

Anorexics and Bulimics Anonymous

“Copyright”: Information for All Members

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The office of the General Service Association (GSA) of ABA has received a number of inquiries from ABA Groups and Meetings who, for a variety of reasons, would like to shorten the “Preamble for Meetings” or otherwise alter it for their specific purposes. Such requests involve the legal matter of copyright.

1. What does “copyright” mean?

There seems to be a good deal of misunderstanding about what the term “copyright” means, and about what constitutes copyright infringement. In an attempt to eliminate this confusion, as well as to guide ABA members and Groups, the GSA offers the following information from Intellectual Property Law, which regulates the issues surrounding copyright:

- An individual or organization that produces any original written document automatically owns a legal copyright to it, even if it is *not* marked with the copyright symbol (©).
- Any writer who marks a piece of writing with the copyright symbol is clearly and strongly indicating to all readers that the writing is “copyright-protected.”
- In printed books, the copyright symbol will be found on “the copyright page,” which usually immediately follows the title page. The copyright symbol is accompanied by the year of publication and the name of the person or organization that owns the copyright. Generally, a statement follows explaining what copyright protection means. Sometimes merely the abbreviated statement “All rights reserved” is found.
- “Copyright protection” means no one (other than the owner of the copyright) may reproduce the writing, store it or introduce it into a retrieval system, or transmit it in any form—either electronically,

mechanically, by photocopy or audio-recording or anything else—**without the express permission of the copyright owner**, usually granted in writing. The copyrighted material may not be digitally scanned or re-typed or even written out by hand.

- Copyright infringement is a crime and is subject to full prosecution under the law.
- In the modern digital age, copyright infringement often occurs because it can be done so easily, yet it is still a crime.

2. Does the GSA adhere to copyright law? Why?

The GSA has never taken legal action against anyone who has violated ABA's copyrighted literature. Ours is a spiritual program, and we seek to live by spiritual principles. The GSA assumes that all ABA members are acting in good faith, are seeking to live by the spiritual principles embodied in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions, and wish to develop the personal integrity necessary to live a sane and sober life in this world. It further assumes that any copyright violations which have occurred are most likely the result of ignorance, not malice.

The GSA asks all ABA members and Groups to respect the copyright symbol wherever it is found in our literature, both written and auditory.

Why do we make this request? ABA's unity is our most precious attribute. With unity, we can effectively accomplish our primary purpose of carrying the message of recovery to the anorexic or bulimic who still suffers. With unity, people will find the hope they need to recover. With unity, ABA can flourish as it meets the needs of its members. All 12-Step Fellowships guard their unity, and careful stewardship of their unique literature is one of the most important methods of maintaining unity.

Copyright protection of our ABA literature ensures that no one can alter our unique message of recovery, either deliberately or inadvertently. Thus the newcomer will be exposed to the clear and consistent message that our literature so carefully articulates. The message will be the same from one Group and Meeting to another, in whatever city, state, nation, or continent it is carried.

3. Are there any exceptions to copyright protection?

If you look at the ABA website, you will find a number of documents (in pdf format) and audio recordings that bear the copyright symbol, yet are accompanied by a statement that anyone is free to download and copy them. This statement constitutes the “express permission” referred to above in Section 1. This permission is granted with the assumptions that anyone copying a document will do so exactly as it is presented, attribute it to its true source (ABA), not falsely claim ownership of it, and not make any financial profit from its distribution. In other words, the GSA assumes good faith.

4. What about the “Preamble for Meetings”?

We would now like to address specifically the matter referred to earlier: requests from some Groups to alter the “Preamble for Meetings” found on pp 142-148 in the ABA textbook.

The page immediately preceding the Preamble (p 141) contains this statement:

“Notwithstanding the copyright laws that apply to everything in this textbook, the authors and publisher hereby grant blanket permission to any ABA member or group to copy the next seven pages containing the Preamble for Meetings, *as long as it is reproduced in its entirety and is not otherwise altered.*”

In granting this permission, we are endeavoring to make it easy for ABA meetings to get started. The Preamble may be downloaded from the ABA website, photocopied directly from the book, or scanned first and then copied. The seven pages can be stapled together and made available for members to use during meetings or even to take home, depending on Group practice.

The Preamble is to be reproduced in its entirety, not chopped up arbitrarily into sections. Why? Because it functions as a whole, containing vital information needed by anyone wishing to recover from anorexia or bulimia using the ABA approach. The Preamble was the first ABA literature ever developed. It was hammered out by our pioneers in 1995, in the days when our only textbook was *Alcoholics Anonymous*, a full seven years before the ABA textbook was published. People with long-term sobriety find the

Preamble just as helpful today as it was when it was first written twenty years ago, and there appears to be no compelling reason to change it. Minor adjustments to wording or punctuation have been made over the years, and these are noted on p 148 in tiny print at the end of the Preamble.

Some Groups have asked whether they *must* read the entire Preamble at every meeting. This question falls under **Tradition 4**, respecting the autonomy of each Group. **ABA is not governed by any laws or rules or regulations (other than the law of the land, which includes copyright law)**. Each Group is autonomous to do as its group conscience dictates, *provided that its action does not affect another Group or ABA as a whole*. So, for example, a Group may decide to read aloud only parts of the Preamble, in order to allow more time for discussion in a 1-hour meeting. Any Group is free to do that if they wish. However, the Preamble must be *printed* in its entirety, as discussed above, in order to abide by the conditions of “express permission,” even if it is not *read aloud* in its entirety.

The GSA does offer a *suggestion* (emerging from many years of Groups’ experience) that Groups read the entire Preamble aloud at any meeting where there is a newcomer or a relatively new member. To offer only a fragment of the written Preamble is to risk misrepresenting ABA’s singular message to the newcomer or to members who are not yet sober—thereby violating **Tradition 5** respecting the primary purpose of every ABA Group: “to carry its message to the anorexic or bulimic who still suffers”.

All violations of the Traditions adversely affect ABA as a whole, and place the Group at risk of disintegration, as is clearly discussed elsewhere in our literature (ABA text pp 166, 183).

The GSA does not have to monitor ABA Groups to ensure they are abiding by the Traditions, because a Higher Power is in charge. In our experience, Groups that follow the Traditions tend to flourish.