

# ***FACT SHEET NO. 2***

## **Pen Names**

Some writers choose to write under a “nom-de-plume”, or pen name. Writers are not legally bound to use a pen name, and the majority of writers do not use one.

In some situations, however, you may decide that you do not wish to write under your given name. Perhaps your name is very complicated to spell, pronounce or remember. Perhaps you are a female writer who has married, but you wish to write under your maiden name. Alternatively, you may feel that your given name does not have enough of a “literary ring” to it. All of these reasons are entirely valid ones for writing under a pen name.

One situation in which you may be required to use a pen name is in writing for competitions. Many literary competitions, further to requesting that you do not show your name on your manuscript, will request that you supply them with a pen name for the purposes of maintaining anonymity. If you are a writer of prose or poetry who regularly enters competitions, it may be easier for you to invent one pen name which you can use and re-use rather than having to invent a different one each time. But there are no hard and fast rules. If you never enter literary competitions, it is unlikely that you will ever have to choose a pen name.

There is one thing to remember with pen names, however. The copyright of any piece you write under a pen name rests with you, the author. Therefore, if you write a novel under the pen name of “John Brown” but your real name is Mary Smith, then the copyright must be shown to belong to Mary Smith (ie. © Mary Smith) as John Brown is a fictitious person. This hints at one of the complications that can arise as a result of using a pen name. Historians who try to document or “catalogue” your works may also face complications, particularly those undergoing this task years after your works have been written.

For this reason, FAW generally advises against the use of pen names by professional writers, aside from the necessity of employing pen names in competition-related activities. But the choice is up to you. Should you have any further queries relating to the use of pen names, please contact the Australian Copyright Council, Suite 3, 245 Chalmers St, Redfern, NSW, 2016. Tel (02) 9318 1788.