

A Guide to Copyright Termination

Disclaimer

Copyright termination can be daunting for those unfamiliar with the process. We are not copyright attorneys and do not claim to be infallible, but are simply sharing information that has helped many of us. For those of you who wish to terminate a copyright of your music yourselves without the expense of professional help, these resources may be a place to start.

When is a termination possible?

Copyright law includes a 'termination transfer right' after 35 years. The window of opportunity is open for only 5 years and advance notice must be sent to the publisher. Note that the publisher may be notified two years or more before the beginning of the 5-year window so that termination may be effective exactly 35 years after publication.

The Copyright Office website will have details about the date of publication of your piece and the date and registration number of the copyright. Search the Public Catalog. (<https://cocatalog.loc.gov/cgi-bin/Pwebrecon.cgi?DB=local&PAGE=First>.)

To find the earliest and latest dates for notifying the publisher, fill in the dates and answer the questions on the website rightsback.org. The earliest and latest dates for notification and the earliest and latest dates for the termination to take effect will also be provided.

What must appear in a letter giving notification of termination to the publisher?

There are very specific requirements for a letter notifying a publisher of a termination, such as: type of service (first class mail), title of work, date of publication, date of contract, copyright registration date and number, and effective date of termination.

See [sample letter](#).

How do I notify the Copyright Office of a termination?

The Copyright Office provides a form called a Notice of Termination Cover Sheet (TCS) on its website along with detailed instructions for filling out the form and what needs to accompany the form.

Here is the TCS page on the Copyright Office website: [TCS form & instructions](#)

Note: An invaluable guide to copyright termination (Termination Transfer) can be found at: <https://www.authorsalliance.org/resources/termination-of-transfer>.

