

Copyright FAQs

When it comes to including third-party content (i.e., anything you didn't create) in your manuscript, copyright law can be a tricky area to navigate. Morton Publishing takes a conservative view on copyright and will generally ask you to remove any third-party material that you don't have written permission to include in your manuscript. Please see the following guidelines to help you understand some of the intricacies of copyright law involving third-party content.

1. Public Domain

The internet contains everything you're looking for, so it is tempting to take content (exercises, images, etc.) from a Google or Wikipedia search. However, the internet is not public domain.

Public domain works fall into three main categories:

1. Non-copyrightable items: Names, ideas, facts, government works.
 - a. Note that some names and ideas may be protected under trademarks or patents.
2. Works that have been placed into the public domain by their creators.
 - a. These explicitly state that they were created for the public domain.
3. Works that have had their copyrights expire and then automatically placed into the public domain.
 - a. This usually happens 70 years after the creator of the work has died.

As soon as content is created, it is automatically protected under copyright laws. It does not matter where or how that content was created (online or offline, digital or analog).

If something is truly in the public domain, it can be used in your custom. Public domain has a very specific and narrow meaning, however, and does not apply to the internet as a whole.

2. Out-of-Print Books

Related to the public domain discussion, a book going out of print does not mean that the book's content can be used without permission.

3. Content Used in the Past

When copyright permission is granted, that doesn't mean that it's yours to use as you see fit. Whether you are changing publishers or going into a new edition of your book, you'll likely need to secure permission for any content you've used in the past.

4. Fair Use

Fair use is designed to let authors use limited portions of copyright-protected works in certain circumstances. However, those circumstances are narrow, and legal interpretation of fair use is fuzzy. To be safe, use of any content that isn't yours within your work, no matter how small, should be accompanied by written permission from that content's creator(s).

5. Crediting an Author and/or Publisher

You should always credit the creator of any content that you're taking from elsewhere to use in your work. However, credit is not the same thing as permission. Unless you have written permission from the creator of that content, you are not allowed to use that content in your book.

6. Creative Commons

Creative Commons licenses are standardized methods to grant copyright permissions automatically, without you having to seek out that content's creator to specifically ask for it. However, not all Creative Commons licenses are created equally. In order to be able to use Creative Commons content in your material in a published lab manual, the license must specifically include language saying it can be used in commercial material. Make sure that you read the actual Creative Commons license for the content you wish to include before you drop it into your book.

7. The Author Said I Could Use Their Content

Great! Ask them to give you that permission in writing and we're good to go!

The common theme with all of the above points is that in the vast majority of situations, the safest way to include third-party material in your manuscript is to secure written permission from that content's creator(s). Please feel free to ask your project editor for any additional information or specific clarification for your lab manual.