

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a dark blue t-shirt and a watch, is sitting at a dark wooden desk. She is writing in an open notebook with a black pen. On the desk, there is also a red book, a black coffee cup, and a clear plastic folder. In the background, there are several potted plants on a windowsill. The scene is lit with natural light from a window.

# **COPYWRITING** **YOUR SCRIPT** **EXECUTION PLAN**

THE  
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THE EXECUTION PLAN SERIES

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# COPYRIGHTING YOUR SCRIPT: EXECUTION PLAN

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I want you to take a second to picture the following scenario. After so many countless hours of hard work, you've finally finished your very first script. You've poured so much heart, energy, and thought into making every single line, character, and plot point absolutely perfect. You're ready to send it out to the world but there's one thing missing. The copyright. You're at a loss for what to do. You're not a lawyer, you don't have any experience in copyrighting material, and you don't have the money to spend to hire someone to help you figure this out. But you don't want to put your play out there until you've gotten it copyrighted.

So what do you do? Well, that's where I come in. This execution plan will help YOU to learn the basic ins and outs of copyrighting your play- and guess what? It's a lot easier than you think!

Now, let's do it!

## WHAT EVEN IS COPYRIGHT?

The term 'copyright' may seem very vague or broad, and maybe you're not even too sure what copyrighting really is, or what it protects you against. But you do know one big thing: it's important. If you didn't, you probably wouldn't be reading this execution plan right now. So, before we really dive into the ins and outs of how to copyright your material, I want to help you find out how much you already know by answering the following questions.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** I've provided you with a list of questions below to answer to your best ability. If you don't know an answer, no worries! The rest of this execution plan will help you to figure that out. This exercise is just to help you find out what you already know, and what you're going to learn through this plan to help you get the most out of the work you put in.

1. What is copyright?

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2. What does copyright protect?

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3. Is it expensive to copyright your play?

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4. How long does copyright protection last?

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5. Do you have to go through the government to have copyright protection?

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And of course...

6. How do you copyright a play? (If you have any guesses, go ahead and write those down here too!)

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Got your answers written down? Great! Let's see how you did. I'm going to answer a couple of those questions for you right here, but you'll learn more about the rest as you complete this execution plan! Let's start with the very first question: What is copyright? Well, according to the U.S. Copyright Office, "copyright is a form of protection grounded in the U.S. Constitution and granted by law for original works of authorship fixed in a tangible medium of expression and covers both published and unpublished works." In simpler terms, copyright is the exclusive legal right given to you as the creator to print, publish, perform, etc. the material, and to authorize or refuse others the right to do the same. With copyright protection, you have the right to use your work as you please, and the right to say 'yes' or 'no' to people when they want to use it. This leads us right into the second question: What does copyright protect? Copyright protects any work of original authorship- which means the script you wrote most definitely qualifies for copyright protection, which lasts quite a long time... all the way up to 70 years after your death! Now that you know the basics about copyright, let's move on to the actual copyrighting process.

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## THE POOR MAN'S COPYRIGHT

Now you may have heard of a little something called the "poor man's copyright", a simple method where you print out and mail your script to yourself to use the registered dating by the postal service to establish that the material has been in your possession since a particular time. Now that's one way to go about it. But if I were you, I wouldn't waste all that money on printing and postage when you could just as easily do the same thing through e-mail. Yep, you read that right- you can get copyright protection via e-mail! So, right here, right now, with this next Action Exercise- we're going to copyright your play.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** I want you to take a second to log onto your computer, tablet, phone, or whatever device you've been using to type up your newest work and pull up your script. Now that it's up, I want you to go ahead and export that document into a PDF. Now open up a new e-mail and send your script to someone. It could be your actor friend, your mentor, or even your grandmother! Just shoot your script in an email to someone. And just like that, your work has copyright protection. It makes no difference whether you add a "©" and the year – copyright is conferred the moment that your play is "fixed" in a tangible medium of expression," according to the U.S. Copyright Act. Once you've exported your play and sent it off to someone, you've met those qualifications and now are protected by the law from anyone stealing your work.

Now that your work has copyright protection, that's all there is to it right? There's nothing left to do!

Well... not quite.



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## REGISTERING YOUR COPYRIGHT

I want to look back at the questions I asked you in the first Action Exercise. One question from that list that we haven't tackled yet is #5: Do you have to go through the government to have copyright protection? Well as we just determined in the last section, the short answer to that question is no. However, there are many benefits to registering your work with the U.S. Copyright Office. While you are automatically granted copyright protection once your work is fixed, it can be very difficult to fight any dispute that may arise involving theft of your work without having the copyright of your play registered. The strongest proof of ownership is the certificate of registration that the U.S Copyright Office provides once registration is complete. When all of your hard work is at stake, trust me when I say you never want to rely on only a date-stamped PDF of your script for copyright protection. Now let's get to it and register a copyright of your script.

**ACTION EXERCISE:** Use the following steps to help you register with the U.S Copyright Office to get the protection your work deserves!

1. Head online and visit [www.copyright.gov](http://www.copyright.gov)
2. Click "Register"
3. Click "Log in to the Electronic Copyright Office (eCO) Registration System"
4. Unless you already have an account with the U.S. Copyright Office, click the hyperlink that reads "If you are a new user, click here to register"
5. Once you've created an account, log in and follow the steps to register a copyright of your work.



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**Pro Tip:** If you are registering one unpublished work online and are the sole author, the fee is \$35, while the general online fee is \$55.

Once you've completed the online form, you just need to wait for the Copyright Office to process your claim. On average, this takes around 4 months for claims submitted online, but could fall anywhere in the range of 1-7 months depending on various factors that can be found on the Registration Processing Times and FAQ's section of the U.S. Copyright Office website.

Congratulations! You've officially obtained copyright protection for your script and have filed a claim to register your copyright with the U.S. Copyright Office. That wasn't so hard, was it? I can't wait to see where you take your work next!

Still feeling stuck on copyrighting your play or have more questions about taking the next steps with your show? Join The TheaterMakers Studio to access my training courses on “How to Self-Diagnose Your Script”, “How to Get Your Show Off the Ground”, and “How to Market Your Show with No Money” Plus, members of The TheaterMakers Studio also get access to my live office hours calls where they can ask me anything they want each month!

[www.TheaterMakersStudio.com](http://www.TheaterMakersStudio.com)