

## Copyrights: You Can Preregister Your Work

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People often ask how to “copyright” their work, be it music, a novel, a website, a software application, or many other works. They recognize that they should register a copyright to receive proper compensation, respect, or at least credit for their hard work.

But what if you have not finished your work but someone might still be copying it before you are ready to spring it on the world? For example, you are working on a song and you email the demo track to a producer to try to seek help in working on your song. The producer never returns your messages. The producer did not even acknowledge getting your email with the song attached. Is the producer too busy to listen to your song?

Is the producer thinking that your song totally sucks? Or has the producer stayed up nights and weekends rehearsing the song with a protégé and preparing the payola deals with Top 40 radio? Of course, this never happens in real life. Just a hypothetical.

Perhaps you should consider preregistering your work as a safeguard. Whenever your work is not finished, but you think that someone else could begin to become “inspired” by your unfinished masterpiece, preregistration might help.

Before you go to [copyright.gov](http://copyright.gov) to preregister your work, understand that preregistration is not useful for most situations. Take my song example above. Besides the preregistration of the song, you could have actually registered the musical composition (you do know how to read musical notation, don't you?) and you could have actually registered the “sound recording.”

Still, you might want to preregister your work. Note that preregistration is not a substitute for registration. It is only a safeguard. You still need to actually register the copyright when the work is published. Take another example, this time for a holiday cookbook. You expect to publish the book at the beginning of the holiday season, even though you finished the book six months in advance. Just because the book is not published yet, you can still register the copyright as an unpublished work.

You can actually register a completed work that is just not published yet (or ever). Preregistration would not have provided any benefit if your manuscript was already finished.

The U.S. Copyright Office allows you to preregister only if the work is unpublished and you are preparing the work for commercial distribution (you are hoping to make money, aren't you?). You also need to have already started creating your work. Talking about it at the local cantina or therapist's office (redundant?) is not enough. Either way, the Copyright Office will allow preregistration if the work is either a film, musical work, sound recording, computer program, book, or a photograph for advertisement.

You can find more information on preregistering at <http://www.copyright.gov/prereg/help.html>.

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