able to give you free preliminary legal advice about an issue that is not addressed in an information sheet. This service is primarily for professional creators and arts organisations but is also available to staff of educational institutions and libraries. For information about the service, see the 'Legal Advice' section of our website (copyright.org.au).

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About Us

The Australian Copyright Council is an independent, non-profit organisation. Founded in 1968, we represent the peak bodies for professional artists and content creators working in Australia's creative industries and Australia's major copyright collecting societies.

We are advocates for the contribution of creators to Australia's culture and economy; the importance of copyright for the common good. We work to promote understanding of copyright law and its application, lobby for appropriate law reform and foster collaboration between content creators and consumers.

We provide easily accessible and affordable practical, user-friendly information, legal advice, education and forums on Australian copyright law for content creators and consumers.



Australian Government



The Australian Copyright Council has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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