



What is Royalty-Free Music?



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You've probably heard a lot about royalty-free music. For YouTubers, Twitch streamers and social media influencers, royalty-free music is an essential part of the creative process. So, what is it exactly?

What does royalty-free music mean?

The definition of royalty-free music – not to be confused with copyright-free – is music that you can use without having to pay royalties. So, how does royalty-free music work? You pay for it once, or on a recurring basis if you subscribe to a royalty-free music service. Royalty-free doesn't have to mean that the music creators don't receive royalty payouts. For example, at Epidemic Sound, all royalties we collect from music streaming platforms are split 50/50 with the music creator, even if they no longer work with us. Read more about [how we work with artists](#).

Is royalty-free music free?

No, royalty-free music is NOT free. The word "free" in royalty-free refers to you not having to pay royalties every time you use a piece of music. Royalty-free music comes at a cost. Epidemic Sound offers a [monthly or yearly subscription](#) that gives you unlimited access to every [track and sound effect in the catalog](#). You can cancel anytime and you're free to monetize your videos featuring Epidemic Sound music without getting claimed.

Why use royalty-free music?

Traditionally, when licensing music for major productions like TV-shows or movies, royalties of various sorts have to be paid to the rights-holder every time the production airs or a copy of the production is sold. This licensing model works for some, but it's often a very complex process. Paying royalties in different countries, for different kinds of distribution, and repeating everything for any reproduction takes a lot of work, and money.

In recent years, more and more creators are switching to royalty-free music, since it only requires one up-front payment to the rights-holder of the music, or a recurring payment if you're subscribing.

Where to get royalty-free music?

Epidemic Sound has a big and diverse catalog of royalty-free music. With a monthly or yearly subscription, you get unlimited access to over 35,000 high-quality tracks that can't be found anywhere else, plus 90,000 premium sound effects. Since we own all rights to the music in our catalog, including public performance, you'll avoid copyright claims by licensing music from Epidemic Sound.

What is the difference between royalty-free and direct licensing?

Royalty-free music companies typically don't own all rights themselves. They may own the rights to some of the music in their catalog, but not to every track. They operate as a middle-man, clearing the rights with the rights holders, to then be able to license the music to customers. This can make the customer responsible for paying public performance royalties, which means the customers are not fully protected from being claimed for using the music in content they publish on public platforms.

Direct licensing companies offer royalty-free music, but they go further than that. Direct licensing companies own all rights to the music in their catalog, and can therefore offer a license that includes all rights, including public performance. Public performance rights are required to, for example, use the music in content published on YouTube. Hence direct licensing companies can protect their users from being claimed, while making sure their music creators are compensated. Epidemic Sound is a direct licensing music company.

Lisa Cerny (Aussie New Yorker) has over 12 years of sales, SaaS, digital marketing, music and tech experience. She provides content creators, storytellers and brands epic music for their broadcasting and digital media productions.