

# Photography & Copyright

**If you take a photograph, you own the copyright to the photo** — whether or not you are a professional photographer.

**But if you own a photo someone else took, you do not own the copyright to that photo**, even if it is a photo of you. The person who took the photo owns the copyright.



As the copyright owner of a photograph, you have the right to make and sell copies of it; make new works from it; and display it publicly, including on the internet. Anyone else who wants to use your photo in these ways must get permission from you.

And if you want to use someone else's photo in these ways, you must get permission from the copyright owner.

Copyright protection begins the moment a creative work like a photograph is produced in a fixed form, such as an electronic file downloadable from a camera. Registration with the U.S. Copyright Office is not required. But timely registration offers important benefits, such as the ability to secure certain remedies in cases alleging copyright infringement.

**Copyright**

## Using Photos You Did Not Take

Copyright protects photos on the internet. If you want to use someone else's photo from the internet, you need to get permission.

If you own a photo but not the copyright to it, you can give it away or sell it—just as you can with a book or any other material object. But you don't have the right to distribute copies of it or to publish it.

If you inherited a collection of family photos, they may still be protected by copyright. The term of copyright protection has changed over the years. So you need to know when the photos were taken and the term of copyright protection at that time. For information about researching the copyright status of works, visit the Copyright Office website at [copyright.gov](http://copyright.gov).



## Registering Your Photographs

When registering photos that you do own, you can register an individual photo or a group. Group registration requirements, changed in early 2018, differ based on if the photos are published or not. For more information about the new requirements, [visit copyright.gov](http://copyright.gov).

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**If you belong to an arts group, club, or association that would benefit from a free copyright workshop from one of our visual arts experts, call (202) 707-2973 to make arrangements.**