



Moral Rights

In this fact sheet we give an overview of the ‘moral rights’ of individual creators under the *Copyright Act 1968* (Cth). Moral rights for performers are discussed in our fact sheet [Performers’ Rights](#).

For detailed information, see our book [Moral Rights](#). Moral rights are also discussed in our books [Film & Copyright: Making Content for Big and Little Screen](#), and [Photographers & Copyright](#).

The purpose of this fact 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.

Key points

- Moral rights are personal legal rights belonging to individual creators of copyright works and cannot be transferred, assigned or sold.
- For any one item of copyright material, the moral rights and copyright in the material may be held by different people.
- Someone using copyright material may need to get moral rights consent from the creator as well as copyright permission from the copyright owner.
- There are several defences and exceptions to infringement of moral rights.
- Courts can award a range of damages for infringement of moral rights.

1. What are ‘moral rights’?

‘Moral rights’ are the rights individual creators have in relation to copyright works or films they have created. Moral rights are separate from the ‘economic rights’ of the copyright owner. The creator of a work, who holds moral rights, is not necessarily the owner of copyright in the work.

Creators have three moral rights. These are the right:

- to be attributed (or credited) for their work
- not to have their work falsely attributed, and
- not to have their work treated in a derogatory way.

1.1 What types of material do moral rights apply to?

Moral rights apply to:

- **literary material** such as novels, screenplays, poems, song lyrics and journal articles
- **artistic works** such as paintings, drawings, architecture, sculpture, craft work, photographs, maps and plans
- **musical works**
- **dramatic works** such as ballets, plays, screenplays and mime
- **computer programs**, and
- **cinematograph films** such as feature films, documentaries, music videos, television programs and television commercials.

In the moral rights provisions of the Copyright Act, these categories of material are referred to as 'works'.

Films, and works included in films, are treated differently from other works under the moral rights provisions.

There are no moral rights in published broadcasts or sound recordings (though works and films incorporated in these may be subject to the rights).

1.2 Who has moral rights?

Individual creators have moral rights in relation to their work. Examples of such creators are:

- the writer of a novel
- the writer of a screenplay
- the architect of a building
- the composer of a song melody and the writer of the lyrics
- the painter of a picture
- the choreographer of a ballet.

In the case of films the following people have moral rights:

- the principal director
- the principal producer (provided the producer is a natural person and not a company), and
- the principal screen writer.

Performers whose performances are captured on sound recordings also have moral rights. Moral rights belong to each person who contributed to the sounds of a performance, including the conductor of a musical work. For more information, see our fact sheet [Performers' Rights](#).

1.3 How do you get moral rights?

In Australia, there is no need to do anything to ensure you have moral rights: they arise automatically once you have created a copyright work or film.

In Australia, it is not necessary for an author to expressly assert his or her moral rights. However, in some countries (such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand), there is a requirement to assert moral rights in order to benefit from them.

Australian creators whose work may be published, distributed or broadcast overseas should consider getting advice on whether they should use a form of assertion to ensure that they get moral rights protection in those countries. This is generally done simply by including a statement in

copies of the work (for example, on the imprint page of a printed book) stating that the creator asserts his or her right to be identified as the author of the work.

1.4 How long do moral rights last?

The rights of attribution and false attribution in relation to all works, and the right of integrity in relation to all works except films, last for the same period as copyright protection. For films, each creator's right of integrity lasts only for that creator's lifetime.

Generally, copyright protection lasts for the creator's life plus 70 years.

For more information, see our fact sheet [Duration of Copyright](#).

1.5 Can moral rights be transferred?

Moral rights are different from copyright, which consists of economic rights (such as the right to reproduce the work). Unlike copyright, which can be assigned or licensed, creators cannot assign, transfer or sell their moral rights. Creators can give consent for their work to be used in specific ways but cannot assign the right to grant such consent.

Where moral rights continue after the creator's death, they are administered by the creator's legal personal representative.

2. Right of attribution

Creators have a right to be attributed (or credited) when their work is used in certain ways.

Creators of copyright in literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works can take action for any failure to attribute them that takes place on or after 21 December 2000, regardless of when the works were originally created.

The right of attribution applies to films made on or after 21 December 2000 and to literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works 'as included in' films made on or after this date. This means that creators of films and works included in films cannot take action for failure to attribute them if the film was completed before 21 December 2000. Creators of music for a film still, however, have rights when the music is used other than as part of the film.

2.1 When does a creator need to be attributed?

Creators of copyright material have the right to be attributed when the work is:

- **reproduced** - such as by making photocopies, copying it by hand, reciting it onto an audio file, scanning it into a digital file or printing out a copy of a digital file
- **published** – that is, made public for the first time
- **exhibited in public** - in the case of artistic works and films
- **communicated** to the public - such as by putting the written work onto a website, broadcasting it or emailing digital files containing the work, or
- **adapted** - translated, adapted from a literary to a dramatic work, or, for a musical work, arranged.

2.2 How should a creator be attributed?

If a creator has not stated the way in which they wish to be identified, any 'clear and reasonably prominent' form of identification may be used. This means that someone receiving, seeing or hearing the work or adaptation would be aware of the creator's name.

2.3 When is attribution NOT necessary?

You do not need to attribute the creator when you use a copyright work in one of the ways outlined above if:

- the creator has given a valid consent in writing to specified acts or omissions, or
- it is reasonable in all the circumstances not to identify the creator.

There are several factors to be considered when assessing whether a person has acted reasonably: see **6. Reasonableness**, below.

3. Right of false attribution

Authors of literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works and films have the right not to have the authorship of their works falsely attributed.

False attribution means:

- crediting the wrong person as the creator of the work; or
- crediting the creator of a work that has been altered without acknowledging the alterations.

It is also an infringement of this right to knowingly deal with or communicate a falsely attributed work.

3.1 When is it OK to falsely attribute the author?

False attribution does not infringe the creator's rights if the creator has given written consent.

Note that there is no defence of 'reasonableness' for false attribution.

4. Right of integrity

The right of integrity is the creator's right not to have their work subjected to 'derogatory treatment'.

Creators of copyright in literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works can take action against another person who treats the work in a derogatory manner on or after 21 December 2000, regardless of when the works were created.

The right of integrity applies to films made on or after 21 December 2000 and to literary, dramatic, musical and artistic works 'as included in' films made on or after this date.

4.1 What is 'derogatory' treatment?

'Derogatory treatment' means doing anything in relation to the work which prejudices the creator's honour or reputation. This could include:

- distorting, mutilating or materially altering the work in a way that prejudices the creator's honour or reputation, and
- in the case of artistic works, destroying the work or exhibiting it in public in a way that prejudices the creator's honour or reputation.

Someone who imports for commercial purposes or commercially deals with material that infringes a creator's moral rights, may themselves infringe moral rights.

Simply altering a work or treating it in a way the creator is not happy with, will not necessarily infringe the creator's moral rights: there is also a requirement that the treatment of the work be prejudicial to the creator's honour or reputation.

4.2 When is derogatory treatment not an infringement of moral rights?

You do not infringe the creator's moral rights if you treat a copyright work or film in a way that would otherwise be 'derogatory' if:

- the creator has consented in writing to the treatment of the work, or
- it is reasonable in all the circumstances to treat the work in this way.

There are several factors to be considered in assessing whether a person has acted reasonably: see **6. Reasonableness**, below.

4.2.1 Special exceptions to infringement of the right of integrity

There are special exceptions to infringement of the right of integrity in relation to artistic works (including buildings and architectural drawings). It is not an infringement of moral rights to:

- destroy a moveable artistic work if the creator, or the creator's representative, is given a reasonable opportunity to remove the work
- change, relocate, demolish or destroy a building of which an artistic work forms part, or to which it is affixed, provided certain conditions (including the giving of notice and provision of access for the purpose of making a record and consultation) are met
- change, relocate, demolish or destroy a building, provided certain conditions (including the giving of notice and provision of access for the purpose of making a record and consultation) are met, or
- remove or relocate site-specific artworks, provided certain conditions (including the giving of notice and provision of access for the purpose of making a record and consultation) are met.

It is not an infringement of moral rights to do anything in good faith to restore or preserve a work.

Our book [Galleries, Museums & Copyright](#) provides in-depth guidance on these provisions in the context of curatorial work undertaken in collecting institutions.

5. Consent

The Copyright Act sets out several different ways creators can provide consent.

A creator who is an employee can give a wide-ranging consent to their employer, covering all material created in the course of employment. Similarly, a broad consent can be given by a creator whose work is a film or will be included in a film. Other creators cannot give such wide-ranging consent.

6. Reasonableness

A failure to attribute the creator, or a derogatory treatment of copyright work, does not infringe the creator's rights if the action was 'reasonable' in the circumstances.

The Copyright Act sets out several factors to be considered in working out whether the action was reasonable. These include:

- the nature of the work
- the purpose, manner and context for which it is used
- relevant industry practice
- whether the work was created in the course of employment or under a contract of service, and
- if there are two or more authors, their views about the failure to attribute or derogatory treatment.

There is no defence of reasonableness for false attribution.

In the case of films, the creators of ‘underlying’ works reproduced or recorded in the film – such as the music – have moral rights, as well as the creators of the film itself (the director, producer and screenwriter). The creators of a film can enter into a written ‘co-authorship agreement’ under which they each agree not to exercise their respective rights of integrity except jointly with the other creators.

7. What remedies are available for infringement of moral rights?

If a creator makes a successful claim for infringement of moral rights, the remedies a court could grant include:

- financial compensation (damages)
- an order to prevent or stop a particular activity (an injunction)
- a declaration that a moral right of the creator has been infringed
- an order that the defendant make a public apology for the infringement, or
- an order that any false attribution of authorship, or derogatory treatment of the work, be reversed or removed.

There are several factors which the court can consider when deciding the appropriate remedy, such as anything done by the defendant to reduce the effects of infringement.

Before deciding whether to grant an injunction, a court must consider whether it should adjourn the hearing to give the parties an opportunity to negotiate a settlement.

Frequently asked questions

In some books, you see the words ‘The author asserts their moral rights’. Is this wording necessary?

In Australia, it is not necessary for an author to expressly assert their moral rights in this way.

However, assertion of moral rights is a requirement of the law of the United Kingdom and New Zealand, so Australian authors may want to use this form of assertion to ensure that they get moral rights protection in those countries.

My work has been used in a publication and I have not been credited. Do I have any rights?

Whenever your work is used in a publication, you have the right to be attributed, subject to any consent you have signed and subject to the reasonableness defence. If you are not attributed, you may have the right to pursue several remedies, including financial compensation.

You might be able to negotiate a satisfactory outcome with the other party concerned. However, if this is not possible, your next step would be to take the matter to court, which, unfortunately, usually involves considerable expense. You should not take this step without legal advice

If someone reproduces part of my work, do I have the right to be attributed?

You have the right to be attributed whenever a ‘substantial part’ of your work is used. There is, as yet, no guidance on the meaning of this phrase in the context of moral rights. In relation to copyright, ‘substantial part’ means an important, distinctive or recognisable part of a work, but not necessarily a large part.

Can an employed creator insist on being attributed when their work is used?

Employed creators have the right to be attributed in the same way as freelance creators, subject to any consent they may have given their employer. However, there is an argument that it may be

reasonable not to attribute employed creators in certain situations: the reasonableness defence includes, as one of the factors to consider in assessing reasonableness, the creator's employment status.

My work has been used by someone else and they have put their name on it. Do I have any rights?

Yes, this amounts to false attribution (subject to any consent you may have given in favour of that person). It is also likely to be an infringement of the attribution right, as your name has been left off the work.

My article has been published with several changes I didn't authorise. Is this an infringement of my right of integrity?

When someone publishes your work, they have an obligation to ensure that your work is not treated in a derogatory manner. Unauthorised changes to your article could amount to derogatory treatment if the changes are prejudicial to your honour or reputation and may also be a false attribution, depending on the number and the effect of the changes. You may need to be able to demonstrate that others think less of you because of the way the article has been altered.

Even if derogatory treatment is established, there is the possibility that the publisher could raise the defence that the treatment was reasonable in all the circumstances.

Further information and advice

We also have a range of other fact sheets on several topics and publish books that focus on specific interest groups. Check our website for information about our publications [here](#) and details of our seminar/webinar program [here](#).

We can provide this fact sheet in an accessible format or in hard copy on request.

An Australian Copyright Council lawyer may be able to give you free preliminary legal advice about an issue not addressed in a fact sheet. This service is primarily for professional creators and arts organisations but is also available to staff of educational institutions and libraries. For further information about the service, see [Legal Advice](#) on our website copyright.org.au.

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About us

The Australian Copyright Council is an independent, not-for-profit, non-government 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. Our objectives include:

- to assist creators and other copyright owners to exercise their rights effectively
- to raise awareness in the community about the importance of copyright
- to identify and research areas of copyright law which are inadequate or unfair

- to seek changes to law and practice to enhance the effectiveness and fairness of copyright
- to foster co-operation amongst bodies representing creators and owners of copyright.

The Australian Copyright Council respectfully acknowledges the Gadigal people, the owners and custodians of the land on which our office is located. We pay our respects to the elders and to all First Nations elders: past, present and emerging. This always was and always will be Aboriginal land.



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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