Scholarly Communications Corner: 
Know your Rights as an Author

By Sandy De Groote

When you submit your article to a publisher and you need to sign and submit the publisher agreement (Copyright Transfer Agreement), do you ever stop to read that agreement before you sign it? Do you realize that you are often giving complete ownership of the article to the publisher? By signing away these rights you may be giving away the right to: use your work in your classes, post your work on your own website or in an institutional repository, and/or make derivatives of your work. By maintaining your rights, you retain the ability to disseminate your work beyond the journal it was published in, and allow for the greatest possible audience, and thus, the greatest possible impact.

There are some things to consider when you write an article for publication. You are the copyright holder and you remain the copyright holder unless or until you transfer your rights by signing a copyright transfer agreement. Once you sign away your rights, you may need to ask permission to use your own work. However, it is possible retain some rights and sign other rights over. (See SPARC’s Author Rights for more information on examining publication agreements.)

The next time you go to sign a publication agreement, read it over, and remember that publishing agreements are negotiable. You can cross out language that gives the publisher exclusive rights and substitute in “non-exclusive.” In 2007, the UIC University Senate endorsed the Addendum to Publication Agreements for CIC Authors. The addendum allows an author to retain rights to share his or her work in a variety of circumstances not usually permitted in standard publication agreements. Another alternative is to use the SPARC’s Addendum to Publication Agreement.

There are still some publishers who refuse to accept the addendum. In these cases, you may, of course, still decide to publish with them. We do suggest that in the course of signing off with
such a publisher, that you communicate to them dissatisfaction with this method. Only sufficient and consistent pressure from scholars will change publisher behavior.

For more on this topic see SPARC’s Author Rights and the UIC Library’s Author’s Rights. Please contact the Scholarly Communications Librarian, Sandy De Groote, if you would like to discuss your options further.

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