

The internet – using other people's material

It's very easy to make copies of materials on the internet. But remember that images, text and audio or video clips belong to someone. There are rules about copying other people's material. These are called **copyright laws**. If you copy other people's material from the internet without permission, you're breaking the law. This is called **copyright theft**. You could be taken to court, fined and sent to prison for breaking copyright laws.

Downloading music from the internet

You're allowed to download for free music that the owner has given permission for anyone to use. This music is not protected by copyright laws. There are special websites that contain this music. Or you could visit the website of the artist or band whose music you want to download and check what's available for free. Some websites contain a mixture of free music and music that you have to pay for. Other websites just include music you must pay for. Make sure you read the conditions before you sign up to one of these websites.

You may be allowed to store on your computer or download to your digital audio player (MP3 player or iPod) music that you've already bought as a legal music download. This will depend on the conditions of sale. You are not allowed to store music that you bought on a CD onto your computer, or copy it to your digital audio player.

It's against the law to download music which you haven't bought or don't have permission to use.

It is also against the law to 'fileshare' (upload music to share with others using the internet). If you illegally download or fileshare, you can be traced through your IP address. You may receive a warning letter from your Internet Service Provider (ISP). At present, they have no legal powers to disconnect you for illegal downloading or filesharing. However, they may ask you to pay compensation. You should get advice if this is the case.

What you can publish on your own website

If you are publishing your own website, make sure that you don't break copyright laws. For example, you can't include photos taken by a photographer and published on the internet without the photographer's permission. And you can't copy large amounts of text written by someone else, even if you say that it's their work. However, you can ask a site if they'll give you permission to copy their work. Many sites will give their permission to do this as long as you say it's their work. Also, you can **link** to the content in another website without asking permission (although it's considered good practice to ask permission).

Copying computer software

Computer software is also protected by copyright law. When you buy a software product, you are really buying the rights to use the product in line with agreed terms and conditions (**the licence agreement**). If you don't follow the licence agreement, you're breaking the law. You could be taken to court, fined and sent to prison if you break copyright law.

For example, if you buy a software programme and the licence agreement says it's for a single user only, you're breaking the law if you install the programme on other people's computers.

Software programmes, CDs, videos and DVDs that have been copied without the owner's permission are often called **pirated versions**.

Some **rogue dealers** load pirated versions of software onto a computer before you buy it. This software may be incomplete or it may contain viruses. Also, you won't have the right to technical support if things go wrong. As a general rule, if the computer you buy second-hand or from an untrustworthy seller has already got software installed, the software is likely to be pirated.

Some software may appear to be downloadable for free from the internet. However, you need to check carefully whether you really do have the right to download it. For example, it may have been placed on the internet without the permission of the owner. If you're not sure whether you should be downloading software, contact the **Federation Against Software Theft** - see under heading Further help.

You **are** allowed to make back-up copies of software for your own use only. Check with the software publisher or on the licence agreement if you're not sure what counts as a legal back-up.

Buying pirated goods on the internet

It is very common for pirated CDs, videos or DVDs to be sold on the internet. It's also common for other pirated goods such as fake designer clothes, handbags and sunglasses to be sold as if they were genuine items. Selling pirated goods on the internet, or anywhere else, is against the law. If you have been sold pirated goods, contact the police or Consumer Direct (see Further help for contact details).

It isn't always easy to tell whether goods you buy on the internet are pirated. If you're buying a video or DVD, you should be able to tell a genuine product for the UK market by the fact that it will normally contain British Board of Film Classification markers. **The Federation Against Copyright Theft** has a website which shows other ways of identifying whether a DVD is genuine or pirated – see under heading Further help.

Further help

Citizens Advice Bureaux

Citizens Advice Bureaux give free, confidential, impartial and independent advice to help you solve problems. To find your nearest CAB, including those that give advice by e-mail, click on [nearest CAB](#), or look under C in your phone book.

Consumer Direct

You can report pirated goods to Consumer Direct online at: www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/complaints, or phone them on 0845 4040 0506.

The Federation Against Software Theft

The Federation Against Software Theft (FAST) has useful information about copyright law at: www.fast.org.uk.

The Federation Against Copyright Theft

The Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT) website has useful information about pirated DVDs at: www.fact-uk.org.uk.

The police

Search for details of your local police force at: www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk

Other fact sheets on Adviceguide that might help

- Offensive internet sites
- Buying on the internet
- Fraud on the internet

This fact sheet is produced by [Citizens Advice](#), an operating name of The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. It is intended to provide general information only and should not be taken as a full statement of the law. The information applies to England, Wales and Scotland.

This fact sheet was last updated on 4 December 2009, and is reviewed regularly. If it is some time since you obtained this fact sheet, please contact your local Citizens Advice Bureau to check if it is still correct. Or visit our website - www.adviceguide.org.uk - where you can download an up-to-date copy.