Save the work you create

AI can help you make a song without removing copyright from the original work you contribute. The Copyright Office recognizes human expression that remains in AI output, as well as sufficiently creative changes and arrangements. Prompts alone do not establish authorship of generated output. [3]

Use this guide to keep track of your songwriting and production as you work. It covers U.S. practice; each song and recording still needs to be assessed on its own facts.

1. Save your lyrics and melody

Write the lyrics and record yourself singing or playing the melody before generation. A rough recording is fine. Keep both files in the song folder, with a backup elsewhere. If you upload them to a tool such as Suno, keep the originals.

Listen to the result. Where does it follow your melody, and where has the system added something different? A private video upload can be an extra retained copy, but it does not count as copyright registration.

2. Keep track of what the AI added

Keep the source files for the vocals and instruments you use. If you combine parts from several generations, give those files names you can recognize later. A short note can identify which parts came from the system and which you supplied or added yourself.

Your sung demo and a generated singer are different performances. If the master uses the generated voice, describe it that way, even when it sings your lyrics and follows your melody.

A useful starting folder

Lyrics, original melody recording, source audio, DAW project, and final master. Keep everything for the song together, and add the short version record when the master is finished.

Make the song work

3. Build the arrangement in your DAW

Bring the stems into Logic Pro or your preferred DAW. Listen for what the song needs: a later second verse, a stronger drum entrance, or a new string part in the bridge. Move sections, replace instruments, program MIDI, or record new parts where they serve the music.

When an automatic session player supplies a part, note any changes you make to its notes, rhythm, or phrasing. Keep the source and license information for samples you use.

A note such as "moved the second verse and programmed the drum transition" is useful when it describes your work. There is no number of editing hours or percentage of changes that guarantees protection.

4. Describe your production choices

The Copyright Office includes mixing, manipulating, mastering, compiling, and editing among possible forms of sound-recording authorship. Describe the creative decisions in the recording. [2]

For example, you might automate vocal reverb so the verse feels close and the chorus opens up. Explain what changes across those sections. A list of plugins alone will not tell that story.

Keep cleanup notes brief

Removing an artifact in RX or checking true peaks in Insight serves a technical purpose. Note that work separately from writing a passage or shaping the arrangement. If you process an AI-generated vocal, describe the production you did rather than claiming to have sung it.

Use whichever software fits the project. These tool names are examples; the same approach to saving and describing your work applies elsewhere.

Production & Authorship Record

5. Keep one short record for each finished version. Fill this in or copy it into your own document. It is a suggested way to organize your files, not a required Copyright Office form.

SONG TITLE / VERSION

PEOPLE WHO WORKED ON THE SONG / DATE

What you wrote and produced

In a short paragraph, describe your writing, performances, arrangement changes, and production choices for this version.

AI-generated material used

Name the generated vocals or instruments you kept. Note which lyrics and melody you supplied yourself.

Where the files are saved

DAW project: _____
Original melody recording: _____
Final master: _____
Extra backup or private video, if used: _____

Attach the lyrics and arrangement

Include the lyrics for this version once, plus one screenshot of the full arrangement. Add pages if needed. Your saved project holds the session details; there is no need to screenshot every plugin.

What are you registering?

6. Identify the song and the recording

The composition is the music and lyrics. The sound recording is a particular recorded performance and production. An acoustic version and a full-band version can use the same underlying song. [1]

Before filing, check what has already been registered and what changed in the new version. A different mix does not, by itself, mean you wrote another composition. If the words or music changed, identify those changes too.

7. Explain the AI involvement

The Copyright Office's AI guidance directs applicants to the Standard Application. Describe your human contribution and disclose and exclude more-than-minimal generated material from the claim. The guidance points to Material Excluded / Other and an optional note to the Office. Do not list the AI tool as an author. [4]

Use your project notes to help explain the work. They do not replace the information required on the application. Follow the current form instructions, and ask the Office if you are unsure which application fits or how to describe a particular part.

Does paying for an AI tool give you copyright?

A subscription may give you permission to release output commercially under the service's terms. Copyright protection is a separate question about the work and its human authorship. Check the terms that applied when you generated the material.

Official sources are linked on page 5. This guide explains a practical process; it cannot determine the outcome of an individual application.

Check the files and the form

- Can you find your original lyrics and melody recording?
- Are the source files for retained generated parts saved?
- Does the version record describe what you actually changed?
- Are the lyrics and one full-arrangement screenshot included?
- Can you open the project and find the finished master?
- Have you checked earlier registrations for the same song?
- Does the application describe your contribution and disclose the AI material?

Official sources

1. Musical compositions and sound recordings (Circular 56A)
2. Sound-recording authorship: performance and production
3. Copyright Office report announcement (January 29, 2025)
4. AI registration guidance (March 16, 2023)

Check copyright.gov/ai for updates to the official guidance.

Read the full article: Can You Copyright AI Music? A Practical Guide for Artists