

CLEAR

C	Create	Use your own original work whenever possible (photos, video, audio, or writing).
L	License	If you didn't make it, confirm you have rights. Use licensed sources (AP, CNN, approved Creative Commons), public domain, or written permission.
E	Evaluate	If no license, apply the Four Questions of Fair Use (purpose, nature, amount, market effect). Low Risk → proceed cautiously with documentation; High Risk → get permission or find alternatives.
A	Attribute	Always credit third-party content, and save your "receipts" (licenses, permissions, fair-use notes). Remember: credit is not permission.
R	Review	Leadership must sign off before publishing. Be prepared to explain your CLEAR process and show documentation; even then, platforms may still flag material.

CREATE — *Did you make it yourself?*

If you can record, write, or film it, do that first. Using your own work is always the safest and best option. Original content avoids copyright issues and strengthens your reporting.

Your own work can include:

- **Visuals** – Photos, video, or graphics you create yourself
- **Audio** – Interviews, ambient sound, or narration you record
- **Writing** – Scripts, articles, or captions based on your reporting

Example: You need a photo of a campus protest → go take your own photos or video rather than pulling one off Twitter.

LICENSE — *Do you have permission or is it free to use?*

If you didn't create the content, check whether you already have the rights:

- **Licensed sources** – Examples include AP Photos (within monthly allotment, with credit), CNN Newsource (within our educational license), and Creative Commons material (only CC BY or CC BY-SA; avoid NC and ND).
- **Public Domain** – Works that are not protected by copyright, such as many U.S. government publications. No license needed, but confirm carefully.

- **Written Permission** – If none of the above apply, request permission directly from the creator and save their written response.

Example: You want a picture of the President signing a bill → an official White House photo is public domain. You want a photo from Getty Images or Reuters → you can't use it, because we don't have a license.

EVALUATE — *Does fair use apply?*

Sometimes you can use copyrighted material without permission if it qualifies as fair use. To decide, ask yourself the Four Questions of Fair Use...

#1 Purpose – Why are you using it?

- Low Risk: Reporting news, analyzing, commenting, or teaching
- High Risk: Decoration, background, or entertainment

#2 Nature – What kind of content is it?

- Low Risk: Factual, informational, or nonfiction
- High Risk: Highly creative, artistic, or expressive (e.g., music, movies, or art)

#3 Amount – How much are you using?

- Low Risk: Small amount you need to make your point
- High Risk: Most of it, all of it, or the most memorable or valuable part

#4 Market Effect – Will your use hurt the creator's audience or sales off of the content?

- Low Risk: Your use doesn't replace the original or creating competition with the creator's market
- High Risk: Your use could substitute for the original and reduce the creator's audience or earnings

Rule of Thumb: If most answers lean Low Risk, use the content but cautiously with attribution and save a short note explaining your fair use reasoning. If most answers lean High Risk, do not use it. Instead, seek permission, use licensed sources, or create your own alternative.

Example: You're covering a viral song in a podcast → playing 10 seconds under your analysis may be fair use; using the whole track as background music is not.

ATTRIBUTE — *Did you credit and save proof?*

After you've created, licensed, or evaluated content, you must give proper credit and save your documentation.

Best practices:

- **Give Credit Where Due** - Always credit third-party content clearly in captions, scripts, or on-screen text.

- **Keep Receipts** - save license counts, permission emails, and fair-use notes in a shared folder so your team and editors can verify clearance later
- **Permission Matters** - Giving credit doesn't replace the need for legal clearance

Example: You use an AP photo → include “(AP Photo/Photographer Name)” in the caption and save the record in the receipts folder.

REVIEW — *Did top leadership approve it?*

Leaders in the newsroom must sign off before anything goes live. Review ensures accuracy, compliance, and protection for you and the outlet.

- **Leadership Approval** – Before publishing, executive producers and senior leadership must check your work and sign off.
- **CLEAR Journey** – Be prepared to explain how you applied each step of the CLEAR process, and show your receipts (permissions, notes, or documentation) if asked.
- **Platform Pitfalls** – Even if you've followed every step, platforms (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok) may still flag copyrighted material.

Example: You finish editing a SportsScene package and include a short clip from ESPN → your executive producer must review and approve before the video goes live.