

A Simple Guide to Legally Using Images in Presentations

Images are often used in presentations and classes, whether in person or virtual, to provide or clarify information, or simply to heighten audience engagement. Images can include photographs, charts, maps, illustrations and more, including the [comic strips](#) presenters and instructors often use to reinforce their message.

Our simple guide will help you understand how to legally use images in your presentation slides and minimize your risks of copyright infringement.

Start With a Copyright Compliance Mindset

Include copyright management in your presentation planning:

- Start clearing any necessary permissions at least 6 weeks prior to using the image, if possible.
- Determine your budget, if any, for paying permission fees.
- Have alternate strategies (e.g., identify alternative images) in case permissions aren't timely or are too costly.
- Assume that any image you find online or elsewhere is protected by copyright and do your research to determine its copyright status. When you find an image on Google Images, some [copyright information](#) may be present, but its absence doesn't mean the image isn't protected by copyright.
- Always check existing permissions to determine if permission is needed for a new use. Permission to use a photo for one purpose isn't a blanket license for any use, or time and territory limitations may apply.

7 Copyright Tips for Using Images in Presentations

1. Use public domain images

A work is in the [public domain](#) when copyright in it has expired. In the U.S., this occurs 70 years after the author's death, and in most other countries after either 50 or 70 years. Be mindful that a manipulated or adapted image you find may have copyright protection in those new elements. (Yes, it can get complicated.)

2. State or summarize facts, news and historical events

Facts, news and historical events are not copyright-protected. You can summarize what you found in the source image as long as you don't copy how it was expressed. This is more applicable to data you find in a table or chart than a photo.

3. Create your own images

Employers generally own works that an employee creates during the course of their job duties. When possible, use photos or other images that you or other employees have created. As always, confirm copyright ownership first and seek permission if necessary (copyright in an image on your company's website may belong to the employee who created it in their personal time). Also, obtain model releases from people in your photos.

4. Use stock photo images

If your budget allows, or your organization has an account with a stock photo agency, you may obtain suitable photos through them. Ensure you use them in accordance with the terms and conditions of the license.

5. Use CC-licensed images (but remember, they're not in the public domain)

Use images that have a [Creative Commons \(CC\) license](#). But read that license to see what's allowed and what requires permission. Not all CC licenses allow the same uses, but it's always necessary to acknowledge the author of the image.

6. Use images as is

Copyright permission to use an image in your presentation doesn't necessarily mean you have permission to adjust coloring, crop or otherwise manipulate it. Depending on the country where you use the image, this may be a violation of moral rights. Check your license and seek permission for any actions not covered.

7. Determine if fair use or fair dealing applies to your use of the image

[Fair use](#) in the U.S. or fair dealing in Canada and some other countries may allow you to use an image without permission in certain situations. Determining this requires applying a set of criteria to your situation, but this is not without risk. The only way to know for certain if fair use or fair dealing applies is in a court of law, so understanding your organization's risk tolerance is important.

Please do not rely on the information in this document as legal advice. Seek legal advice where necessary.

Copyright law is complicated. Learn copyright principles and gain the decision-making skills to confidently apply copyright in your library or organization through the online [Copyright Leadership Certificate](#) program.

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