

Pseudonyms

This circular provides information about copyright law and pseudonyms. It covers

- Definition of a pseudonymous work
- Duration of copyright protection
- Registering a pseudonymous work

For specific information, see **chapter 600**, section 615.2, of the *Compendium of U.S. Copyright Office Practices*.¹

A pseudonym is a fictitious name that an individual author may use to identify him or herself to the public. A pseudonym may be used on the copies of a work or when registering a claim to copyright with the U.S. Copyright Office. Nicknames and abbreviated forms of legal names are not considered pseudonyms. For example, the British writer Joanne Rowling uses an abbreviated name and a pseudonym. She writes under “J.K. Rowling,” which is an abbreviated name, and “Robert Galbraith,” which is a pseudonym.

NOTE: A pseudonym itself is not protected by copyright. Copyright protection is not available for names or short phrases.

When an author places a pseudonym on the copies or phonorecords of a work protected by copyright instead of using the author’s real name, the work may be considered a pseudonymous work under copyright law, but only when the author’s real name does not appear anywhere on the work. If the author’s full name appears on the work or appears in the copyright notice, the work is not a pseudonymous work, even if a pseudonym also appears on the work or is included in the registration application. Whether a work is a pseudonymous work may have implications for protection under copyright law, in particular by extending or reducing the term of copyright.

Copyright Duration

For works created on or after January 1, 1978, the copyright in a pseudonymous work expires 95 years from the year of publication or 120 years from the year of creation, whichever is shorter.

If the legal name of the author is identified in the records of the Copyright Office, then the term of copyright will be the life of the author plus seventy years.

Copyright Registration

You may register a pseudonymous work with the U.S. Copyright Office. For general information, see *Copyright Registration (Circular 2)*. The Copyright Office encourages applicants to provide the author's real name in the application for registration, even if the author's name does not appear on the copies or phonorecords of the work. Providing the author's real name creates a clear record of authorship and ownership of the copyright and may affect the term of copyright.

NOTE: Registration records are open to the public. Do not disclose the author's real name or address in an application for a pseudonymous work if the author does not wish to make that information public. The Office will not remove the author's name from the registration record once a certificate of registration has been issued.

Mistakes in applications lead to delays in registration, so it is important to complete the application accurately. Here are some tips for registering a pseudonymous work.

Name of Author

- If you are registering a pseudonymous work, you are not required to provide the author's full name in the application.
 - » If you do not wish to reveal the author's real name, you may check the box marked Pseudonymous and complete the Pseudonym field.
 - » If you wish to reveal the author's real name, you may provide the author's full name in the Individual Author field in addition to checking the box marked Pseudonymous and completing the Pseudonym field.
 - » Only check the Pseudonymous box if the pseudonym, not the author's real name, appears on the copies or phonorecords, including the copyright notice.
 - » Do not check the Work Made for Hire box. A work made for hire cannot be registered as a pseudonymous work. For more information, see **chapter 600**, section 614.1(E) of the *Compendium*.
 - » Do not check the anonymous box. A pseudonymous work is not anonymous.
- If you are not registering a pseudonymous work but wish to provide your pseudonym, provide the author's full name in the Individual Author field and complete the Pseudonym field.
 - » Do not check the pseudonymous box.
- A pseudonym must be a name. The Copyright Office will not accept a number or symbol as a pseudonym.
- The name of a performing group is not a pseudonym.

Year of Creation or Publication

Double check the accuracy of the years of creation and publication, if applicable. These dates may be used to calculate the term of copyright if you do not include the author's legal name in the application.

Using the Pseudonym Elsewhere in the Application

If the author does not wish to provide his or her real name anywhere in the application, you may use the pseudonym in the following areas, where appropriate: Name of Claimant, Rights and Permissions, Correspondent, and Certification.

Supplementary Registration

Supplementary registration is a special type of registration that may be used to add the author's real name to the registration record when the applicant originally provided a pseudonym. For more information, see *Supplementary Registration* (**Circular 8**).

NOTE

1. This circular is intended as an overview of copyright and pseudonyms. The authoritative source for U.S. copyright law is the Copyright Act, codified in Title 17 of the *United States Code*. Copyright regulations are codified in Title 37 of the *Code of Federal Regulations*. Copyright Office practices and procedures are summarized in the third edition of the *Compendium of U.S. Copyright Office Practices*, cited as the *Compendium*. The copyright law, regulations, and the *Compendium* are available on the Copyright Office website at www.copyright.gov.

For Further Information

By Internet

The copyright law, the *Compendium*, electronic registration, application forms, regulations, and related materials are available on the Copyright Office website at www.copyright.gov.

By Email

To send an email inquiry, click the *Contact Us* link on the Copyright Office website.

By Telephone

For general information, call the Copyright Public Information Office at (202) 707-3000 or 1-877-476-0778 (toll free). Staff members are on duty from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm, eastern time, Monday through Friday, except federal holidays. To request application forms or circulars by postal mail, call (202) 707-9100 or 1-877-476-0778 and leave a recorded message.

By Regular Mail

Write to

Library of Congress
U.S. Copyright Office
Outreach and Education Section
101 Independence Avenue, SE #6304
Washington, DC 20559-6304

