You Wrote It; You Own It!

Emma Hill\textsuperscript{1} and Mike Rossner\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Executive Editor, The Journal of Cell Biology
\textsuperscript{2}Executive Director, The Rockefeller University Press

Authors of papers published in Rockefeller University Press journals (\textit{The Journal of Cell Biology}, \textit{The Journal of Experimental Medicine}, or \textit{The Journal of General Physiology}) now retain copyright to their published work. This permits authors to reuse their own work in any way, as long as they attribute it to the original publication. Third parties may use our published materials under a Creative Commons license, six months after publication.

In 1787, the Copyright Clause of the United States Constitution gave the United States Congress the power “To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.” For more than two centuries, however, authors of scientific papers have been giving up that right.

Even before the United States existed, copyright law was introduced in Britain to protect authors from publishers’ monopoly on printed material. However, scientific publishers twisted these laws to their advantage, usurping copyright from authors.

Preying on authors’ desire to publish, and thus their willingness to sign virtually any form placed in front of them, scientific publishers have traditionally required authors to sign over the copyright to their work before publication. For authors, this arrangement was both positive and negative. On the positive side, the publisher defended against improper use of the authors’ work; on the negative side, restrictions were placed on authors (and third parties) that limited the reuse of the published work.

At The Rockefeller University Press, we have followed this tradition in the past and obtained copyright from authors as a condition of publication. Several years ago, however, we recognized that the advent of the internet had irrevocably changed the nature and mechanisms of knowledge distribution, and we returned some of those rights to authors. Since July 2000, we have allowed our authors to freely distribute their published work by posting the final, formatted PDF version on their own websites immediately after publication (Rossner, 2007).

With the growing demand for public access to published data, we recently started depositing all of our content in PubMed Central. In a further step to enhance the utility of scientific content, we have now decided to return copyright to our authors. In return, however, we require authors to make their work available for reuse by the public. Instead of relinquishing copyright, our authors will now provide us with a license to publish their work. This license, however, places no restrictions on how authors can reuse their own work; we only require them to attribute the work to its original publication. Six months after publication, third parties (that is, anyone who is not an author) can use the material we publish under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0).

What does this Creative Commons License mean? It means that our published content will be open for reuse, distribution, data mining, etc., by anyone, as long as attribution is made to the original work. Share-alike means that any subsequent distribution must follow the rules set out in this license. Noncommercial means that published work can be reused without permission, as long as it is for noncommercial purposes.

We still believe in protecting our authors from commercial exploitation of their work. Commercial reuse of material published in one of our journals will still require permission from the journal. Authors, on the other hand, can reuse their own material for any purpose, including commercial profit, as long as proper attribution is made.
Within the first six months after publication, the same terms of this license apply, with one exception: the creation of mirror sites containing all, or a subset, of our content is prohibited during that period. The Rockefeller University Press still derives essential revenue from journal subscriptions to content within the first six months, and thus we cannot risk the creation of a free mirror site during this time.

The Creative Commons License will apply retroactively to all work published by The Rockefeller University Press before November 1, 2007; the license restricting the creation of mirror sites will apply to all work published within the last six months. Authors who previously assigned their copyright to the Press are now granted the right to use their own work in any way they like, as long as they acknowledge the original publication.

We are pleased to finally comply with the original spirit of copyright in our continuing effort to promote public access to the published biomedical literature.

Full text of our new copyright policy is available here: http://www.jgp.org/misc/terms.shtml.

REFERENCES