



## A QUICK GUIDE TO MUSICAL COPYRIGHT, LICENCING AND PERMISSIONS FOR DISTRIBUTING MUSIC DIGITALLY

Whether you are performing, writing, rehearsing or recording music, you'll probably need to be covered by a licence. This guide is specifically about licensing and copyright for distributing music digitally, either pre-recorded material or live streamed material. For more general information about performing rights and licencing, visit the [PRS website](#).

If you're going to play something live (either in person or online) then you need to be covered by a licence – this basically means the copyright holder gets some money for the performance. For online performances the licence will be with PRS for Music.

There are 4 things you need to check before you stream:

1. Music and lyrics: In the UK a piece of music and its lyrics stay in copyright for **70 years after the death of the composer/lyricist**. So, if your composer and lyricist have died before 1950 you don't need to worry.
2. If the composer or lyricist is still alive or died in of after 1950, you need to look at **where you will stream**:  
**YouTube and Facebook** have a blanket licence with PRS for Music which means any content put on their platform – either as a live stream or something pre-recorded – is covered by that licence – so users don't have to worry.  
If you want to stream on another platform you have to check their guidelines if they have a licence. Otherwise you need to get in touch with [PRS](#).  
If you want to stream on your own website you need a [Limited Online Music Licence \(LOML\)](#) from PRS for Music.
3. Some publishers charge a **licence fee** on top of PRS.  
If you haven't got a licence for a piece that is still in copyright, you need to contact the publisher. They will let you know if you need to buy a licence for the piece you want to perform or if they are happy with just PRS royalty income (which is covered on Facebook and YouTube (see point 2)).  
If you are not sure who owns the copyright you can contact the [Music Publishers Association](#).
4. **Without a licence**, the copyright holder can ask you to **remove the content or the page**.  
If you upload an **arrangement of an original** you would have needed separate permission from the copyright to make that arrangement – so the copyright holder might object on those grounds.  
Even if it is not an arrangement and with the Facebook/YouTube licences in place - the copyright holders can still object. This tends to happen if content is being used to promote a **cause the copyright holder does not want to be associated with** (think Neil Young and Donald Trump) – or if the user was using the recording for **direct commercial gain** – e.g. selling downloads, CDs or promoting a product.

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