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**Dementia Inclusive
Singing Network**

Copying Lyrics and Sheet Music and Making Arrangements

This guide explains what you should do if the songs you are singing with your group are in copyright and you want to copy lyrics for song sheets, copy sheet music or make a musical arrangement. Read the guide called 'Copyright and Licensing for Choirs and Singing Groups' first so you know whether the songs you are singing are in copyright.

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Copying lyrics for rehearsal and performance

The printing out of lyrics counts as making a copy. This includes:

- Printing lyrics that can easily be found on the internet. Printing them would still be counted as copying.
- Even writing them out by hand from memory or by listening to a recording is counted as copying.
- Putting on to PowerPoint slides for digital projection.

By the letter of law, if you are making a copy of the lyrics of a song that is in copyright, you should have permission from the person who wrote the lyrics or whoever owns the copyright.

HOWEVER: Singing groups copying lyrics so people can sing together is common practice. The risk of a copyright holder taking action if you do that is low. Your group may decide to take a balanced view of the risk. There are two different copyrights covering a song your group is singing.

If you do decide to print lyrics then you should consider ways to keep the risk to your group low. For example:

- At Come and Sing events, ask singers to leave song sheets behind and destroy them afterwards.
- Don't make a booklet for singers to keep with lyrics of lots of songs in.

Copying published sheet music

If you use published sheet music for your choir, until the music and lyrics are out of copyright (70-year rule) AND the edition you are using is out of copyright (25-year rule) you should not copy it.

Stick to these rules:

- You should get sheet music by buying, hiring or borrowing it.
- You should not copy sheet music to avoid buying or hiring it.
- You should buy, hire or borrow **all** the copies you need.



Some exceptions are:

- If a singer has any disability that makes it difficult for them to read the music as published, an accessible copy can be made for them, e.g. a large print copy made.
- If a singer is finding it difficult to turn a page in the middle of a song, then you can make a copy of a page to make that easier.
- If you make a copy for these reasons, you must write 'Copy made with permission' on the page and destroy it after use.

For more information look at the [Music Publisher's Association's \(MPA's\) Code of Fair Practice](#).

Making arrangements of songs in copyright

Making an arrangement of a song is common practice among singing groups. This could be the music or the lyrics and includes things like key changes, removing a verse, or repeating a chorus. By the letter of the law, you need permission from the copyright holder to make any changes to a song, music or lyrics.

HOWEVER: You might decide that it would be a lot of work for both your group and the copyright owner if you asked permission to make very small changes. The risk of a copyright holder taking action if you make a minor change is low. Your group may decide to take a balanced view of the risk.

The decision about what is a minor change is up to the arranger. A good question to ask yourself is, are you fundamentally changing the nature of the piece? If you are, then you should ask for permission. But if you are maintaining the original nature of the piece but making small adjustments to suit the piece to your group and get the best performance from your group, then they might be viewed as minor.

Examples of minor changes -

- Octave or key changes to suit the voices available.
- Removing or repeating a chorus or verse.
- Editing or simplifying technically challenging sections.

Examples of fundamental changes -

- Changing the style of the song. For example, a bluegrass version of Delilah.
- A creative interpretation of a piece that changes its feel and style.



Another consideration is how you will use the arrangement. For example, if you want to make your arrangement available to other groups, then seeking permission is a good idea.

If you plan to make fundamental changes then you should get permission from the copyright holder. This is usually done by contacting the publisher. If you do an internet search for the name of the publisher and 'permissions' then you will normally find an email address or online form to complete. It can take some time so make sure you ask for permission well in advance of the performance (at least two months ideally).

Links

Music Publishers Association: <https://mpaonline.org.uk/contact/>

To find out who the copyright holders of a piece of music are, answer questions relating to specific publications or editions, or put you in contact with a publisher.

We hope you find this Making Music resource useful. If you have any comments or suggestions about the guidance please contact us. Whilst every effort is made to ensure that the content of this guidance is accurate and up to date, Making Music do not warrant, nor accept any liability or responsibility for the completeness or accuracy of the content, or for any loss which may arise from reliance on the information contained in it.