

9.2 Copyright

Syllabus 2026 - 2028

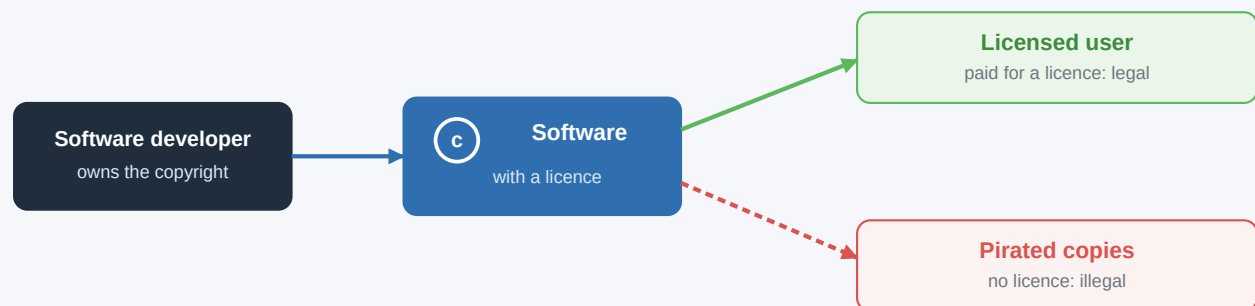
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- The need for copyright legislation
- The principles of copyright relating to computer software, such as software piracy
- The methods software producers use to prevent software copyright legislation being broken

What copyright is

Copyright is a legal right that gives the creator of an original work, such as software, music, text, images or video, the right to control how it is copied, shared and used. It applies automatically when the work is created and lasts for a set number of years. Copyright law is needed so that the work of creators is protected.

Figure 39: Copyright protects software from illegal copying



Why copyright legislation is needed

- To protect the **income** of creators and developers, who have spent time and money producing the work
- To **encourage** people to create new software and ideas, because they will be paid for them
- To stop others **stealing** the work or claiming it as their own
- To let the owner take **legal action** against people who break the rules
- To ensure users get **genuine** software, which is supported, updated and free from hidden malware

Principles of copyright for software

- Software is protected by copyright, and the user buys a **licence** to use it, not ownership of the program
- It is illegal to **copy** the software and give or sell the copies to others
- It is illegal to use one licence on **more computers** than the licence allows
- It is illegal to use the program code, or part of it, in another program **without permission**
- It is illegal to rent out or share the software without permission, or to claim it as your own work
- A user may usually make one **backup copy** for their own use

Software piracy

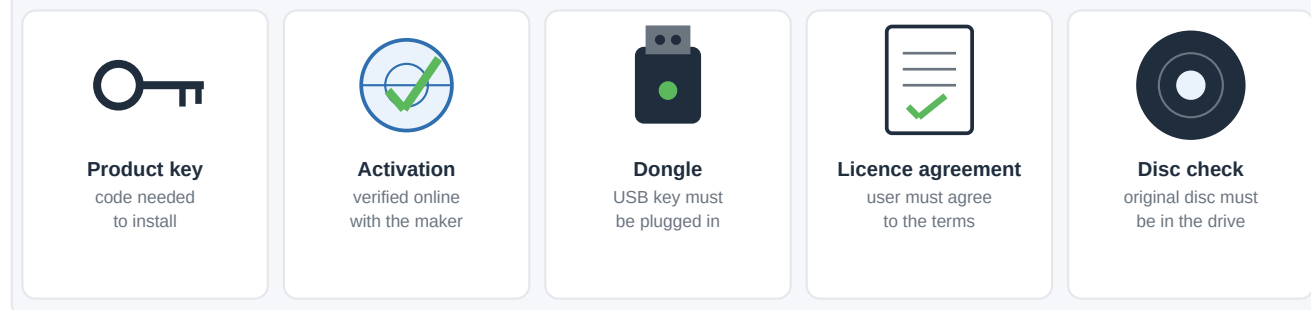
Software piracy is the illegal copying, sharing or use of software.

Examples of piracy	Effects
Copying a program and giving or selling copies	Developers lose income and may stop producing software
Installing one licence on many computers	Prices may rise for honest customers
Downloading cracked software or using key generators	Risk of malware; no updates or support; users and organisations can be fined, sued or imprisoned

Examples of piracy	Effects
Selling counterfeit discs or fake licences	Customers are cheated and the developer's reputation is damaged

How software producers prevent copyright being broken

Figure 40: Methods software producers use to prevent copying



Method	How it works	Limitation
Product key or serial number	A code, supplied with the genuine software, must be typed in during installation.	Keys can be shared or made by key generators
Online activation	The software contacts the maker's server to check that the key is genuine and has not been used too many times.	Needs an internet connection; honest users may be locked out
Dongle (hardware key)	A small USB device that must be plugged in for the software to run.	Costs more; can be lost or damaged
Licence agreement	The user must agree to terms, such as how many computers may be used, before installing. Breaking the terms is a legal offence.	Many users do not read it; it needs enforcing
Disc check	The original disc must be in the drive for the software to run.	Inconvenient; can be bypassed; fewer programs now use discs
Encryption and account sign-in	Software is encrypted, or runs through a paid account or in the cloud, so copies do not work without a valid login.	Needs a constant connection; accounts can be shared
Holograms and packaging	Authentic labels on genuine packaging show it is not a copy.	Can be faked

EXAM TIP

A good answer names the **method** and says **how it stops copying**, for example 'a product key must be entered when the software is installed, so someone who copies the disc without the key cannot use it'. Remember that licences are **permission to use** software, not ownership.

Key terms

Term	Meaning
Copyright	The legal right of the creator to control how their work is copied and used.
Software piracy	The illegal copying, sharing or use of software.
Licence	Permission to use software under set conditions.
Product key	A code that proves software is genuine.
Activation	Checking a licence online before software can be used.
Dongle	A hardware key needed to run protected software.
Legislation	Laws made by government.
Counterfeit	A fake copy made to look genuine.

Practice questions

Answer each question in full sentences. Command words used: State (give a short answer), Describe (say what it is like), Explain (give reasons), Analyse (break it down and examine it), Suggest (apply your knowledge to a situation), Compare and contrast (similarities and differences), Evaluate (weigh up and reach a judgement).

No.	Question	Marks
1	State two examples of software piracy.	[2]
2	Describe how a product key is used to prevent illegal copying of software.	[3]
3	Explain why copyright legislation is needed.	[3]
4	Analyse why software piracy can harm both software developers and users.	[4]
5	Suggest two ways a school can make sure that it uses software legally.	[2]
6	Compare and contrast online activation with the use of a dongle.	[4]
7	Evaluate the methods that software producers use to prevent copyright being broken.	[6]

Total: 24 marks