

Cornell Law School



U.S. Code › Title 17 › Chapter 1 › § 101

17 U.S. Code § 101 - Definitions

Except as otherwise provided in this title, as used in this title, the following terms and their variant forms mean the following:

An “anonymous work” is a work on the copies or phonorecords of which no natural person is identified as author.

An “architectural work” is the design of a building as embodied in any tangible medium of expression, including a building, architectural plans, or drawings. The work includes the overall form as well as the arrangement and composition of spaces and elements in the design, but does not include individual standard features.

“Audiovisual works” are works that consist of a series of related images which are intrinsically intended to be shown by the use of machines, or devices such as projectors, viewers, or electronic equipment, together with accompanying sounds, if any, regardless of the nature of the material objects, such as films or tapes, in which the works are embodied.

The “Berne Convention” is the Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, signed at Berne, Switzerland, on September 9, 1886, and all acts, protocols, and revisions thereto.

The “best edition” of a work is the edition, published in the United States at any time before the date of deposit, that the Library of Congress determines to be most suitable for its purposes.

A person’s “children” are that person’s immediate offspring, whether legitimate or not, and any children legally adopted by that person.

A “collective work” is a work, such as a periodical issue, anthology, or encyclopedia, in which a number of contributions, constituting separate and independent works in themselves, are assembled into a collective whole.

A “compilation” is a work formed by the collection and assembling of preexisting materials or of data that are selected, coordinated, or arranged in such a way that the resulting work as a whole constitutes an original work of authorship. The term “compilation” includes collective works.

A “computer program” is a set of statements or instructions to be used directly or indirectly in a computer in order to bring about a certain result.

“Copies” are material objects, other than phonorecords, in which a work is fixed by any method now known or later developed, and from which the work can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. The term “copies” includes the material object, other than a phonorecord, in which the work is first fixed.

“Copyright owner”, with respect to any one of the exclusive rights comprised in a copyright, refers to the owner of that particular right.

A “Copyright Royalty Judge” is a Copyright Royalty Judge appointed under section 802 of this title, and includes any individual serving as an interim Copyright Royalty Judge under such section.

A work is “created” when it is fixed in a copy or phonorecord for the first time; where a work is prepared over a period of time, the portion of it that has been fixed at any particular time constitutes the work as of that time, and where the work has been prepared in different versions, each version constitutes a separate work.

A “derivative work” is a work based upon one or more preexisting works, such as a translation, musical arrangement, dramatization, fictionalization, motion picture version, sound recording, art reproduction, abridgment, condensation, or any other form in which a work may be recast, transformed, or adapted. A work consisting of editorial revisions, annotations, elaborations, or other modifications which, as a whole, represent an original work of authorship, is a “derivative work”.

A “device”, “machine”, or “process” is one now known or later developed.

A “digital transmission” is a transmission in whole or in part in a digital or other non-analog format.

To “display” a work means to show a copy of it, either directly or by means of a film, slide, television image, or any other device or process or, in the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, to show individual images nonsequentially.

An “establishment” is a store, shop, or any similar place of business open to the general public for the primary purpose of selling goods or services in which the majority of the gross square feet of space that is nonresidential is used for that purpose, and in which nondramatic musical works are performed publicly.

The term “financial gain” includes receipt, or expectation of receipt, of anything of value, including the receipt of other copyrighted works.

A work is “fixed” in a tangible medium of expression when its embodiment in a copy or phonorecord, by or under the authority of the author, is sufficiently permanent or stable to permit it to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration. A work consisting of sounds, images, or both, that are being transmitted, is “fixed” for purposes of this title if a fixation of the work is being made simultaneously with its transmission.

A “food service or drinking establishment” is a restaurant, inn, bar, tavern, or any other similar place of business in which the public or patrons assemble for the primary purpose of being served food or drink, in which the majority of the gross square feet of space that is nonresidential is used for that purpose, and in which nondramatic musical works are performed publicly.

The “Geneva Phonograms Convention” is the Convention for the Protection of Producers of Phonograms Against Unauthorized Duplication of Their Phonograms, concluded at Geneva, Switzerland, on October 29, 1971.

The “gross square feet of space” of an establishment means the entire interior space of that establishment, and any adjoining outdoor space used to serve patrons, whether on a seasonal basis or otherwise.

The terms “including” and “such as” are illustrative and not limitative.

An “international agreement” is—

- (1) the Universal Copyright Convention;
- (2) the Geneva Phonograms Convention;
- (3) the Berne Convention;
- (4) the WTO Agreement;
- (5) the WIPO Copyright Treaty;
- (6) the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty; and
- (7) any other copyright treaty to which the United States is a party.

A “joint work” is a work prepared by two or more authors with the intention that their contributions be merged into inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole.

“Literary works” are works, other than audiovisual works, expressed in words, numbers, or other verbal or numerical symbols or indicia, regardless of the nature of the material objects, such as books, periodicals, manuscripts, phonorecords, film, tapes, disks, or cards, in which they are embodied.

The term “motion picture exhibition facility” means a movie theater, screening room, or other venue that is being used primarily for the exhibition of a copyrighted motion picture, if such exhibition is open to the public or is made to an assembled group of viewers outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances.

“Motion pictures” are audiovisual works consisting of a series of related images which, when shown in succession, impart an impression of motion, together with accompanying sounds, if any.

To “perform” a work means to recite, render, play, dance, or act it, either directly or by means of any device or process or, in the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, to show its images in any sequence or to make the sounds accompanying it audible.

A “performing rights society” is an association, corporation, or other entity that licenses the public performance of nondramatic musical works on behalf of copyright owners of such works, such as the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), and SESAC, Inc.

“Phonorecords” are material objects in which sounds, other than those accompanying a motion picture or other audiovisual work, are fixed by any method now known or later developed, and from which the sounds can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. The term “phonorecords” includes the material object in which the sounds are first fixed.

“Pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works” include two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of fine, graphic, and applied art, photographs, prints and art reproductions, maps, globes, charts, diagrams, models, and technical drawings, including architectural plans. Such works shall include works of artistic craftsmanship insofar as their form but not their mechanical or utilitarian aspects are concerned; the design of a useful article, as defined in this section, shall be considered a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work only if, and only to the extent that, such design incorporates pictorial, graphic, or sculptural features that can be identified separately from, and are capable of existing independently of, the utilitarian aspects of the article.

For purposes of section 513, a “proprietor” is an individual, corporation, partnership, or other entity, as the case may be, that owns an establishment or a food service or drinking establishment, except that no owner or operator of a radio or television station licensed by the Federal Communications Commission, cable system or satellite carrier, cable or satellite carrier service or programmer, provider of online services or network access or the operator of facilities therefor, telecommunications company, or any other such audio or audiovisual service or programmer now known or as may be developed in the future, commercial subscription music service, or owner or operator of any other transmission service, shall under any circumstances be deemed to be a proprietor.

A “pseudonymous work” is a work on the copies or phonorecords of which the author is identified under a fictitious name.

“Publication” is the distribution of copies or phonorecords of a work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending. The offering to distribute copies or phonorecords to a group of persons for purposes of further distribution, public performance, or public display, constitutes publication. A public performance or display of a work does not of itself constitute publication.

To perform or display a work “publicly” means—

(1) to perform or display it at a place open to the public or at any place where a substantial number of persons outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances is gathered; or

(2) to transmit or otherwise communicate a performance or display of the work to a place specified by clause (1) or to the public, by means of any device or process, whether the members of the public capable of receiving the performance or display receive it in the same place or in separate places and at the same time or at different times.

“Registration”, for purposes of sections 205(c)(2), 405, 406, 410(d), 411, 412, and 506(e), means a registration of a claim in the original or the renewed and extended term of copyright.

“Sound recordings” are works that result from the fixation of a series of musical, spoken, or other sounds, but not including the sounds accompanying a motion picture or other audiovisual work, regardless of the nature of the material objects, such as disks, tapes, or other phonorecords, in which they are embodied.

“State” includes the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and any territories to which this title is made applicable by an Act of Congress.

A “transfer of copyright ownership” is an assignment, mortgage, exclusive license, or any other conveyance, alienation, or hypothecation of a copyright or of any of the exclusive rights comprised in a copyright, whether or not it is limited in time or place of effect, but not including a nonexclusive license.

A “transmission program” is a body of material that, as an aggregate, has been produced for the sole purpose of transmission to the public in sequence and as a unit.

To “transmit” a performance or display is to communicate it by any device or process whereby images or sounds are received beyond the place from which they are sent.

A “treaty party” is a country or intergovernmental organization other than the United States that is a party to an international agreement.

The “United States”, when used in a geographical sense, comprises the several States, the District of Columbia and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the organized territories under the jurisdiction of the United States Government.

For purposes of section 411, a work is a “United States work” only if—

(1) in the case of a published work, the work is first published—

(A) in the United States;

(B) simultaneously in the United States and another treaty party or parties, whose law grants a term of copyright protection that is the same as or longer than the term provided in the United States;

(C) simultaneously in the United States and a foreign nation that is not a treaty party; or

(D) in a foreign nation that is not a treaty party, and all of the authors of the work are nationals, domiciliaries, or habitual residents of, or in the case of an audiovisual work legal entities with headquarters in, the United States;

(2) in the case of an unpublished work, all the authors of the work are nationals, domiciliaries, or habitual residents of the United States, or, in the case of an unpublished audiovisual work, all the authors are legal entities with headquarters in the United States; or

(3) in the case of a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work incorporated in a building or structure, the building or structure is located in the United States.

A “useful article” is an article having an intrinsic utilitarian function that is not merely to portray the appearance of the article or to convey information. An article that is normally a part of a useful article is considered a “useful article”.

The author’s “widow” or “widower” is the author’s surviving spouse under the law of the author’s domicile at the time of his or her death, whether or not the spouse has later remarried.

The “WIPO Copyright Treaty” is the WIPO Copyright Treaty concluded at Geneva, Switzerland, on December 20, 1996.

The “WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty” is the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty concluded at Geneva, Switzerland, on December 20, 1996.

A “work of visual art” is—

(1) a painting, drawing, print, or sculpture, existing in a single copy, in a limited edition of 200 copies or fewer that are signed and consecutively numbered by the author, or, in the case of a sculpture, in multiple cast, carved, or fabricated sculptures of 200 or fewer that are consecutively numbered by the author and bear the signature or other identifying mark of the author; or

(2) a still photographic image produced for exhibition purposes only, existing in a single copy that is signed by the author, or in a limited edition of 200 copies or fewer that are signed and consecutively numbered by the author.

A work of visual art does not include—

(A)(i) any poster, map, globe, chart, technical drawing, diagram, model, applied art, motion picture or other audiovisual work, book, magazine, newspaper, periodical, data base, electronic information service, electronic publication, or similar publication;

- (ii) any merchandising item or advertising, promotional, descriptive, covering, or packaging material or container;
- (iii) any portion or part of any item described in clause (i) or (ii);
- (B) any work made for hire; or
- (C) any work not subject to copyright protection under this title.

A “work of the United States Government” is a work prepared by an officer or employee of the United States Government as part of that person’s official duties.

A “work made for hire” is—

- (1) a work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment; or
- (2) a work specially ordered or commissioned for use as a contribution to a collective work, as a part of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, as a translation, as a supplementary work, as a compilation, as an instructional text, as a test, as answer material for a test, or as an atlas, if the parties expressly agree in a written instrument signed by them that the work shall be considered a work made for hire. For the purpose of the foregoing sentence, a “supplementary work” is a work prepared for publication as a secondary adjunct to a work by another author for the purpose of introducing, concluding, illustrating, explaining, revising, commenting upon, or assisting in the use of the other work, such as forewords, afterwords, pictorial illustrations, maps, charts, tables, editorial notes, musical arrangements, answer material for tests, bibliographies, appendixes, and indexes, and an “instructional text” is a literary, pictorial, or graphic work prepared for publication and with the purpose of use in systematic instructional activities.

In determining whether any work is eligible to be considered a work made for hire under paragraph (2), neither the amendment contained in section 1011(d) of the Intellectual Property and Communications Omnibus Reform Act of 1999, as enacted by section 1000(a)(9) of Public Law 106–113, nor the deletion of the words added by that amendment—

- (A) shall be considered or otherwise given any legal significance, or
- (B) shall be interpreted to indicate congressional approval or disapproval of, or acquiescence in, any judicial determination,

by the courts or the Copyright Office. Paragraph (2) shall be interpreted as if both section 2(a)(1) of the Work Made For Hire and Copyright Corrections Act of 2000 and section 1011(d) of the Intellectual Property and Communications Omnibus Reform Act of 1999, as enacted by section 1000(a)(9) of Public Law 106–113, were never enacted, and without regard to any inaction or awareness by the Congress at any time of any judicial determinations.

The terms “WTO Agreement” and “WTO member country” have the meanings given those terms in paragraphs (9) and (10), respectively, of section 2 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act.

(Pub. L. 94–553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2541; Pub. L. 96–517, §10(a), Dec. 12, 1980, 94 Stat. 3028; Pub. L. 100–568, §4(a)(1), Oct. 31, 1988, 102 Stat. 2854; Pub. L. 101–650, title VI, §602, title VII, §702, Dec. 1, 1990, 104 Stat. 5128, 5133; Pub. L. 102–307, title I, §102(b)(2), June 26, 1992, 106 Stat. 266; Pub. L. 102–563, §3(b), Oct. 28, 1992, 106 Stat. 4248; Pub. L. 104–39, §5(a), Nov. 1, 1995, 109 Stat. 348; Pub. L. 105–80, §12(a)(3), Nov. 13, 1997, 111 Stat. 1534; Pub. L. 105–147, §2(a), Dec. 16, 1997, 111 Stat. 2678; Pub. L. 105–298, title II, §205, Oct. 27, 1998, 112 Stat. 2833; Pub. L. 105–304, title I, §102(a), Oct. 28, 1998, 112 Stat. 2861; Pub. L. 106–44, §1(g)(1), Aug. 5, 1999, 113 Stat. 222; Pub. L. 106–113, div. B, §1000(a)(9) [title I, §1011(d)], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1536, 1501A–544; Pub. L. 106–379, §2(a), Oct. 27, 2000, 114 Stat. 1444; Pub. L. 107–273, div. C, title III, §13210(5), Nov. 2, 2002, 116 Stat. 1909; Pub. L. 108–419, §4, Nov. 30, 2004, 118 Stat. 2361; Pub. L. 109–9, title I, §102(c), Apr. 27, 2005, 119 Stat. 220; Pub. L. 111–295, §6(a), Dec. 9, 2010, 124 Stat. 3181.)

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