LICENSING GUIDE

Archival Footage Licensing Handbook

A working reference on stock footage license types, usage rights, clearance workflows, and the legal pitfalls that derail archival projects.

AUDIENCE	READ TIME	CATEGORY
Producers & Legal Teams	10 min	Legal

01 Understand the Three Core License Models

Before you download a single clip, know the difference between rights-managed, royalty-free, and editorial-only licenses — each dictates what you can do, where you can show it, and for how long.

- Rights-Managed (RM): priced by use case, territory, duration, and exclusivity. Ideal for broadcast and theatrical projects needing clean paper trails.
- Royalty-Free (RF): one-time fee, broad usage rights, no per-use tracking. Best for digital campaigns, social content, and internal presentations.
- Editorial-Only: cleared for news, documentary, and educational contexts — never for advertising, endorsement, or commercial promotion.
- Always verify which model applies before adding a clip to your timeline. Mixing models in a single project is common but requires separate tracking.

02 Build a Rights Clearance Workflow

A consistent clearance process prevents last-minute legal surprises. Build it once and run it for every project.

- Create a clearance spreadsheet with columns: clip ID, source, license type, territory, term, usage scope, cost, and approval status.
- Assign one person as the rights coordinator — every clip must pass through them before entering the timeline.
- Set a clearance deadline at least two weeks before delivery lock to allow for negotiation and substitution.
- Archive all license agreements, receipts, and correspondence in a dedicated project folder. Never rely on email search alone.
- Flag any clip containing recognizable individuals, brand logos, copyrighted artwork, or music for additional clearance.

03 Navigate Common Legal Pitfalls

These are the mistakes that derail projects. Avoid them systematically.

- Assuming "old footage" is public domain. Age alone does not determine copyright status — verify rights holders for every clip.

- Ignoring territory restrictions. A clip licensed for North America cannot air in Europe without additional clearance.
- Overlooking music and audio embedded in archival clips. Synchronized sound recordings often carry separate copyright.
- Using editorial-licensed footage in branded content or advertisements. This is the most common — and most expensive — licensing violation.
- Failing to document clearance for deliverables. Distributors, broadcasters, and E&O insurers will ask for proof.

04 Handle Model and Property Releases

Archival footage often features real people and private property. Understand when releases are required and when editorial exceptions apply.

- Documentary and news contexts generally don't require model releases for public footage, but commercial use does.
- If a person is identifiable and the footage is used to promote a product or brand, a model release is required regardless of footage age.
- Property releases may be needed for footage featuring distinctive private buildings, artworks, or trademarked signage.
- When in doubt, use the clip editorially or request a release through the footage provider.

05 Prepare for E&O Insurance Review

Errors and Omissions insurance is required for most broadcast and streaming distribution. Your clearance documentation is what the insurer reviews.

- Compile a clip-by-clip clearance report listing every piece of third-party material in the final cut.
- Include license type, rights holder, territory, term, and any restrictions for each clip.
- Note any clips used under fair use or editorial exception, with supporting legal rationale.
- Retain all correspondence with rights holders as backup documentation.
- Submit the clearance package at least three weeks before the E&O application deadline.

Licensing Resources

Review Stockfilm's licensing terms and browse the archive for rights-ready footage.

Licensing Guide — stockfilm.com/licensing-guide

Archive Index — stockfilm.com/all-collections

Request Footage — stockfilm.com/request-footage

Browse the Full Archive

stockfilm.com | Authentic 8mm and Super 8 Archival Footage