

Software licences

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Software piracy is the unauthorized copying or distribution of software in violation of licence agreements. When you purchase or otherwise obtain software (e.g. by getting

**review the licence
agreement that comes
with your software
before you open it**

shareware or freeware from friends or the Internet), you are actually acquiring a licence that permits you to use the software. You do not own the software.

Licence agreements differ so you should carefully review the one that comes with your new software before you open the package. Opening the package or, in the case of downloaded software, using the program, usually means that you agree to the terms of the licence.

There are four types of software in terms of copyright: commercial, shareware, freeware and public domain. (These software copyright classifications are adapted from *Using Software: A Guide to the Ethical and Legal Use of Software for Members of the Academic Community*, a publication produced by the Educational Uses of Information Technology Program of Educom, and the Information Technology Association of America.)

Commercial and shareware

Commercial software packages must be paid for before use. They cannot be returned after the package is opened.

Shareware software permits usage for evaluation. It requires payment after the software is adopted.

Commercial and shareware software are both covered by the software copyright law. In most cases, you are entitled to make an archival copy that is usable only if the original fails or is destroyed. Some licences for software you use at work also allow you to make a copy for home use, with the stipulation that you cannot use both copies at the same time.

You are not entitled to make modifications or reverse engineer ("take apart" to see how it works) the software without the permission of the copyright holder. Furthermore, you are not authorized to build software on the package without permission from the copyright holder.

Freeware

Freeware is also covered by software copyright law. Licences for freeware usually indicate that copies can be made for archival and distribution purposes but that distribution cannot be for profit.

Modifications to the software are allowed and encouraged. Reverse engineering is allowed without the explicit permission of the copyright holder. Development of new software built upon the package is allowed with the condition that it be designated as freeware.

Public domain

A public domain classification implies that the software's copyrighted holder has relinquished all rights to the software. Assume that intellectual property (such as software) is copyright unless it is clearly marked public domain.

Licence agreements for software in the public domain are similar to those for freeware with the exception that there are no restrictions on the development of new software built upon the package. □

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