

I Want to Show a Movie!!!

(without worrying about getting arrested!)

Adapted with permission from [University of Kansas' Student Union movie advisory](#)

The following guidelines are intended for students and student organizations wishing to show a movie publicly on campus.

When you want to show a film on campus, you must be able to provide proof that you have obtained permission (the “rights”) to show the material. This advisory document is designed to help you understand why this is necessary, and how you can go about getting the permission you need.

Why do I/my organization need to get permission to show this film?

Copyright infringement is a serious offense under the law, and is also the equivalent of stealing from a film distributor. While it is important to abide by the law, it is also important that your organization represents itself well by doing the right thing—getting permission to show the film. As a member of the K-State community, the University counts on you and your organization to behave in a manner consistent with University policies, and state, local, and federal law. Should you or your organization be caught breaking copyright law, the University and/or the Union would not provide any kind of protection from your group's liability under the law.

When do you need permission, and when don't we need permission?

Permission to show a film is necessary more often than you might think. Some common examples are:

- **Any time you show a film in the Union or any other public University space** (this is any classroom, lounge, or common area at the University). These spaces are considered "public" spaces, and showing the movie in these areas is the equivalent to showing them in a theater.
- **If you have used publicity to invite your audience to the showing** (this includes but is not limited to mass emails, letters, flyers, and web postings). Because movie rentals are intended for private use, renting them does not provide you with the permission you need to have a public showing in which an audience is invited.
- **If you are charging admission for the showing or an event in conjunction with the showing** (charging for a lecture that will accompany the film, for example). This would be true even if you showed the film at your house, or at another venue off campus.
- **You need permission even if the film showing is for educational purposes.** If the distributor has special permission for films shown for educational purposes, they will still need to give you the written confirmation you need to protect your event under the law and Union policy.
- **You do not necessarily need permission if you are showing brief parts of a film.** There are not set rules for what "brief" means in this context, but a general rule is that these snippets are OK when the event is free, when the snippet does not reveal key plot items to the film, when the length of the showing is not substantial, and when it doesn't affect people's likelihood of seeing the entire film.
- **Your department may already have permission to show the film.** If you are

showing the film in conjunction with an academic department, that department may already have permission. Check to be sure. If permission is already granted, they need to be able to show you written proof of the fact. If the source of the film is K-State Libraries, public performance rights may have been purchased with the film itself. Ask a librarian to help you determine this.

How can I get permission?

Getting permission for showing most films is fairly simple. For some rare or international films, it may prove to be a bit trickier. However, there are resources on campus to help you if you should have problems. Most "mainstream" films that are distributed for non-commercial use (which is what most campus showings would be) come from one of two main distributors, or you can search for the proper source:

- SWANK Motion Pictures, Incorporated — the web site for this company is www.swank.com, and the phone number is 1-800-876-5577. The list of films they distribute is on their web page, but they add new films every day
- Criterion — They are the other big distributor. Their web site is <http://www.criterionpicusa.com/> and their phone number is 1-800-890-9494.
- Conduct a web search — a good place to start is www.imdb.com, the Internet Movie Database. Simply go to the site, type your film in the search area at the top, and choose the correct film out of the results. Once you choose your film, go to the "Company Credits" and look for "Production Co." Select "See more," and look under "Distributors." Look for a distributor that is in the USA; from there, you can do a Google search for that distributor's contact information. From there, you can contact the distributor and inquire about purchasing a public performance license.
- Independent film producers often provide contacts from the film's website and may have special promotions for educational, public library, or non-profit organizational use. Many will be happy to see their film in circulation, and some are willing to negotiate the public performance fees.
- If you STILL can't find out who distributes the film, you can call (310) 247-3000, or search the [Reference Library of the Motion Picture Academy](#).

What is a film distributor going to ask me?

- Your name, and the name of the organization you are working with;
- How you intend to show the film (advertise all over campus vs. to a small group, whether you are charging, what kind of venue you are showing the film in);
- If there is a charge, how your organization will pay for the rights to show the movie
- Contact information for your organization;
- Whether or not you need them to send you a copy of the film.

Is this going to cost money?

It might. The only way for you to determine this is to call or email the distributor, explain under what context the film will be shown, and see what they can do for you. If there is a fee, it will matter whether or not you are charging for the showing, how many people you expect, whether or not you need a copy of the film sent to you, and how often you show films. Have all the information handy about your event when you speak with the film's distributor.

After I have obtained permission, what "proof" do I need to have?

Once you have obtained the rights, you will receive a written record of your permission to show the film. This is commonly called a "confirmation." If you are being charged, an invoice will follow this confirmation once you show the film. Confirmations can come via the mail, or via email, and will have the film, the date(s) you have permission to show the film, the contact information of your representative from the distribution company, and the format you requested the film in (if the film is being sent to you), and other pertinent information. If a distribution company is unable to provide a confirmation, they should send you a letter or via e-mail that certifies that you have legally obtained the rights to show the film. This should be on letterhead with all contact information of the distributor available.

This is so complicated! Why don't I just show a film without written permission?

Even though it sounds complicated, it really is not difficult to obtain the proper permission to show films on campus. It will definitely take less time and money than defending yourself or your organization in court if you are caught! Intellectual copyright infringement is being prosecuted more and more on college campuses. It is just not worth the risk.

I have more questions. Who can I talk to?

If you have questions specifically regarding the need for permission when showing films, or more about copyright information in general, visit the [K-State Copyright Consultation Service](#) or send your questions to copyright@k-state.edu.

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