

# Introduction to free licences



**Wikipedia**  
basics 

# Wikipedia

content is distributed under a free license. Anyone can re-distribute it at no charge.

Wikipedia is one of a growing number of projects in which the fundamental approach is, "how can we best share information?" instead of "how can we effectively control information?" This collaborative method requires that we set clear expectations about how our content may be reused. Wikipedia thus requires a radically different approach than that taken by more traditional projects.

After reading **Introduction to free licenses**, you will be able to:

- » Understand how free licenses help a project like Wikipedia
- » Understand some core concepts relating to the use of free licenses

The concept of a free license is central to establishing a shared understanding, among the millions of people who write and read our material, of how to work together and how to treat one another's work.

## What is a free license?

The person who creates the work is the owner of that copyright – which literally means "the right to copy" – unless he or she produced it on behalf of an organization, or legally transferred the right to somebody else. The owner of the copyright may choose to give, or sell, the right to distribute copies under specific conditions; this is accomplished through a legal document known as a **license**, which is a contract specifying the nature of the agreement.

A **free license** simply means the creator wants to **allow** others to use his or her work without asking prior permission. Doing so makes it easier **to share work** with others.

There are many different free licenses. Most licenses say that when a creator has released a work under a free license, that means you can:

- » **copy it**, as long as you give them attribution;
- » **modify it**, as long as the new work is also released under the free license.

# Wikimedia's educational mission and free content

**Wikimedia**, the non-profit organization that operates Wikipedia, is dedicated to providing educational material that may be freely reproduced. Every article, picture, sound, or video you find on Wikimedia's sites may be reused for any purpose.

Wikipedia contributors generally agree to release their work under the Creative Commons **CC-BY-SA** license, meaning that they attach the following conditions to reusing their work: **attribution** (in the form of a link to their user page), and any derivative works are released **under the same license**.

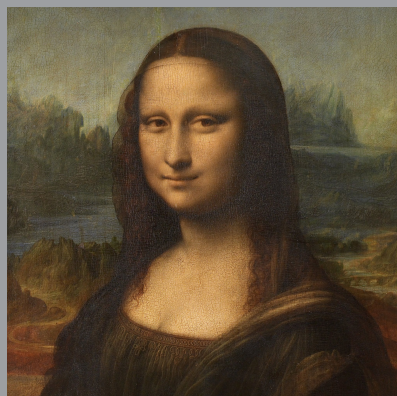
## What can I upload?

You can upload your **own photographs, drawings, sound files, etc.** to Wikimedia sites, as long as you release your works under a free license.

If you have found materials elsewhere — for instance, from a blog or an old book — you must ensure that they are either in the **public domain**, or released under a **free license**.

### Public Domain

Some images have previously been copyrighted, but some time after the artist's or photographer's death, they are 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.



The Mona Lisa, by Leonardo Da Vinci, is in the public domain, so you can use the image freely.

Some countries also publish new works directly into the public domain. In the United States, material produced by the federal government are in the public domain, because the country's taxpaying citizens have already paid for it. For instance, most material that is produced by NASA is released as public domain.

# What is a free license and what can I upload to Wikipedia?

**Introduction to free licenses** helps you understand the basic concepts of free licenses. It explains the idea of free licenses, as well as terms like "CC-by-SA" and "public domain".

## **Wikimedia Foundation**

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