

US CODE

2011

Title 17

Chapter 1

Section 101

An “establishment” is a store, shop, or any similar place of business open to the general public for the primary purpose of selling goods or services in which the majority of the gross square feet of space that is nonresidential is used for that purpose, and in which nondramatic musical works are performed publicly.

The term “financial gain” includes receipt, or expectation of receipt, of anything of value, including the receipt of other copyrighted works.

A work is “fixed” in a tangible medium of expression when its embodiment in a copy or phonorecord, by or under the authority of the author, is sufficiently permanent or stable to permit it to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration. A work consisting of sounds, images, or both, that are being transmitted, is “fixed” for purposes of this title if a fixation of the work is being made simultaneously with its transmission.

A “food service or drinking establishment” is a restaurant, inn, bar, tavern, or any other similar place of business in which the public or patrons assemble for the primary purpose of being served food or drink, in which the majority of the gross square feet of space that is nonresidential is used for that purpose, and in which nondramatic musical works are performed publicly.

The “Geneva Phonograms Convention” is the Convention for the Protection of Producers of Phonograms Against Unauthorized Duplication of Their Phonograms, concluded at Geneva, Switzerland, on October 29, 1971.

The “gross square feet of space” of an establishment means the entire interior space of that establishment, and any adjoining outdoor space used to serve patrons, whether on a seasonal basis or otherwise.

The terms “including” and “such as” are illustrative and not limitative.

An “international agreement” is—

- (1) the Universal Copyright Convention;
- (2) the Geneva Phonograms Convention;
- (3) the Berne Convention;
- (4) the WTO Agreement;
- (5) the WIPO Copyright Treaty;
- (6) the WIPO Performances and Phonograms Treaty; and
- (7) any other copyright treaty to which the United States is a party.

A “joint work” is a work prepared by two or more authors with the intention that their contributions be merged into inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole.

“Literary works” are works, other than audiovisual works, expressed in words, numbers, or other verbal or numerical symbols or indicia, regardless of the nature of the material objects, such as books, periodicals, manuscripts, phonorecords, film, tapes, disks, or cards, in which they are embodied.

The term “motion picture exhibition facility” means a movie theater, screening room, or other venue that is being used primarily for the exhibition of a copyrighted motion picture, if such exhibition is open to the public or is made to an assembled group of viewers outside of a normal circle of a family and its social acquaintances.

“Motion pictures” are audiovisual works consisting of a series of related images which, when shown in succession, impart an impression of motion, together with accompanying sounds, if any.

To “perform” a work means to recite, render, play, dance, or act it, either directly or by means of any device or process or, in the case of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, to show its images in any sequence or to make the sounds accompanying it audible.

A “performing rights society” is an association, corporation, or other entity that licenses the public performance of nondramatic musical works on behalf of copyright owners of such works, such as the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP), Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI), and SESAC, Inc.

“Phonorecords” are material objects in which sounds, other than those accompanying a motion picture or other audiovisual work, are fixed by any method now known or later developed, and from which the sounds can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. The term “phonorecords” includes the material object in which the sounds are first fixed.

“Pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works” include two-dimensional and three-dimensional works of fine, graphic, and applied art, photographs, prints and art reproductions, maps, globes, charts, diagrams, models, and technical drawings, including architectural plans. Such works shall include works of artistic craftsmanship insofar as their form but not their mechanical or utilitarian aspects are concerned; the design of a useful article, as defined in this section, shall be considered a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work only if, and only to the extent that, such design incorporates pictorial, graphic, or sculptural features that can be identified separately from, and are capable of existing independently of, the utilitarian aspects of the article.

For purposes of section 513, a “proprietor” is an individual, corporation, partnership, or other entity, as the case may be, that owns an establishment or a food service or drinking establishment, except that no owner or operator of a radio or television station licensed by the Federal Communications Commission, cable system or satellite carrier, cable or satellite carrier service or programmer, provider of online services or network access or the operator of facilities therefor, telecommunications company, or any other such audio or audiovisual service or programmer now known or as may be developed in the future, commercial subscription music service, or owner or operator of any other transmission service, shall under any circumstances be deemed to be a proprietor.

A “pseudonymous work” is a work on the copies or phonorecords of which the author is identified under a fictitious name.

“Publication” is the distribution of copies or phonorecords of a work to the public by sale or other transfer of ownership, or by rental, lease, or lending. The offering to distribute copies or phonorecords to a group of persons

the United States Government as part of that person's official duties.

A “work made for hire” is—

(1) a work prepared by an employee within the scope of his or her employment; or

(2) a work specially ordered or commissioned for use as a contribution to a collective work, as a part of a motion picture or other audiovisual work, as a translation, as a supplementary work, as a compilation, as an instructional text, as a test, as answer material for a test, or as an atlas, if the parties expressly agree in a written instrument signed by them that the work shall be considered a work made for hire. For the purpose of the foregoing sentence, a “supplementary work” is a work prepared for publication as a secondary adjunct to a work by another author for the purpose of introducing, concluding, illustrating, explaining, revising, commenting upon, or assisting in the use of the other work, such as forewords, afterwords, pictorial illustrations, maps, charts, tables, editorial notes, musical arrangements, answer material for tests, bibliographies, appendixes, and indexes, and an “instructional text” is a literary, pictorial, or graphic work prepared for publication and with the purpose of use in systematic instructional activities.

In determining whether any work is eligible to be considered a work made for hire under paragraph (2), neither the amendment contained in section 1011(d) of the Intellectual Property and Communications Omnibus Reform Act of 1999, as enacted by section 1000(a)(9) of Public Law 106–113, nor the deletion of the words added by that amendment—

(A) shall be considered or otherwise given any legal significance, or

(B) shall be interpreted to indicate congressional approval or disapproval of, or acquiescence in, any judicial determination,

by the courts or the Copyright Office. Paragraph (2) shall be interpreted as if both section 2(a)(1) of the Work Made For Hire and Copyright Corrections Act of 2000 and section 1011(d) of the Intellectual Property and Communications Omnibus Reform Act of 1999, as enacted by section 1000(a)(9) of Public Law 106–113, were never enacted, and without regard to any inaction or awareness by the Congress at any time of any judicial determinations.

The terms “WTO Agreement” and “WTO member country” have the meanings given those terms in paragraphs (9) and (10), respectively, of section 2 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act.

(Pub. L. 94–553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2541; Pub. L. 96–517, §10(a), Dec. 12, 1980, 94 Stat. 3028; Pub. L. 100–568, §4(a)(1), Oct. 31, 1988, 102 Stat. 2854; Pub. L. 101–650, title VI, §602, title VII, §702, Dec. 1, 1990, 104 Stat. 5128, 5133; Pub. L. 102–307, title I, §102(b)(2), June 26, 1992, 106 Stat. 266; Pub. L. 102–563, §3(b), Oct. 28, 1992, 106 Stat. 4248; Pub. L. 104–39, §5(a), Nov. 1, 1995, 109 Stat. 348; Pub. L. 105–80, §12(a)(3), Nov. 13, 1997, 111 Stat. 1534; Pub. L. 105–147, §2(a), Dec. 16, 1997, 111 Stat. 2678; Pub. L. 105–298, title II, §205, Oct. 27,

1998, 112 Stat. 2833; Pub. L. 105–304, title I, §102(a), Oct. 28, 1998, 112 Stat. 2861; Pub. L. 106–44, §1(g)(1), Aug. 5, 1999, 113 Stat. 222; Pub. L. 106–113, div. B, §1000(a)(9) [title I, §1011(d)], Nov. 29, 1999, 113 Stat. 1536, 1501A–544; Pub. L. 106–379, §2(a), Oct. 27, 2000, 114 Stat. 1444; Pub. L. 107–273, div. C, title III, §13210(5), Nov. 2, 2002, 116 Stat. 1909; Pub. L. 108–419, §4, Nov. 30, 2004, 118 Stat. 2361; Pub. L. 109–9, title I, §102(c), Apr. 27, 2005, 119 Stat. 220; Pub. L. 111–295, §6(a), Dec. 9, 2010, 124 Stat. 3181.)

#### HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

HOUSE REPORT NO. 94–1476

The significant definitions in this section will be mentioned or summarized in connection with the provisions to which they are most relevant.

#### REFERENCES IN TEXT

Section 1011(d) of the Intellectual Property and Communications Omnibus Reform Act of 1999, referred to in definition of “work made for hire”, is section 1000(a)(9) [title I, §1011(d)] of Pub. L. 106–113, which amended par. (2) of that definition. See 1999 Amendment note below.

Section 2(a)(1) of the Work Made For Hire and Copyright Corrections Act of 2000, referred to in definition of “work made for hire”, is section 2(a)(1) of Pub. L. 106–379, which amended par. (2) of that definition. See 2000 Amendment note below.

Section 2 of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act, referred to in definitions of “WTO Agreement” and “WTO member country”, is classified to section 3501 of Title 19, Customs Duties.

#### AMENDMENTS

2010—Pub. L. 111–295, §6(a)(3), transferred the definition of “food service or drinking establishment” to appear after the definition of “fixed”.

Pub. L. 111–295, §6(a)(2), transferred the definition of “motion picture exhibition facility” to appear after the definition of “Literary works”.

Pub. L. 111–295, §6(a)(1), which directed transfer of the definition of “Copyright Royalty Judges” to appear after the definition of “Copyright owner”, was executed by so transferring the definition of “Copyright Royalty Judge”, to reflect the probable intent of Congress.

2005—Pub. L. 109–9 inserted definition of “motion picture exhibition facility” after definition of “Motion pictures”.

2004—Pub. L. 108–419 inserted definition of “Copyright Royalty Judge” after definition of “Copies”.

2002—Pub. L. 107–273, §13210(5)(B), transferred definition of “Registration” to appear after definition of “publicly”.

Pub. L. 107–273, §13210(5)(A), transferred definition of “computer program” to appear after definition of “compilation”.

2000—Pub. L. 106–379, §2(a)(2), in definition of “work made for hire”, inserted after par. (2) provisions relating to considerations and interpretations to be used in determining whether any work is eligible to be considered a work made for hire under par. (2).

Pub. L. 106–379, §2(a)(1), in definition of “work made for hire”, struck out “as a sound recording,” after “motion picture or other audiovisual work,” in par. (2).

1999—Pub. L. 106–113, which directed the insertion of “as a sound recording,” after “audiovisual work” in par. (2) of definition relating to work made for hire, was executed by making the insertion after “audiovisual work,” to reflect the probable intent of Congress.

Pub. L. 106–44, §1(g)(1)(B), in definition of “proprietor”, substituted “For purposes of section 513, a ‘proprietor’” for “A ‘proprietor’”.

Pub. L. 106–44, §1(g)(1)(A), transferred definition of “United States work” to appear after definition of “United States”.

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Title 17

Chapter 1

Section 102

and 373 of Title 35, Patents, enacting provisions set out as notes under section 1052 of Title 15 and sections 104 and 154 of Title 35, and amending provisions set out as a note under section 109 of this title)—

“(1) the term ‘WTO Agreement’ has the meaning given that term in section 2(9) of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act [19 U.S.C. 3501(9)]; and

“(2) the term ‘WTO member country’ has the meaning given that term in section 2(10) of the Uruguay Round Agreements Act.”

## § 102. Subject matter of copyright: In general

(a) Copyright protection subsists, in accordance with this title, in original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression, now known or later developed, from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. Works of authorship include the following categories:

- (1) literary works;
- (2) musical works, including any accompanying words;
- (3) dramatic works, including any accompanying music;
- (4) pantomimes and choreographic works;
- (5) pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works;
- (6) motion pictures and other audiovisual works;
- (7) sound recordings; and
- (8) architectural works.

(b) In no case does copyright protection for an original work of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or embodied in such work.

(Pub. L. 94-553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2544; Pub. L. 101-650, title VII, §703, Dec. 1, 1990, 104 Stat. 5133.)

### HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

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**Original Works of Authorship.** The two fundamental criteria of copyright protection—originality and fixation in tangible form are restated in the first sentence of this cornerstone provision. The phrase “original works or authorship,” which is purposely left undefined, is intended to incorporate without change the standard of originality established by the courts under the present copyright statute. This standard does not include requirements of novelty, ingenuity, or esthetic merit, and there is no intention to enlarge the standard of copyright protection to require them.

In using the phrase “original works of authorship,” rather than “all the writings of an author” now in section 4 of the statute [section 4 of former title 17], the committee’s purpose is to avoid exhausting the constitutional power of Congress to legislate in this field, and to eliminate the uncertainties arising from the latter phrase. Since the present statutory language is substantially the same as the empowering language of the Constitution [Const. Art. I, §8, cl. 8], a recurring question has been whether the statutory and the constitutional provisions are coextensive. If so, the courts would be faced with the alternative of holding copyrightable something that Congress clearly did not intend to protect, or of holding constitutionally incapable of copyright something that Congress might one day want to protect. To avoid these equally undesirable results, the courts have indicated that “all the writings of an author” under the present statute is narrower in scope than the “writings” of “authors” referred to in the Constitution. The bill avoids this dilemma by using

a different phrase—“original works of authorship”—in characterizing the general subject matter of statutory copyright protection.

The history of copyright law has been one of gradual expansion in the types of works accorded protection, and the subject matter affected by this expansion has fallen into two general categories. In the first, scientific discoveries and technological developments have made possible new forms of creative expression that never existed before. In some of these cases the new expressive forms—electronic music, filmstrips, and computer programs, for example—could be regarded as an extension of copyrightable subject matter Congress had already intended to protect, and were thus considered copyrightable from the outset without the need of new legislation. In other cases, such as photographs, sound recordings, and motion pictures, statutory enactment was deemed necessary to give them full recognition as copyrightable works.

Authors are continually finding new ways of expressing themselves, but it is impossible to foresee the forms that these new expressive methods will take. The bill does not intend either to freeze the scope of copyrightable subject matter at the present stage of communications technology or to allow unlimited expansion into areas completely outside the present congressional intent. Section 102 implies neither that that subject matter is unlimited nor that new forms of expression within that general area of subject matter would necessarily be unprotected.

The historic expansion of copyright has also applied to forms of expression which, although in existence for generations or centuries, have only gradually come to be recognized as creative and worthy of protection. The first copyright statute in this country, enacted in 1790, designated only “maps, charts, and books”; major forms of expression such as music, drama, and works of art achieved specific statutory recognition only in later enactments. Although the coverage of the present statute is very broad, and would be broadened further by the explicit recognition of all forms of choreography, there are unquestionably other areas of existing subject matter that this bill does not propose to protect but that future Congresses may want to.

**Fixation in Tangible Form.** As a basic condition of copyright protection, the bill perpetuates the existing requirement that a work be fixed in a “tangible medium of expression,” and adds that this medium may be one “now known or later developed,” and that the fixation is sufficient if the work “can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device.” This broad language is intended to avoid the artificial and largely unjustifiable distinctions, derived from cases such as *White-Smith Publishing Co. v. Apollo Co.*, 209 U.S. 1 (1908) [28 S.Ct. 319, 52 L.Ed. 655], under which statutory copyrightability in certain cases has been made to depend upon the form or medium in which the work is fixed. Under the bill it makes no difference what the form, manner, or medium of fixation may be—whether it is in words, numbers, notes, sounds, pictures, or any other graphic or symbolic indicia, whether embodied in a physical object in written, printed, photographic, sculptural, punched, magnetic, or any other stable form, and whether it is capable of perception directly or by means of any machine or device “now known or later developed.”

Under the bill, the concept of fixation is important since it not only determines whether the provisions of the statute apply to a work, but it also represents the dividing line between common law and statutory protection. As will be noted in more detail in connection with section 301, an unfixed work of authorship, such as an improvisation or an unrecorded choreographic work, performance, or broadcast, would continue to be subject to protection under State common law or statute, but would not be eligible for Federal statutory protection under section 102.

The bill seeks to resolve, through the definition of “fixation” in section 101, the status of live broadcasts—



sports, news coverage, live performances of music, etc.—that are reaching the public in unfixed form but that are simultaneously being recorded. When a football game is being covered by four television cameras, with a director guiding the activities of the four cameramen and choosing which of their electronic images are sent out to the public and in what order, there is little doubt that what the cameramen and the director are doing constitutes “authorship.” The further question to be considered is whether there has been a fixation. If the images and sounds to be broadcast are first recorded (on a video tape, film, etc.) and then transmitted, the recorded work would be considered a “motion picture” subject to statutory protection against unauthorized reproduction or retransmission of the broadcast. If the program content is transmitted live to the public while being recorded at the same time, the case would be treated the same; the copyright owner would not be forced to rely on common law rather than statutory rights in proceeding against an infringing user of the live broadcast.

Thus, assuming it is copyrightable—as a “motion picture” or “sound recording,” for example—the content of a live transmission should be regarded as fixed and should be accorded statutory protection if it is being recorded simultaneously with its transmission. On the other hand, the definition of “fixation” would exclude from the concept purely evanescent or transient reproductions such as those projected briefly on a screen, shown electronically on a television or other cathode ray tube, or captured momentarily in the “memory” of a computer.

Under the first sentence of the definition of “fixed” in section 101, a work would be considered “fixed in a tangible medium of expression” if there has been an authorized embodiment in a copy or phonorecord and if that embodiment “is sufficiently permanent or stable” to permit the work “to be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated for a period of more than transitory duration.” The second sentence makes clear that, in the case of “a work consisting of sounds, images, or both, that are being transmitted,” the work is regarded as “fixed” if a fixation is being made at the same time as the transmission.

Under this definition “copies” and “phonorecords” together will comprise all of the material objects in which copyrightable works are capable of being fixed. The definitions of these terms in section 101, together with their usage in section 102 and throughout the bill, reflect a fundamental distinction between the “original work” which is the product of “authorship” and the multitude of material objects in which it can be embodied. Thus, in the sense of the bill, a “book” is not a work of authorship, but is a particular kind of “copy.” Instead, the author may write a “literary work,” which in turn can be embodied in a wide range of “copies” and “phonorecords,” including books, periodicals, computer punch cards, microfilm, tape recordings, and so forth. It is possible to have an “original work of authorship” without having a “copy” or “phonorecord” embodying it, and it is also possible to have a “copy” or “phonorecord” embodying something that does not qualify as an “original work of authorship.” The two essential elements—original work and tangible object—must merge through fixation in order to produce subject matter copyrightable under the statute.

**Categories of Copyrightable Works.** The second sentence of section 102 lists seven broad categories which the concept of “works of authorship” is said to “include.” The use of the word “include,” as defined in section 101, makes clear that the listing is “illustrative and not limitative,” and that the seven categories do not necessarily exhaust the scope of “original works of authorship” that the bill is intended to protect. Rather, the list sets out the general area of copyrightable subject matter, but with sufficient flexibility to free the courts from rigid or outmoded concepts of the scope of particular categories. The items are also overlapping in the sense that a work falling within one class may

encompass works coming within some or all of the other categories. In the aggregate, the list covers all classes of works now specified in section 5 of title 17 [section 5 of former title 17]; in addition, it specifically enumerates “pantomimes and choreographic works”.

Of the seven items listed, four are defined in section 101. The three undefined categories—“musical works,” “dramatic works,” and “pantomimes and choreographic works”—have fairly settled meanings. There is no need, for example, to specify the copyrightability of electronic or concrete music in the statute since the form of a work would no longer be of any importance, nor is it necessary to specify that “choreographic works” do not include social dance steps and simple routines.

The four items defined in section 101 are “literary works,” “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works,” “motion pictures and audiovisual works,” and “sound recordings”. In each of these cases, definitions are needed not only because the meaning of the term itself is unsettled but also because the distinction between “work” and “material object” requires clarification. The term “literary works” does not connote any criterion of literary merit or qualitative value: it includes catalogs, directories, and similar factual, reference, or **instructional works** and compilations of data. It also includes computer data bases, and computer programs to the extent that they incorporate authorship in the programmer’s expression of original ideas, as distinguished from the ideas themselves.

Correspondingly, the definition of “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works” carries with it no implied criterion of artistic taste, aesthetic value, or intrinsic quality. The term is intended to comprise not only “works of art” in the traditional sense but also works of graphic art and illustration, art reproductions, plans and drawings, photographs and reproductions of them, maps, charts, globes, and other cartographic works, works of these kinds intended for use in advertising and commerce, and works of “applied art.” There is no intention whatever to narrow the scope of the subject matter now characterized in section 5(k) [section 5(k) of former title 17] as “prints or labels used for articles of merchandise.” However, since this terminology suggests the material object in which a work is embodied rather than the work itself, the bill does not mention this category separately.

In accordance with the Supreme Court’s decision in *Mazer v. Stein*, 347 U.S. 201 (1954) [74 S.Ct. 460, 98 L. Ed. 630, rehearing denied 74 S.Ct. 637, 347 U.S. 949, 98 L.Ed. 1096], works of “applied art” encompass all original pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works that are intended to be or have been embodied in useful articles, regardless of factors such as mass production, commercial exploitation, and the potential availability of design patent protection. The scope of exclusive rights in these works is given special treatment in section 113, to be discussed below.

The Committee has added language to the definition of “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works” in an effort to make clearer the distinction between works of applied art protectable under the bill and industrial designs not subject to copyright protection. The declaration that “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works” include “works of artistic craftsmanship insofar as their form but not their mechanical or utilitarian aspects are concerned” is classic language; it is drawn from Copyright Office regulations promulgated in the 1940’s and expressly endorsed by the Supreme Court in the *Mazer* case.

The second part of the amendment states that “the design of a useful article \* \* \* shall be considered a pictorial, graphic, or sculptural work only if, and only to the extent that, such design incorporates pictorial, graphic, or sculptural features that can be identified separately from, and are capable of existing independently of, the utilitarian aspects of the article.” A “useful article” is defined as “an article having an intrinsic utilitarian function that is not merely to portray the appearance of the article or to convey information.”

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Title 17

Chapter 2

Section 201

Sec.  
205. Recordation of transfers and other documents.

### § 201. Ownership of copyright

(a) **INITIAL OWNERSHIP.**—Copyright in a work protected under this title vests initially in the author or authors of the work. The authors of a joint work are coowners of copyright in the work.

(b) **WORKS MADE FOR HIRE.**—In the case of a work made for hire, the employer or other person for whom the work was prepared is considered the author for purposes of this title, and, unless the parties have expressly agreed otherwise in a written instrument signed by them, owns all of the rights comprised in the copyright.

(c) **CONTRIBUTIONS TO COLLECTIVE WORKS.**—Copyright in each separate contribution to a collective work is distinct from copyright in the collective work as a whole, and vests initially in the author of the contribution. In the absence of an express transfer of the copyright or of any rights under it, the owner of copyright in the collective work is presumed to have acquired only the privilege of reproducing and distributing the contribution as part of that particular collective work, any revision of that collective work, and any later collective work in the same series.

(d) **TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP.**—

(1) The ownership of a copyright may be transferred in whole or in part by any means of conveyance or by operation of law, and may be bequeathed by will or pass as personal property by the applicable laws of intestate succession.

(2) Any of the exclusive rights comprised in a copyright, including any subdivision of any of the rights specified by section 106, may be transferred as provided by clause (1) and owned separately. The owner of any particular exclusive right is entitled, to the extent of that right, to all of the protection and remedies accorded to the copyright owner by this title.

(e) **INVOLUNTARY TRANSFER.**—When an individual author's ownership of a copyright, or of any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, has not previously been transferred voluntarily by that individual author, no action by any governmental body or other official or organization purporting to seize, expropriate, transfer, or exercise rights of ownership with respect to the copyright, or any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, shall be given effect under this title, except as provided under title 11.

(Pub. L. 94-553, title I, § 101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2568; Pub. L. 95-598, title III, § 313, Nov. 6, 1978, 92 Stat. 2676.)

#### HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

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**Initial Ownership.** Two basic and well-established principles of copyright law are restated in section 201(a): that the source of copyright ownership is the author of the work, and that, in the case of a "joint work," the coauthors of the work are likewise coowners of the copyright. Under the definition of section 101,

a work is "joint" if the authors collaborated with each other, or if each of the authors prepared his or her contribution with the knowledge and intention that it would be merged with the contributions of other authors as "inseparable or interdependent parts of a unitary whole." The touchstone here is the intention, at the time the writing is done, that the parts be absorbed or combined into an integrated unit, although the parts themselves may be either "inseparable" (as the case of a novel or painting) or "interdependent" (as in the case of a motion picture, opera, or the words and music of a song). The definition of "joint work" is to be contrasted with the definition of "collective work," also in section 101, in which the elements of merger and unity are lacking; there the key elements are assemblage or gathering of "separate and independent works \* \* \* into a collective whole."

The definition of "joint works" has prompted some concern lest it be construed as converting the authors of previously written works, such as plays, novels, and music, into coauthors of a motion picture in which their work is incorporated. It is true that a motion picture would normally be a joint rather than a collective work with respect to those authors who actually work on the film, although their usual status as employees for hire would keep the question of coownership from coming up. On the other hand, although a novelist, playwright, or songwriter may write a work with the hope or expectation that it will be used in a motion picture, this is clearly a case of separate or independent authorship rather than one where the basic intention behind the writing of the work was for motion picture use. In this case, the motion picture is a derivative work within the definition of that term, and section 103 makes plain that copyright in a derivative work is independent of, and does not enlarge the scope of rights in, any preexisting material incorporated in it. There is thus no need to spell this conclusion out in the definition of "joint work."

There is also no need for a specific statutory provision concerning the rights and duties of the coowners of a work; court-made law on this point is left undisturbed. Under the bill, as under the present law, coowners of a copyright would be treated generally as tenants in common, with each coowner having an independent right to use or license the use of a work, subject to a duty of accounting to the other coowners for any profits.

**Works Made for Hire.** Section 201(b) of the bill adopts one of the basic principles of the present law: that in the case of works made for hire the employer is considered the author of the work, and is regarded as the initial owner of copyright unless there has been an agreement otherwise. The subsection also requires that any agreement under which the employee is to own rights be in writing and signed by the parties.

The work-made-for-hire provisions of this bill represent a carefully balanced compromise, and as such they do not incorporate the amendments proposed by screenwriters and composers for motion pictures. Their proposal was for the recognition of something similar to the "shop right" doctrine of patent law: with some exceptions, the employer would acquire the right to use the employee's work to the extent needed for purposes of his regular business, but the employee would retain all other rights as long as he or she refrained from the authorizing of competing uses. However, while this change might theoretically improve the bargaining position of screenwriters and others as a group, the practical benefits that individual authors would receive are highly conjectural. The presumption that initial ownership rights vest in the employer for hire is well established in American copyright law, and to exchange that for the uncertainties of the shop right doctrine would not only be of dubious value to employers and employees alike, but might also reopen a number of other issues.

The status of works prepared on special order or commission was a major issue in the development of the definition of "works made for hire" in section 101,



which has undergone extensive revision during the legislative process. The basic problem is how to draw a statutory line between those works written on special order or commission that should be considered as “works made for hire,” and those that should not. The definition now provided by the bill represents a compromise which, in effect, spells out those specific categories of commissioned works that can be considered “works made for hire” under certain circumstances.

Of these, one of the most important categories is that of “instructional texts.” This term is given its own definition in the bill: “a literary, pictorial, or graphic work prepared for publication with the purpose of use in systematic instructional activities.” The concept is intended to include what might be loosely called “text-book material,” whether or not in book form or prepared in the form of text matter. The basic characteristic of “instructional texts” is the purpose of their preparation for “use in systematic instructional activities,” and they are to be distinguished from works prepared for use by a general readership.

**Contributions to Collective Works.** Subsection (c) of section 201 deals with the troublesome problem of ownership of copyright in contributions to collective works, and the relationship between copyright ownership in a contribution and in the collective work in which it appears. The first sentence establishes the basic principle that copyright in the individual contribution and copyright in the collective work as a whole are separate and distinct, and that the author of the contribution is, as in every other case, the first owner of copyright in it. Under the definitions in section 101, a “collective work” is a species of “compilation” and, by its nature, must involve the selection, assembly, and arrangement of “a number of contributions.” Examples of “collective works” would ordinarily include periodical issues, anthologies, symposia, and collections of the discrete writings of the same authors, but not cases, such as a composition consisting of words and music, a work published with illustrations or front matter, or three one-act plays, where relatively few separate elements have been brought together. Unlike the contents of other types of “compilations,” each of the contributions incorporated in a “collective work” must itself constitute a “separate and independent” work, therefore ruling out compilations of information or other uncopyrightable material and works published with editorial revisions or annotations. Moreover, as noted above, there is a basic distinction between a “joint work,” where the separate elements merge into a unified whole, and a “collective work,” where they remain unintegrated and disparate.

The bill does nothing to change the rights of the owner of copyright in a collective work under the present law. These exclusive rights extend to the elements of compilation and editing that went into the collective work as a whole, as well as the contributions that were written for hire by employees of the owner of the collective work, and those copyrighted contributions that have been transferred in writing to the owner by their authors. However, one of the most significant aims of the bill is to clarify and improve the present confused and frequently unfair legal situation with respect to rights in contributions.

The second sentence of section 201(c), in conjunction with the provisions of section 404 dealing with copyright notice, will preserve the author’s copyright in a contribution even if the contribution does not bear a separate notice in the author’s name, and without requiring any unqualified transfer of rights to the owner of the collective work. This is coupled with a presumption that, unless there has been an express transfer of more, the owner of the collective work acquires, “only the privilege of reproducing and distributing the contribution as part of that particular collective work, any revision of that collective work, and any later collective work in the same series.”

The basic presumption of section 201(c) is fully consistent with present law and practice, and represents a fair balancing of equities. At the same time, the last

clause of the subsection, under which the privilege of republishing the contribution under certain limited circumstances would be presumed, is an essential counterpart of the basic presumption. Under the language of this clause a publishing company could reprint a contribution from one issue in a later issue of its magazine, and could reprint an article from a 1980 edition of an encyclopedia in a 1990 revision of it; the publisher could not revise the contribution itself or include it in a new anthology or an entirely different magazine or other collective work.

**Transfer of Ownership.** The principle of unlimited alienability of copyright is stated in clause (1) of section 201(d). Under that provision the ownership of a copyright, or of any part of it, may be transferred by any means of conveyance or by operation of law, and is to be treated as personal property upon the death of the owner. The term “transfer of copyright ownership” is defined in section 101 to cover any “conveyance, alienation, or hypothecation,” including assignments, mortgages, and exclusive licenses, but not including nonexclusive licenses. Representatives of motion picture producers have argued that foreclosures of copyright mortgages should not be left to varying State laws, and that the statute should establish a Federal foreclosure system. However, the benefits of such a system would be of very limited application, and would not justify the complicated statutory and procedural requirements that would have to be established.

Clause (2) of subsection (d) contains the first explicit statutory recognition of the principle of divisibility of copyright in our law. This provision, which has long been sought by authors and their representatives, and which has attracted wide support from other groups, means that any of the exclusive rights that go to make up a copyright, including those enumerated in section 106 and any subdivision of them, can be transferred and owned separately. The definition of “transfer of copyright ownership” in section 101 makes clear that the principle of divisibility applies whether or not the transfer is “limited in time or place of effect,” and another definition in the same section provides that the term “copyright owner,” with respect to any one exclusive right, refers to the owner of that particular right. The last sentence of section 201(d)(2) adds that the owner, with respect to the particular exclusive right he or she owns, is entitled “to all of the protection and remedies accorded to the copyright owner by this title.” It is thus clear, for example, that a local broadcasting station holding an exclusive license to transmit a particular work within a particular geographic area and for a particular period of time, could sue, in its own name as copyright owner, someone who infringed that particular exclusive right.

Subsection (e) provides that when an individual author’s ownership of a copyright, or of any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, have not previously been voluntarily transferred, no action by any governmental body or other official or organization purporting to seize, expropriate, transfer, or exercise rights of ownership with respect to the copyright, or any of the exclusive rights under a copyright, shall be given effect under this title.

The purpose of this subsection is to reaffirm the basic principle that the United States copyright of an individual author shall be secured to that author, and cannot be taken away by any involuntary transfer. It is the intent of the subsection that the author be entitled, despite any purported expropriation or involuntary transfer, to continue exercising all rights under the United States statute, and that the governmental body or organization may not enforce or exercise any rights under this title in that situation.

It may sometimes be difficult to ascertain whether a transfer of copyright is voluntary or is coerced by covert pressure. But subsection (e) would protect foreign authors against laws and decrees purporting to divest them of their rights under the United States copyright statute, and would protect authors within the foreign country who choose to resist such covert pressures.

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Title 17

Chapter 2

Section 204

does not contain provisions specifying its term or duration, and the author has not terminated the agreement under this section, the agreement continues for the term of the copyright, subject to any right of termination under circumstances which may be specified therein. If, however, an agreement does contain provisions governing its duration—for example, a term of fifty years—and the author has not exercised his or her right of termination under the statute, the agreement will continue according to its terms—in this example, for only fifty years. The quoted language is not to be construed as requiring agreements to reserve the right of termination.

#### AMENDMENTS

2002—Subsec. (a)(2)(A) to (C). Pub. L. 107-273, in subpars. (A) to (C), substituted “The” for “the” and, in subpars. (A) and (B), substituted period for semicolon at end.

1998—Subsec. (a)(2). Pub. L. 105-298, §103(1), struck out “by his widow or her widower and his or her children or grandchildren” after “exercised,” in introductory provisions.

Subsec. (a)(2)(D). Pub. L. 105-298, §103(2), added subpar. (D).

### § 204. Execution of transfers of copyright ownership

(a) A transfer of copyright ownership, other than by operation of law, is not valid unless an instrument of conveyance, or a note or memorandum of the transfer, is in writing and signed by the owner of the rights conveyed or such owner's duly authorized agent.

(b) A certificate of acknowledgement is not required for the validity of a transfer, but is prima facie evidence of the execution of the transfer if—

(1) in the case of a transfer executed in the United States, the certificate is issued by a person authorized to administer oaths within the United States; or

(2) in the case of a transfer executed in a foreign country, the certificate is issued by a diplomatic or consular officer of the United States, or by a person authorized to administer oaths whose authority is proved by a certificate of such an officer.

(Pub. L. 94-553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2570.)

#### HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

##### HOUSE REPORT NO. 94-1476

Section 204 is a somewhat broadened and liberalized counterpart of sections 28 and 29 of the present statute [sections 28 and 29 of former title 17]. Under subsection (a), a transfer of copyright ownership (other than one brought about by operation of law) is valid only if there exists an instrument of conveyance, or alternatively a “note or memorandum of the transfer,” which is in writing and signed by the copyright owner “or such owner's duly authorized agent.” Subsection (b) makes clear that a notarial or consular acknowledgment is not essential to the validity of any transfer, whether executed in the United States or abroad. However, the subsection would liberalize the conditions under which certificates of acknowledgment of documents executed abroad are to be accorded prima facie weight, and would give the same weight to domestic acknowledgments under appropriate circumstances.

### § 205. Recordation of transfers and other documents

(a) CONDITIONS FOR RECORDATION.—Any transfer of copyright ownership or other document

pertaining to a copyright may be recorded in the Copyright Office if the document filed for recordation bears the actual signature of the person who executed it, or if it is accompanied by a sworn or official certification that it is a true copy of the original, signed document. A sworn or official certification may be submitted to the Copyright Office electronically, pursuant to regulations established by the Register of Copyrights.

(b) CERTIFICATE OF RECORDATION.—The Register of Copyrights shall, upon receipt of a document as provided by subsection (a) and of the fee provided by section 708, record the document and return it with a certificate of recordation.

(c) RECORDATION AS CONSTRUCTIVE NOTICE.—Recordation of a document in the Copyright Office gives all persons constructive notice of the facts stated in the recorded document, but only if—

(1) the document, or material attached to it, specifically identifies the work to which it pertains so that, after the document is indexed by the Register of Copyrights, it would be revealed by a reasonable search under the title or registration number of the work; and

(2) registration has been made for the work.

(d) PRIORITY BETWEEN CONFLICTING TRANSFERS.—As between two conflicting transfers, the one executed first prevails if it is recorded, in the manner required to give constructive notice under subsection (c), within one month after its execution in the United States or within two months after its execution outside the United States, or at any time before recordation in such manner of the later transfer. Otherwise the later transfer prevails if recorded first in such manner, and if taken in good faith, for valuable consideration or on the basis of a binding promise to pay royalties, and without notice of the earlier transfer.

(e) PRIORITY BETWEEN CONFLICTING TRANSFER OF OWNERSHIP AND NONEXCLUSIVE LICENSE.—A nonexclusive license, whether recorded or not, prevails over a conflicting transfer of copyright ownership if the license is evidenced by a written instrument signed by the owner of the rights licensed or such owner's duly authorized agent, and if—

(1) the license was taken before execution of the transfer; or

(2) the license was taken in good faith before recordation of the transfer and without notice of it.

(Pub. L. 94-553, title I, §101, Oct. 19, 1976, 90 Stat. 2571; Pub. L. 100-568, §5, Oct. 31, 1988, 102 Stat. 2857; Pub. L. 111-295, §3(b), Dec. 9, 2010, 124 Stat. 3180.)

#### HISTORICAL AND REVISION NOTES

##### HOUSE REPORT NO. 94-1476

The recording and priority provisions of section 205 are intended to clear up a number of uncertainties arising from sections 30 and 31 of the present law [sections 30 and 31 of former title 17] and to make them more effective and practical in operation. Any “document pertaining to a copyright” may be recorded under subsection (a) if it “bears that actual signature of the person who executed it,” or if it is appropriately certified as a true copy. However, subsection (c) makes clear that the recorded document will give constructive no-