

Guidance for Thesis Deposit and Copyright Compliance for Postgraduate Research Students

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1. Introduction

As part of your doctoral studies, your final submitted thesis will be deposited in the University's Institutional Repository. This ensures your research is preserved, discoverable, and accessible, in line with open access principles. However, making your thesis publicly available online introduces legal and ethical responsibilities, particularly around copyright, intellectual property, and data protection.

Following the award of your degree, the Research and Postgraduate Office will arrange for the approved version of your thesis to be deposited in the Institutional Repository on your behalf.

This guide explains how to prepare your thesis for deposit in the Institutional Repository, with a focus on copyright compliance and the responsible use of third-party content. It also helps you understand your rights and responsibilities as an author, including how copyright protects your original work, how you can use other people's work without infringing copyright, when you might need copyright permission, and how to redact sensitive or copyrighted material where necessary.

2. Copyright and your thesis

Under the University's Research Degree Regulations, copyright in the thesis is vested in the student. The thesis submitted for examination remains the property of the University, but this does not affect the student's ownership of copyright in the thesis or in original material created as part of their research.

Copyright protects original works such as text, images, diagrams, photographs, software code, and other creative content.

Research often involves engaging with and discussing the work of others. In many cases, you can lawfully include third-party material in your thesis, provided that you comply with copyright law, licence terms, or any relevant copyright exceptions. This guidance explains when permission may be required and when material can be used without seeking permission.

If your research is externally funded, undertaken in collaboration with an external organisation, or subject to a separate agreement, different intellectual property arrangements may apply. If you are unsure, discuss this with your supervisor or funder.

Depositing your thesis in the University Repository does not normally prevent future publication. Most academic publishers do not regard a thesis made available through an institutional repository as prior publication. However, some publishers may request an embargo period before publication of related journal articles, book chapters, or monographs. See section 11 for further information.

3. What is an e-thesis?

An e-thesis is the final electronic version of your doctoral thesis that is deposited in London Metropolitan University's Institutional Repository by the Research and Postgraduate Office on your behalf. The Repository preserves your research and, where appropriate, makes it available online so that it can be discovered and accessed by other researchers

3.1 Thesis submission for examination

The version of your thesis submitted for examination is not generally considered a published work. As part of the examination process, you may include third-party copyright material where this is necessary for your research, provided that you comply with UK copyright law and acknowledge your sources appropriately.

This means that your examination copy may include material such as quotations, images, diagrams, tables, maps, or other copyright-protected content that supports your analysis and research findings.

3.2 When does a thesis become publicly available?

Following the successful completion of your degree, the approved version of your thesis will normally be deposited in the University's Institutional Repository as an e-

thesis.

Making a thesis publicly available online differs from submitting it for examination because it allows wider access to your work beyond the University. As a result, you should review any third-party copyright material included in the thesis before repository deposit.

In many cases, third-party material can continue to be included in an e-thesis, provided that its use complies with copyright law. Further guidance on copyright exceptions, licences, permissions and redaction is provided in sections 5 to 7.

Where copyright requirements cannot be met, material may need to be removed or redacted from the version made publicly available through the repository.

It is important to note that inability to obtain permission for third-party content will not affect the examination of your thesis. Students will not be penalised if permission cannot be obtained because of cost, lack of response, or refusal by the rights holder. In such circumstances, a redacted version can be made available through the Repository where necessary. Please note that redacting the thesis for Repository publication is your responsibility.

4. Including copyrighted materials

You'll likely want to include work by other people—such as images, graphs, quotes, or data. This is called third-party material, and it's usually protected by copyright.

Under UK law, copyright is automatic. Creators do not need to register it or use the © symbol. While ideas and facts are not copyrighted, the way they are expressed (e.g. in writing or images) is.

4.1 How long copyright lasts (UK)

Type of work	Duration of copyright
Written, dramatic, musical, artistic work	70 years after the author's death
Sound/music recordings	70 years from first publication
Films	70 years after the death of the director, screenplay author, and composer
Broadcasts	50 years from first broadcast
Layout of published editions	25 years from first publication

Table 1. (Source: UK Intellectual Property Office)

4.2 Who owns the copyright?

The **rights holder** is the person or organisation that owns the copyright. This is often the **author**, but for published academic work, it's usually the **publisher**.

Only the rights holder can:

- Copy or share the work
- Perform or show it
- Broadcast or adapt it
- Rent or lend it

If you're not the rights holder, you'll need **permission** to do any of these things, especially if your thesis will be made publicly available.

You can find more information on:

- [Library guide to copyright](#)

- [CopyrightUser - A UK Guide to understanding copyright](#)

5. Using third-party copyright materials

Your thesis may include material created by others, such as images, graphs, maps, film clips, sound recordings, or substantial quotations. For the version of your thesis deposited within the Repository, you must ensure that any third-party content is used legally.

5.1 When can you use third-party content?

Third-party material is commonly included in doctoral theses. In many cases, it can be used lawfully without seeking permission, provided that a copyright exception applies, the material is licensed for reuse, it is out of copyright, or permission has been obtained from the rights holder.

You can include third-party material only if:

- It's covered by a **copyright exception** (e.g. *fair dealing* for criticism or review. See 5.3 for further details)
- It's available under a **licence** (e.g. Creative Commons. See 5.4 for an explanation of these licences)
- It's **out of copyright** (see 4.1 for the length of copyright in the UK)
- You have **explicit written permission** from the rights holder (see 6 for how to do this)

If none of these apply, you must **redact** the material before deposit. It's best to seek permission **as you write**, not at the last minute as copyright holders may not respond quickly.

5.1.1 Copyright checklist

Before seeking permission to include third-party material in your thesis, ask yourself:

- ☐ Is this my own work?

- ☐ Is the material out of copyright?
- ☐ Is it available under a licence that permits reuse (such as a Creative Commons licence)?
- ☐ Does a copyright exception apply, such as fair dealing for criticism, review, or quotation?
- ☐ Have I acknowledged the source appropriately?
- ☐ Am I using only the amount necessary for my research?

If you answer **no** to all of the above, you may need to seek permission from the copyright holder or remove/redact the material from the version of the thesis that will be made publicly available through the Institutional Repository.

5.2 What counts as substantial use?

Substantial third-party content could include:

- Long quotations or extracts from literary or scholarly texts
- Images, maps, photographs, or tables
- Short extracts that form a substantial part of a work (e.g. a poem)
- Material from websites or online sources
- Your own previously published work (if copyright was transferred to a publisher)

For further examples on when copyright applies within images, film and sound, see the Library guide on [Non-Text Media Copyright](#)

5.3 Copyright exceptions explained

5.3.1 Fair dealing for criticism, review, and quotation

One of the most important copyright exceptions for doctoral researchers is **fair dealing for the purposes of criticism, review and quotation**.

Under UK copyright law, you may be able to include material from a copyright-protected work without obtaining permission where:

- The work has been made available to the public.
- The use is for genuine criticism, review, analysis, or quotation.
- You provide sufficient acknowledgement of the source.
- You use only the amount necessary to support your argument or analysis.
- Your use is fair and does not unreasonably prejudice the legitimate interests of the copyright owner.

Fair dealing is not precisely defined in law and must be judged on a case-by-case basis. In general, a use is more likely to be considered fair where it is necessary for scholarly discussion, properly referenced, and does not substitute for the original work.

Examples

Example	Permission likely required?
A short quotation from a published book that you discuss and analyse	Usually no
A figure from a journal article that is reproduced and critically discussed in your thesis	Often no, if fair dealing applies
A photograph reproduced because it is the subject of analysis or criticism	Often no, if fair dealing applies
An image included only to decorate a chapter or make it visually appealing	Usually yes
A substantial extract from a book where no analysis or critique is provided	Usually yes
Large amounts of text copied from another work	Usually yes

These examples are provided for guidance only. If you are uncertain whether a particular use is fair dealing, seek advice before submitting your thesis.

Important points

Fair dealing is more likely to apply to:

- Published books and journal articles.
- Images, photographs, diagrams or other material being directly discussed or analysed.

- Short quotations used to support an academic argument.

Fair dealing is less likely to apply to:

- Unpublished material.
- Large-scale reproduction of copyright works.
- Material included simply for illustration, decoration, or background information.
- Uses that could undermine the market for the original work.

5.3.2 Text and data mining

UK copyright law also includes an exception permitting text and data mining for non-commercial research.

You may use automated tools to analyse copyright-protected material where:

- You have lawful access to the material.
- The activity is for non-commercial research.
- Copies made during the analysis are not shared beyond what is permitted by law.
- Sources are appropriately acknowledged.

For further information see:

- [Open Gov website guidance on copyright exceptions](#)
- [London Met guide to copyright exceptions](#)
- [London Met guide to fair dealing](#)

5.4. Creative commons licences

Creative Commons (CC) licences make it easier to legally reuse creative work.

Instead of the default “All Rights Reserved” copyright, creators can choose a licence that allows others to use their work under certain conditions.

If you find third-party content (like images, videos, or text) with a **Creative**

Commons licence, you may be able to include it in your thesis **without needing permission**, as long as you follow the licence terms. For example, an image published under a CC BY licence can usually be included in your thesis without seeking permission, provided you acknowledge the creator and comply with the licence terms.

For more details, visit:

- [Creative Commons website](#)
- [Library Guide to Creative Commons](#)

6. Seeking permissions

If your thesis includes third-party content (described in section 5.2), that is not covered by a copyright exception (5.3) or a reuse licence (5.4) or other lawful basis for reuse, then you should seek permission from the copyright holder before making the electronic version publicly available.

6.1 Identifying the rights holder

To seek permission to include 3rd party material within the electronic version of your thesis, you need to contact the rights holder. The rights holder may be:

- The author or creator of the work
- A publisher (especially for books and journal articles)
- An illustrator, photographer, or other contributor

Start by checking the publisher's website for copyright or permissions information. If the publisher does not hold the rights, they may redirect you to the appropriate contact.

6.2 Requesting permission

Many journal publishers use a service called the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC). If a publisher uses the CCC, it is a straightforward process to request permission to

reuse material from journal articles.

The CCC form will ask you to select currency, but once you clarify that content will be reused within a thesis, many publishers will allow reproduction in theses for free.

Once you have identified the rights holder, if they do not use the CCC, you can use a standard template to request permission via email or letter. Be clear about:

- The material you wish to use (include page numbers or figure references)
- The fact that your thesis will be deposited in London Met's Institutional Repository
- That it will be publicly accessible online

If you do not receive a response, you may follow up, but **a lack of reply does not imply permission.**

You can find more information on seeking permissions at [Copyright guide for research](#) and the [Copyright Clearance Centre](#) can be used when seeking permissions.

6.3 If permission is granted

You should keep a copy of any letters or emails you receive granting permission and always acknowledge and reference the material you go on to use. Include a statement in your thesis such as:

“Permission to reproduce this material has been granted by [Name of Rights Holder].”

Keep a copy of all correspondence for your records.

6.4 If permission cannot be obtained

Students are expected to make reasonable efforts to seek permission for the inclusion of third-party copyright material in the electronic version of their thesis. However, if permission cannot be obtained—whether due to lack of response,

prohibitive cost, or complexity—this will not affect the examination of your thesis. You will not be penalised, nor will you be required to make any payments to copyright holders.

Where copyright, confidentiality, or other legal restrictions prevent material from being made publicly available, students may be asked to provide:

1. a complete version of the thesis for examination and University record-keeping; and
2. a redacted version suitable for public access through the Institutional Repository.

The University will determine how these versions are stored, preserved, and made available in accordance with its repository, records management, and research degree procedures.

7. Redacting content

Redacting content means that you remove information from your thesis that should not be made publicly available. This can be an individual sentence, a paragraph, an image, or an entire section of a work.

If you cannot obtain permission to use third-party content, or your thesis contains confidential, commercially sensitive, or personal information that should not be made public, you must redact it from the version of your thesis that will be made publicly available. This involves:

- Replacing removed images, figures, tables, or substantial sections of content with a statement such as [IMAGE REDACTED], [TABLE REDACTED], or [CONTENT REDACTED].
- Retaining captions, figure numbers, references, and explanatory text wherever possible so that readers can understand the context of the removed material.

- Ensuring page numbering and cross-references remain consistent after redaction.
- Including a brief redaction summary at the beginning of the thesis explaining what types of content have been removed and why.

Important

Simply placing a black box over text is not sufficient redaction if the underlying content remains embedded within the document. Before submitting a redacted PDF, ensure that the original text, image, or other content has been permanently removed and cannot be recovered by copying, searching, or editing the file.

Where extensive redaction would substantially affect the readability of the thesis, students should discuss alternative options, including embargoes, with the Research and Postgraduate Office and the Repository team.

8. Including your own published work

You may wish to include journal articles, conference papers, book chapters, creative works, or other outputs that you have published during your doctoral studies.

Although you are the author of these works, you may not always retain the copyright. Some publishers require authors to transfer copyright or grant an exclusive licence as part of the publication process. As a result, you should not assume that you are automatically entitled to reproduce published work within the version of your thesis that will be made publicly available through the Institutional Repository.

In practice, many publishers permit authors to include their own published work in a thesis or make specific allowances for theses deposited in institutional repositories. However, conditions may apply, and these should be checked before deposit.

Before including your own published work, you should:

- Review the publishing agreement you signed.
- Check whether you retained copyright or granted rights to the publisher.

- Check the publisher's policy on the inclusion of published material in theses.
- Consider whether any embargo requirements apply.
- Contact the publisher if you are unsure about reuse rights.

If an article or chapter was published under a Creative Commons licence, it can normally be included in your thesis provided you comply with the terms of that licence and provide appropriate attribution.

If a publisher does not permit the inclusion of the published version, you may still be able to:

- use an accepted manuscript version;
 - provide a citation and link to the published work;
 - redact the published content from the publicly accessible version of the thesis;
- or
- apply for an embargo where appropriate.

Students intending to publish research during their doctoral studies are encouraged to consider future thesis deposit requirements at an early stage and discuss any concerns with their supervisor.

Useful resources

- [Jisc Open Policy Finder](#)
- [London Met Copyright Guide](#)

9. Use of generative AI

Generative AI tools may be used to support aspects of research and thesis preparation where permitted by University policies and academic regulations. If you use generative AI tools, you remain responsible for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the content submitted within your thesis.

Where appropriate, you should acknowledge the use of generative AI tools in accordance with University guidance. The Research Degree Regulations and

associated declarations may require you to identify the tool used and explain the purpose and extent of its use.

For further information, see the [University's guidance on Generative AI](#) and the [Library's guidance on AI Literacy](#), which includes citing AI-generated content.

10. Data protection and sensitive information

Before your thesis is made publicly available through the Institutional Repository, you should ensure that it complies with UK data protection legislation and any ethical, contractual, or confidentiality requirements that apply to your research. This may include reviewing personal data, confidential information, commercially sensitive material, and information relating to research participants.

Where publication could create legal, ethical, or confidentiality concerns, you should discuss the available options, including redaction or embargoes, with your supervisor and the Research and Postgraduate Office.

For detailed guidance on research ethics, participant data, confidentiality, and data protection requirements, please refer to the [University's Research Ethics Policy and Procedures and the Research Ethics pages on Student Zone](#) and to the [University's Data Protection Guidance](#).

11. Embargoes and restricting access

In some cases, you may request to restrict access to the full text of your thesis for a limited time. This is known as an embargo. You may apply for an embargo if immediate public access could:

- prejudice the publication of journal articles, book chapters, or a monograph derived from your thesis;
 - disclose confidential or commercially sensitive information.
 - affect pending patent applications or other intellectual property protections;
- or

- create legal, ethical, or security concerns.

An embargo should only be requested where there is a clear justification. In some cases, redacting specific content may be more appropriate than restricting access to the entire thesis.

Embargo requests must be made using form RD11, available from the [Research Form Centre on Student Zone](#), and are subject to approval by the Research Degrees Sub-Committee. The normal maximum embargo period is three years. A longer period may be approved in exceptional circumstances or where ethical considerations require this.

During the embargo period, the full text of the thesis will not be publicly accessible. The thesis record will normally remain visible in the Repository metadata.

In exceptional circumstances involving highly sensitive personal, commercial, legal, or security concerns, additional restrictions may be considered.

For further guidance on how to do this, [see the RD11 form](#) on the 'Research Form Centre' on Student Zone.

12. Support and further guidance

For further assistance, contact:

- Repository and Open Access: openaccess@londonmet.ac.uk
- Copyright Help: [Library Copyright Guide](#)
- Research and Postgraduate Office: research@londonmet.ac.uk