

International Copyright Expiry Durations

Copyright does not last forever. When the applicable term expires, the work enters the public domain in that country and may generally be used without the copyright owner's permission.

The duration of copyright depends on:

- The country whose law applies
- The type of work
- When the work was created or published
- Whether the author is known
- Whether there are multiple authors
- Whether special rules apply to government, anonymous, posthumous, or older works

This guide focuses on the **general duration for literary works by a known individual author**. It is a starting point, not a definitive determination of any particular work's copyright status.

Terms and links were current as of **July 2026**.

General Duration for Literary Works

Country	General Copyright Term
Canada	Life of the author plus 70 years
United States	Life of the author plus 70 years
United Kingdom	Life of the author plus 70 years
Australia	Life of the author plus 70 years
New Zealand	Life of the author plus 50 years
Ireland	Life of the author plus 70 years
India	Life of the author plus 60 years
South Africa	Life of the author plus 50 years

In most cases, the term is calculated to the end of the relevant calendar year. If copyright lasts for the author's life plus 70 years and the author died in 1955, copyright generally expires at the end of 2025. The work enters the public domain on January 1, 2026.

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Canada

General term: Life of the author plus 70 years.

For a work of joint authorship, the term is generally calculated from the death of the last surviving author.

Canada extended its general term from life plus 50 years to life plus 70 years on December 30, 2022. The extension did not restore copyright in works that had already entered the public domain before January 1, 2023.

Different terms apply to anonymous and pseudonymous works, certain government works, sound recordings, performances, and some other material.

Official information: [Canadian Intellectual Property Office](#)

United States

General term: For most works created on or after January 1, 1978, life of the author plus 70 years.

For joint works, the term is generally calculated from the death of the last surviving author.

Anonymous works, pseudonymous works, and works made for hire are generally protected for **95 years from first publication or 120 years from creation, whichever expires first.**

The status of works created or published before 1978 can be considerably more complicated. Earlier laws used different terms, renewal requirements, and publication formalities.

Official information: [U.S. Copyright Office](#)

United Kingdom

General term: Life of the author plus 70 years.

For joint works, the term is generally calculated from the death of the last surviving author.

If the author is unknown, copyright generally lasts for 70 years from creation or, in some circumstances, 70 years from when the work was first made available to the public.

Different terms apply to Crown copyright, Parliamentary copyright, sound recordings, broadcasts, films, and the typographical arrangement of published editions. Older works may also be subject to transitional rules.

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Official information: [UK Intellectual Property Office](#)

Australia

General term: Life of the author plus 70 years.

For works whose author is unknown, the term may be calculated from the year the work was created or first made public.

Special rules apply to works first made public before January 1, 2019, works that were not made public during the author's lifetime, government works, and other categories of material.

Official information: [Australian Copyright Act](#)

New Zealand

General term: Life of the author plus 50 years.

The term is calculated from the end of the calendar year in which the author dies.

Different terms apply to sound recordings, films, communication works, published-edition layouts, industrially applied designs, and Crown copyright. New Zealand Crown copyright generally lasts for 100 years from the end of the year in which the work was made.

Official information: [Intellectual Property Office of New Zealand](#)

Ireland

General term: Life of the author plus 70 years.

For joint works, the term is generally calculated from the death of the last surviving author.

Different terms apply to films, sound recordings, broadcasts, computer-generated works, and the typographical arrangement of published editions.

Official information: [Intellectual Property Office of Ireland](#)

India

General term: Life of the author plus 60 years.

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For literary, dramatic, musical, and most artistic works, the 60-year period is counted from the beginning of the calendar year following the author's death.

Different rules apply to anonymous and pseudonymous works, posthumous publications, photographs, films, sound recordings, government works, and works of international organizations. For many of these works, the term is calculated from publication rather than the author's death.

Official information: [IP India](#)

South Africa

General term: Life of the author plus 50 years.

For literary, musical, and most artistic works, the term generally runs to the end of the 50th year following the author's death.

Different terms and calculations apply to photographs, films, sound recordings, broadcasts, computer programs, government works, and works not published during the author's lifetime.

Official information: [South African Government](#)

Before Treating a Work as Public Domain

A work's copyright may have expired in one country while remaining protected in another. Confirm its status in every country relevant to your intended publication or distribution.

Also remember that a public-domain work may appear in a newer edition containing separately protected material. A translation, introduction, annotation, illustration, audiobook recording, or typographical arrangement may have its own copyright even when the original text does not.

When the author, publication history, country of origin, or applicable law is uncertain, do not rely on simple arithmetic alone.