

COPYRIGHT BASICS

An overview of what constitutes copyright and how to avoid being sued for infringement.

Copyright

- ▶ Copyright law protects the original work of writers, photographers and artists from being reproduced by others. The government established copyright law to reward and stimulate the creation of these works, and to encourage their use for public benefit. While it protects the work of student journalists, it also limits what they may use from other sources.
- ▶ Copyright protects the way in which a creator expresses his or her idea, but not the actual idea or facts behind the idea. For example, a conference cannot be copyrighted, but a reporter can copyright an article about it.
- ▶ Copyright protection is unavailable for names, titles of books and movies, slogans and short advertising expressions. However, both patent and trademark law can come into play with logos and graphics.
- ▶ Only the creator of the copyrighted work or the owner of the copyright is legally allowed to reproduce, perform and display the work. Any unauthorized use is called copyright infringement. If you include a piece of copyrighted material in your publication without obtaining permission, you can be sued.

When is work copyrighted?

- ▶ A work is automatically copyrighted when it is completed. An original work does not have to be published to receive copyright protection.
- ▶ Always obtain permission before printing anything — photos, illustrations, logos, etc — done by someone else.

What is covered by copyright law?

- ▶ Literary works
- ▶ Sound recordings
- ▶ Works of art (including photography, graphic design, etc.)
- ▶ Musical compositions
- ▶ Computer programs
- ▶ Architectural works

For more information, go to the Student Press Law Center website at splc.org.