Copyrights, Copyright Registration and Permission Letters

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Citing your sources:

The Chicago Manual of Style Online, Quick-guide
Purdue Online Writing Lab

Copyright law and fair use:

The Copyright Crash Course, Georgia Harper
Fair Use of Copyrighted Materials
University of Texas Fair Use Guidelines for Dissertations, Georgia Harper
Copyright Law and Graduate Research, Kenneth D. Crews
Part III, Roadmap for Copyright Compliance (see discussion of fair use)

Inquiries and specific questions may be sent to gharper@austin.utexas.edu.

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Use of Published Papers That You Have Written

Special problems arise when the student has published one or more papers based on research results that are to be incorporated into the dissertation. Apparently a few universities allow students to bind reprints of their papers into their dissertations, but that has never been the policy at The University of Texas at Austin. We insist that dissertations be coherent and consistent in appearance throughout, which means that previously published material must be printed using the same font and format as the rest of the dissertation. When a student has the manuscript for an article on diskette, which is generally the case, it should not be too difficult to add or rewrite sections to include details that are generally included in a dissertation, but not in a journal article. In addition, editing may be required to avoid redundancy when material from several papers is used in the dissertation.

A more difficult issue concerns copyright protection. Students and professors may be inclined to take the position, “Since I wrote the paper, I can use it any way I want to.” However, that may not be an ethically or legally defensible position. Inclusion of extensive sections of text, figures and graphs from copyrighted publications without permission of the copyright holder, who is generally the publisher and not the author, can lead to difficulties. Short sections of text that have been previously published can be treated as properly referenced quotations. If the paper is published with co-authors, all of them must be shown as authors of the quote section. In other words, the student cannot represent himself or herself as sole author of the work after it has been published with co-authors. In addition, if the student is not the copyright owner, permission must be obtained from the publisher to include in the dissertation material that lies outside of the fair use provision of the copyright law. Even if text is not quoted verbatim, any illustration or figure that appears in a copyrighted publication can only be included in the dissertation with the permission of the copyright owner. Finally, since that permission cannot be transferred implicitly to someone else, the permission letters must state explicitly that University Microfilms, Incorporated may supply single copies on demand when the dissertation is to be published by UMI.

The policy of publishers on this issue is variable. A small sample of that opinion was obtained from the American Society for Microbiology Publications Department and from Academic Press, Inc., which publishes Virology. Both publishers recommend that permission be obtained from the publisher to incorporate copyrighted material beyond fair use provision into a dissertation, even when the student is an author of the paper. If you are uncertain about the policy of your publisher, it would probably be a good idea to obtain a written statement.

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