

Fair Use Doctrine Guidance

The Copyright Act of 1976, as amended, contains a “fair use doctrine” which permits the use of copyright materials under limited circumstances. It states:

Notwithstanding the provisions of sections 106 and 106A, the fair use of a copyrighted work, including such use by reproduction in copies or phonorecords or by any other means specified by that section, for purposes such as criticism, comment, news reporting, teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use), scholarship, or research, is not an infringement of copyright. In determining whether the use made of a work in any particular case is a fair use the factors to be considered shall include -

1. the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
2. the nature of the copyrighted work;
3. the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
4. the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. The fact that a work is unpublished shall not itself bar a finding of fair use if such finding is made upon consideration of all the above factors.

17 U.S.C. 107.

While educational and research activities are specifically mentioned, the fair use doctrine requires a case-by-case application. Users shall not assume that because a use takes place in an educational environment, that all such uses are fair uses. Users shall apply the four part test prior to the use of a copyright material.