

What is Creative Commons?

Creative Commons is about allowing artists to manage their copyright in their works. As soon as you create an original work, you automatically get copyright in it. This means that nobody is allowed to copy, share, or reproduce it without your permission. It also means that of all the images, text, sound, videos, and other material you can find on the internet, most of them you will not be able to reuse in any way without infringing on someone's copyright.

The internet has the potential to provide a great way for artists to collaborate, and for individuals to participate in their culture by sharing, remixing, and building on the works of others. It also provides an incredible marketing tool for people who want to get their works out there and seen. But for any of this to happen, everyone needs permission from each copyright owner to use each individual work. Technology has in many ways made it easier to play with our media and art, and Creative Commons licences provide a way for copyright to become flexible enough to keep up.

Creative Commons provides a way for you to tell the world that there are certain things that everyone can do with your work, and there are certain things that you don't want anyone to do. It's a way of saying 'some rights reserved', a comfortable middle ground between signing away all your rights on the one hand, and not having your work available to anyone else on the other. The licences provide a way for you to give permission for certain uses of your work in advance, meaning you don't need to talk to a lawyer every time someone wants to use your work.

Using Creative Commons licences

When you create a work, you can go to the Creative Commons website (<http://creativecommons.org>) to get a licence to apply to it. From that site, you can select the conditions on which you're going to make your work available. All the core Creative Commons licences allow for free redistribution, so interested people can share your work with their friends.

- (BY) Attribution – All the licences require that anyone using your work gives you an appropriate credit for it. This ensures that people aren't ripping off your work and passing it off as their own.

Then there are 3 main optional restrictions which you can choose to apply in any combination you want:

- (NC) NonCommercial – anyone can use your work, but they can't use it to make money. If they're going to profit off it, they will have to talk to you. You can always negotiate another licence with them in this case, and charge them a fee for their use.
- (ND) NoDerivatives – anyone can use your work, but they are not allowed to make any changes. Use this option if you are concerned about the integrity of your work, and don't want to see it changed in any way. Remember though, that under Australian law, you always have a moral right of integrity; even if you don't choose this option, you can object to uses of your work which are prejudicial to your honour or reputation.
- (SA) ShareAlike – anyone can use your work, and make changes if they like, or incorporate parts of it into a bigger project, but they must make those changes available back to the community under the same terms. This option is useful if you like the idea of your work staying open, and watching it as it evolves through any number of different interpretations.

Once you have picked your licence, you simply attach it to your work. If it's an electronic work, you can just put a link to the licence, or embed the provided machine readable tagging information. If it's a physical work, you can put a notice on or near it, like the one at the bottom of this article. When people look at the licence, they'll see a simple human-readable Commons Deed, which outlines what they are and are not allowed to do with your work. The Commons Deed is linked to the lawyer-readable Legal Code, which makes sure that your rights

are enforceable all around the world.

Why use Creative Commons?

There are a number of reasons why people use Creative Commons licences. Some people are quite simply interested in getting their work seen by as many people as possible, and want to be sure that everyone has the ability to share their work with their friends. One of our favourite examples is *Black Brow*, a young Brisbane-based duo who we commissioned to make an introductory Creative Commons animation. The animation was picked up by bloggers and file-sharers all over the world, giving the startup duo widespread recognition practically overnight. The grass-roots popularity of the animation has landed Black Brow several international contracts for more work.

Other people are interested in Creative Commons on purely ideological grounds. These people believe that art should be free to the people, and are dedicated to increasing individual participation in culture through allowing everyone to remix and redistribute their works. These artists are often involved in appropriation art themselves, and recognise the importance of allowing people to play with the symbols that form our culture. By encouraging people to share their images, texts, sounds, and videos, these artists are building a contributory commons – a space where everyone can participate in creative expression.

There are many other reasons people choose to make their work available to others to use and reuse. Some artists want to put their older works on the Internet and see what other people can do with them, instead of watching them gather dust on a shelf. Some want to release a few works to the public as a teaser, to increase interest in their other works. Some have already been paid for their work, and feel that it should be spread as widely as possible (like this article!) The fact is, Creative Commons offers a range of options for people to make their work available in a way that they are comfortable with.

Myths and misconceptions

There are a few common arguments made against Creative Commons licensing. These arguments are often based on a misunderstanding of copyright and the way the CC licences work. It's good to clear up a couple of points about what Creative Commons *isn't*:

- **Creative Commons is not about giving up your copyright.** Our licences use copyright to structure what people are allowed and are not allowed to do with your work. You never give up your copyright with CC licences.
- **Creative Commons is not about giving up the ability to make money off your work.** We merely provide a tool for making your material available on terms of your choosing. Many successful artists choose to release portions of their work under CC licences, and many young artists choose to use CC licensing in order to increase their popularity and exposure.'
- **Releasing something under a CC licence doesn't mean you lose the ability to make money off that work.** Our licences are binding on people who use your work, but don't apply to you. So, if you choose to release your work under a CC licence, you can always enter into other deals with it later.

Creative Commons aims to encourage creative sharing. We believe that it would be great if there were more creative works available for everyone to play with. We believe that creativity is extremely important to society and individuals, and we believe that making more art available for individuals to play with enhances creative expression. Creativity is rarely born from a vacuum – the works of others often provide the raw materials for future expression. We want to help grow this commons of creative work that is available for everyone to use.

At Creative Commons, we also believe in artist choice. We believe that artists should be able to choose to make their works available on terms that they are comfortable with. We believe that artists deserve to be able to make a living from their works. We do not believe that 'all rights reserved' is the only way for artists to survive in this age.

We encourage artists to find business models that suit them. We are merely providing a way for artists to release their works in an open manner if they choose to do so. We encourage people to experiment with using Creative Commons licences on some of their works, or using NonCommercial licences to split the market between paying customers and free private users. There are many ways to use Creative Commons licences, and we are confident that there are many ways to make money and help build a great sharing creative community at the same time.

Links

Here's a couple of great places to start looking for works available under Creative Commons licences. The best way to see what Creative Commons is all about is to jump in and have a look at the huge range of material that's already out there, free for you to use.

- Flickr, an online photo library, has around 4.2 million photos licensed under Creative Commons licences for people to reuse: <http://www.flickr.com/creativecommons/>
- The Open Photo Project has thousands of excellent quality photos: <http://openphoto.net/>
- The Prelinger Archive hosts nearly two thousand public domain films: <http://www.archive.org/details/prelinger>
- The Creative Commons search engine, which uses either Google or Yahoo to search the web for CC-licensed works: <http://creativecommons.org/find/>
- ccMixter provides music remixes under CC licences: <http://ccmixter.org/>
- Magnatune is a new music label which uses CC Non-Commercial Share-Alike licences: <http://magnatune.com/>
- Opsound has a large pool of CC audio: <http://www.opsound.org/>
- Check out SoundTransit, where you can book a virtual audio tour through various locations of your choice – a great place to look for field recordings: <http://soundtransit.nl/>

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