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Review of Compact Copyright: Quick Answers to Common Questions

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Review of *Compact Copyright: Quick Answers to Common Questions* by Sara R. Benson. Chicago: 2021. 176 pp. Softcover. \$54.99. ISBN 978-0-8389-3756-3

Sara R. Benson's *Compact Copyright: Quick Answers to Common Questions* aims to serve as an at-the-ready copyright guide for recurrent questions posed to professionals in academia, libraries and archives. As the title suggests, it provides "quick answers to complicated copyright questions" in the moment (ix). As an attorney, copyright librarian and assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, as well as the host of the ©hat ("Copyright Chat") podcast, Benson draws on a deep well of expertise with an educator's talent for conveying and clarifying nuanced law in an accessible manner.

The book comprises 18 succinct chapters and three appendices addressing common questions about copyright faced regularly by those working in libraries, archives, and museums of all kinds. Chapters are organized by topic and contain four sections: the text of the copyright law itself; a discussion of the law's meaning; common scenarios relating to the topic at hand; and finally, tools and resources for further exploration of the law. Chapter topics include, but are not limited to: Copyright Basics, First Sale Doctrine, Public Domain and Fair Use. Supplementing the preceding chapters are the appendices, including: a fair use checklist, best practices relating to copyright and film screening, and additional recommended reading and materials. The valuable fair use checklist itself is reproducible under a CC BY (Creative Commons Attribution) license with citation of the original source. This is an excellent tool for both archivists and patrons assessing fair use on the fly.

In beginning each chapter with the letter of the law itself, Benson provides the reader an opportunity to refer to the precise language of a given section and article within the law, interpret for themselves, and then benefit from the author's subsequent practical guidance within the Discussion of the Law sections. For visual learners, the book's tables, such as those that lay out duration of copyright terms; and figures, including those illustrating the spectrum of fair use; provide legibility to what are sometimes murky guidelines. The Common Scenarios sections tend to favor examples occurring in the context of higher education. However, many scenarios are broadly applicable to questions faced across public, K-12, and university libraries, as well as archives. Finally, the Tools and Resources provide up-to-date articles, sites and other aids for professionals to explore a given copyright topic further.

Benson connects her topics with timely, real world examples, for instance, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on access to content in libraries and archives. This includes how copyright law is invoked in the shift from in-person to online modes of instruction and content sharing. The chapters on fair use and the TEACH Act engage at length with the issues raised by these shifts. For instance, the author bluntly observes that the TEACH Act, while meant to codify copyright exceptions for online teaching, "Unfortunately ... missed the mark and is not nearly as useful as it was supposed to be. In fact, many copyright librarians ignore the TEACH Act completely and proceed directly to fair use when using materials in online teaching..." (62). This candid observation is helpful for the busy archivist trying to determine if and how to use archival materials in their collections for a remote instruction session, for example.

One topic that merits additional fleshing out within *Compact Copyright* is that of access to copyrighted material for patrons with disabilities in Chapter 6: Access to Copyrighted Material for Patrons with Disabilities. As standard practices within libraries and archives are being interrogated amid a larger societal conversation about equity, diversity and inclusion, the matter of accessibility for disabled patrons is a vital one. Furthermore, as the effects of COVID-19 are now an acknowledged long term reality, the way library and archives professionals think about and respond to the needs of those living with disabilities is changing. The pandemic is creating an entirely new group of persons with disabilities, necessitating new methods to offer remote services that will continue to impact the profession.

Concerns such as institutions requiring “proof” of disability, proactive remediation, and reuse of remediated resources could be touched on within the chapter. Although wading too deeply into the weeds of these conversations is not within the scope of Benson’s book, an acknowledgement of these and other broader issues pertaining to copyright and disability in libraries and archival repositories would be a welcome addition here. The Tools and Resources section of this chapter would also benefit from more sources beyond the two included links about the Marrakesh Treaty.

Similarly, traditional knowledge (TK) labels are discussed briefly in Chapter 16: Copyright Metadata and Rights Statements, but further detailed information on the labels is relegated to the notes at the end of the chapter rather than under the more logical Tools and Resources section. Consequently, the discussion of TK gives an impression of being somewhat perfunctory. Questions about traditional knowledge and indigenous cultural heritage come up frequently, particularly for those in Western U.S. archives who consult regularly with tribal communities. Being equipped to address these questions knowledgeably and sensitively will only become more crucial in the future.

These critiques aside, one could envision this book becoming a frequently consulted reference for an archivist looking to assess the risk of creating a copy of a unique document for preservation, to determine whether an archival resource falls within public domain, or to apply fair use guidelines to a digitization request. Additionally, library school students would find this an approachable introduction to copyright matters encountered by archivists on a frequent basis. The Common Scenario sections provide concrete examples to supplement concepts that can often seem abstract for those new to the world of libraries and archives. Indeed, even users of archival resources, whether student, professor or independent researcher, would benefit from *Compact Copyright*’s accessible approach to the subject.

As an archivist with a background in historical societies and museums, scholarly communication, and university archives, I found that *Compact Copyright* addressed a great many of the issues encountered personally across those settings. The book’s compact nature does not constrain its ability to speak to a diverse array of questions that librarians and archivists of all stripes find themselves trying to answer regularly. For example, the myriad factors weighed when considering whether to make a preservation copy of a unique item, how the medium of the resource factors in, and how to lawfully provide access to that copy.

Compact Copyright clarified a number of concepts and nuances within copyright law for me, even having completed significant coursework and professional development activities related to the topic. As a quick reference guide, it should prove to be an invaluable foundation for a sometimes daunting subject. And while the reader still encounters here the inevitable timeworn answer to so many copyright questions: “it depends,” Benson proceeds to explain why and how it depends, and how the law has been applied practically. In other words, “it depends” is never a dead end here, but a springboard to a more nuanced understanding of copyright law and its intersection with archives.

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