Guide to Licensing

Licensing can be complicated and confusing, yet anyone using the internet is agreeing to license conditions all the time, often without really knowing it. Here is a brief description of what you need to know from a practical point of view.

What is a license?

A license is a permit that states what you can and can not do with other people's trademarked, copyright or patented work. If you do original work you own the copyright (all you have to do is be able to prove it is your original work) and you can then license it to others to use.

How do I write a license?

You don't need to and it is better if you choose a standard license. This ensures that your work is compatible with the work done by other people who have similar ideas as you and makes the collective value of the work greater. This guide will help you choose the right license for your work but we have standardised on the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike license for content on the INGOT Community Site.

Ok, how do I pick a license?

Essentially, there are two things you need to know:

Is it a software project?

Are you writing a program or a macro script? For this work we recommend the General Public License (GPL) [1] or BSD license [2] but there are quite a few others [3]. These are Open Source licenses specifically developed for computer programs.

Is it content like a learning resource, music or video?

This is more likely on the INGOTs community site and we use the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License [4] (CC A-SA) for this

Reciprocal licenses A reciprocal license essentially says, "you can use this work, but only if you share work you develop using this work with other people."

The GPL and CC A-SA licenses are both reciprocal licenses because they require new work that is built on or derived from the licensed work to be licensed in the same way. A good example of its use is GNU/Linux distributions such as the Ubuntu desktop systems. The BSD license is not reciprocal and a good example of its use is Apple Computer Corp who used BSD Unix as the basis of the Mac operating system and now do not let anyone use or copy most of the Mac software without permission. Since Linux is licensed under the GPL, if Apple had used Linux for the Mac it would have had to share all the development of the Mac operating system with everyone else. The Apple business decision is that this is a better route for the company whereas Canonical, the developers of Ubuntu have decided that the GPL route is better for them.

Should I choose a reciprocal license?

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A reciprocal license says, "you can use and modify my work, but your modification must be under this same license". For example, suppose that you draw a fabulous picture of the Eiffel Tower. Joe then takes your picture and uses it in an essay about the Eiffel Tower. But Joe does not allow other people to copy his essay. Would you be happy with this situation? If not you need to use a reciprocal license. If you are happy or maybe you think it is better for the user of your work to decide, you can use a more permissive license - you can even just say the work is in the public domain [5]. An example of a permissive non-reciprocal license is the Creative Commons Attribution License [6]

The situation is similar when developing software. People that develop the Linux operating system software say that if you alter it to improve it you must also share the bits that you contribute with everyone else. Developers of Open Source software that does not have reciprocal licenses might say that it is better for the user to decide and it might encourage more developers to take part.

In summary, a non-reciprocal license means that people can exploit your work and give nothing in return. Some people are happy with that, others aren't. In general it's your choice. On the INGOT Community website we require a reciprocal license because we want to encourage people to work collaboratively and learn by sharing their work with others. Notice that all these licenses allow people to make money using your work. The reciprocal licenses simply mean that they pass on the right to make copies too so these people could in principle make money from that work too and so on.

I don't want other people making money from my work

It is worth noting that all open source licenses allow commercial use no matter how much they specify about sharing or not sharing. Mostly software is used in commercial as well as non-commercial projects. Open Source is often wrongly stated as non-commercial, it is simply that with Open Source the commercial interest is not normally related to selling licenses. If you do not want your work used for commercial applications you can specify this in the license. An example of non-commercial license for content (text, pictures, video, music etc) is the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial [7]. For software there is the UCSF Chimera [8] license.

More on closed licenses

If you have a great idea you think you can patent or develop with a more restrictive license, save it for later and use something else for your INGOT community project! Because the INGOTs are about building a community that freely shares its learning resources, we have standardised on the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike License [4] (CC A-SA). It makes things simpler if as far as possible there is one license for content on the web site and thinking about the license is a good practical way to learn more about licensing.

Source URL: https://theingots.org/community/resources/gold/licensing

Links
[1] http://creativecommons.org/licenses/GPL/2.0/
[2] http://opensource.org/licenses/bsd-license.php
[3] http://www.opensource.org/licenses/alphabetical
[4] http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/
[5] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_domain
[6] http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/
[7] http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.5/
[8] http://www.cgl.ucsf.edu/chimera/license.html

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