

# Using Photos and Images in MU Extension Programming: Copyright Licensing

We all need good photos and images to help us tell our story more effectively.

The issue is that the photos or images we want to use are often copyrighted. But don't be discouraged — there are many options available. First let's talk about basics of copyright and licensing.

## How do I know if something is copyrighted?

“As soon as an idea is fixed in a medium that is perceptible to human senses, it is covered by copyright.” (Kevin Smith, MLS, JD, director of copyright and scholarly communication at Duke University Libraries). It does not need to carry a copyright statement to be protected.

Generally, any material created in the United States after 1922 is copyrighted. If you use or adapt such material without first obtaining permission, you put yourself and the university at risk of being sued for copyright infringement.

Aside from protecting you from legal action, asking for permission is the ethical way to respect the intellectual property rights of a creator.

Think of copyright and permission this way. Let's say MU Extension expects you to conduct a workshop about nutrition, and you need a large quantity of fresh vegetables to use for taste sampling. Extension would certainly not expect you to shoplift a cart full of vegetables from your local grocer for use in the workshop. Nor would they expect you to shoplift photos from someone else for use in the flier and handouts for your workshop.

In both cases, you would either pay for the goods, or work out a mutually agreeable recognition with a “donor” in exchange for goods. This kind of agreement and recognition is similar to getting permission to use something that is copyrighted.

## I found a photo that is royalty-free. Does this mean I am free to use it as I want?

No. Royalty-free means that the creator of the photo agrees that for a flat fee, you can use the photo multiple times without having to pay a royalty, or fee, each time you use it. Royalty-free works are covered by copyright; you will need permission and purchase for use.

## Free photos licensed under Creative Commons

What is Creative Commons? In their own words, “Creative Commons is a nonprofit organization that enables the sharing and use of creativity and knowledge through free legal tools.”

Creative Commons website:  
<http://creativecommons.org/>

### Searching

Creative Commons offers an easy, one-stop search through many websites:

<https://search.creativecommons.org>

1. Simply enter your search query near the top of the page. Then click on whichever resource you want to search, such as Flickr, Google Images, Wikimedia Commons, YouTube, etc.
2. For example, if you want to search for “thistle in Missouri,” enter this into the search query, then tell the search engine to look in Flickr by clicking on the Flickr Image button. If you like the first photo of purple thistle that comes up, click on the photo for an expanded view.
3. Notice below the photo, there is attribution of the photographer, along with the location where the photo was taken. There is also important information about “rights.” Click on “Some rights reserved” to find out if and how you can

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## Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

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### You are free to:

**Share** — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

**Adapt** — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

The licensor cannot revoke these freedoms as long as you follow the license terms.



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### Under the following terms:



**Attribution** — You must give [appropriate credit](#), provide a link to the license, and [indicate if changes were made](#). You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.

**No additional restrictions** — You may not apply legal terms or [technological measures](#) that legally restrict others from doing anything the license permits.

use this photo. In this case, the photographer has given rights to SHARE (copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format) and ADAPT (remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially) — UNDER THE FOLLOWING TERM: Attribution — You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license and indicate if changes were made.

4. Let's say you did not edit his photo. You would then use an attribution like this: "[Purple Thistle](#)" by [Phil Warren](#), is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

Let's say you cropped his photo; you would attribute this way: "[Purple Thistle](#)" by [Phil Warren](#), cropped, is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

In all digital form uses, you would link the photographer's name to his or her webpage (when available, which you can usually get by clicking on the photographer's name). Also, link the attribution.

By clicking on the attribution link (wording will vary by source), you will be taken to a webpage that looks like the webpage shown on page 2.

In print uses, the above attributions are sufficient.

While it's usually best to place your attribution next to the photo or image, there are times that it's not practical to do so. In those cases, it is acceptable to list attributions at the end. Be sure to cite the page number, figure number or slide number in each attribution.

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## What are other sources of free photos and images that are in the public domain?

There are quite a few sources that offer free and (mostly) unrestricted use of their photos. Again, it is always a good policy to attribute the sources.

The Creative Commons website consolidates many of these collections, but here are a few of the many that may not be included in the CC site.

In all cases, you may not claim ownership of these photos. **Be sure to read each collection's About or Licensing page.** Some state that you may not use their photos in your own collection that you make available to the public. Most state that you may not sell them. Be sure you know what the limitations are **before** using the photos.

The **USDA** maintains a free, copyright-free, public domain digital library of photos.

<https://www.ars.usda.gov/oc/images/image-gallery/>

The USDA does request attribution and specify how to attribute.

<https://www.ars.usda.gov/oc/images/copyright/>

The **4-H Online Marketing Resource Center** has a good library of photos available. You will have to

register with 4-h.org for your free account.

<https://4-h.org/professionals/marketing-resources/>

**Pixabay** is another large source of free, copyright-free photos that are in the public domain. They are all licensed under Creative Commons; furthermore they do not require attribution.

<https://pixabay.com/>

Another copyright-free source is **Unsplash**. This community of photographers started out as a blog and grew into a website that houses a collection of copyright-free photos. Contributing photographers created this website out of frustration by the lack of free photos that were unrestricted in use. Their license states, "All photos published on Unsplash can be used for free. You can use them for commercial and noncommercial purposes. You do not need to ask permission from or provide credit to the photographer or Unsplash, although it is appreciated when possible."

<https://unsplash.com/about>

**Freephotos** offers photos licensed under Creative Commons for unrestricted use. You are not required to attribute the photographer, but it is appreciated.

<https://freephotos.cc/>

Another large collection of copyright-free photos and images is **Freemages**.

<https://www.freeimages.com/>

**Morguefile** also offers a collection of copyright-free photos.

<https://morguefile.com/>

**Free Stock Photos** is a smaller collection of photos that are free to download. Most are copyright-free, but each has its own licensing requirements. Be sure to use the search bar at the top of the page — this site has ads, disguised as search bars for commercial photo collections.

<http://www.freestockphotos.biz/>

If you need historical photos, the **Library of Congress** has an extensive digital collection.

<https://www.loc.gov/collections/>

All photos on **Freestocks** are free and unrestricted

for commercial use. You can not sell their photos.  
<https://freestocks.org/>

**StockSnap** is a large curated collection of copy-right-free photos that are licensed under Creative Commons.

<https://stocksnap.io/>

**Burst** is a collection powered by Shopify. They have many copyright-free photos that are licensed under Creative Commons. However, they also are intermingled with photos that have restrictions. Once you have selected a photo, click on it and be sure to read the License requirements in the photo information left column.

<https://burst.shopify.com/>

**Dreamstime** has a collection of copyright-free photos. Be sure you click on the **Free Photos link** in their top menu bar.

<https://www.dreamstime.com/>

All photos on **Pexels** are copyright-free and licensed under Creative Commons.

<https://www.pexels.com/>

**Negative Space** is a web-based community where photographers can share their work for all, with no restrictions. Their photos are licensed under Creative Commons.

<https://negativespace.co/>

While not a huge collection, **Picography** does offer beautiful photos licensed under Creative Commons.

<https://picography.co/>

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### When in doubt, ask.

If you have found a photo that is perfect for your use, but you don't know if the photographer has licensed it for unrestricted use, try to find an email address for the photographer. Email the photographer, stating who you are, who your organization is and how you want to use the photo. Often, the

photographer will be happy to help by giving you permission, as long as you attribute the photo.

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### Use your own photos when you can!

In most cases, you will do the best job of communicating with your audience by using photos you have taken yourself.

- You don't have to worry about copyright issues.
- Generally, photos you have taken will resonate better with your audience because they will have local meaning and significance.
- Your own photos will convey sincerity.
- If you use stock photos, you have no control over where else they can show up, and in what context they will be used. You won't have to worry about that with your own photos.
- Be sure to have a photo release for people who could be identified in your photos.  
<https://identity.missouri.edu/downloads/photo-video-release.pdf>

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### A caveat about using free photos

While you may have free and/or unrestricted use of a photo, be aware that not all contributing photographers have (or have submitted) photo releases from models or people in their photos. **If people in a photo are identifiable** and have not signed a photo release, they could sue you or MU Extension for infringing on their right of publicity.

**Unsplash**, for example, does not retain model information or releases. You cannot know if a person in the photo has signed a photo release. Major companies have been sued for using Unsplash photos that were not properly released by the models. When in doubt if a release exists, don't use the photo.



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