1) Copyright in General

What is copyright?
Copyright is a form of protection grounded in the U.S. Constitution and granted by law for original works of authorship fixed in a tangible medium of expression. Copyright covers both published and unpublished works.

What does copyright protect?
Copyright, a form of intellectual property law, protects original works of authorship including literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic works, such as poetry, novels, movies, songs, computer software, and architecture. Copyright does not protect facts, ideas, systems, or methods of operation, although it may protect the way these things are expressed.

How is a copyright different from a patent or a trademark?
Copyright protects original works of authorship, while a patent protects inventions or discoveries. Ideas and discoveries are not protected by the copyright law, although the way in which they are expressed may be. A trademark protects words, phrases, symbols, or designs identifying the source of the goods or services of one party and distinguishing them from those of others.

When is my work protected?
Your work is under copyright protection the moment it is created and fixed in a tangible form that it is perceptible either directly or with the aid of a machine or device.

Do I have to register with your office to be protected?
No. In general, copyright registration is voluntary. Copyright exists from the moment the work is created. You will have to register, however, if you wish to bring a lawsuit for infringement of a U.S. work.

Why should I register my work if copyright protection is automatic?
Registration is recommended for a number of reasons. Many choose to register their works because they wish to have the facts of their copyright on the public record and have a certificate of registration. Registered works may be eligible for statutory damages and attorney's fees in successful litigation. Finally, if registration occurs within 5 years of publication, it is considered prima facie evidence in a court of law.

If I use somebody's work without permission but give credit to the author or publisher, am I still infringing on copyright?
Yes. Giving credit is honest and ethical, but nothing in the copyright law says that it somehow absolves you of infringement. If you are infringing, giving credit won't help you at all.

I've heard about a “poor man's copyright.” What is it?
The practice of sending a copy of your own work to yourself is sometimes called a “poor man’s copyright.” There is no provision in the copyright law regarding any such type of protection, and it is not a substitute for registration.

Is my copyright good in other countries?
Although there is no such thing as an "International Copyright" that will automatically protect an author's writings throughout the world, most countries are members of the Berne Union for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Property (Berne Convention) and the Universal Copyright Convention (UCC), which allow you to protect your works in countries of which you are not a citizen or national. Most countries offer protection to foreign works under certain conditions that have been simplified by these international copyright treaties and conventions. The United States has copyright relations with most countries throughout the world, and as a result of these agreements, we honor each other's citizens' copyrights. However, the United States does not have such copyright relationships with every country [i.e. Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia*, Iran, Iraq, Jordan*, Nauru, Nepal*, North Korea, Oman, Palau*, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe*,...
Seycelles*, Somalia*, Sudan*, Syria*, Tonga, Tuvalu*, Vanuatu*, Western Samoa* and Yemen]. It is unclear whether the countries with an asterisk completely adhere to international copyright conventions.