

Some publishers are recognizing that the restrictions are an affront — Springer Verlag for example, has been offering their electronic titles to libraries without DRM. We should support these authors and publishers, and reject the restrictions imposed by companies like Amazon, Sony, Apple, and Barnes & Noble.

The freedom we are protecting here is not the freedom to lend. Lending is the exercise of other kinds of freedom, unfortunately limited by connection with physical objects. The ultimate goal of lending is sharing. The more fundamental freedom we are protecting is the freedom to use our technology as a means to accomplish this same goal of sharing, to the benefit of ourselves and our communities, without agreeing to be subjugated, restricted, or divided from each other, by the companies who "own" the mediating software.

You can help us stand for *these* freedoms by following our anti-DRM campaign at DefectiveByDesign.org. Please lend us your support, as we work to make lending a thing of the past.

English  

Send your feedback on our translations and new translations of pages to [campaigns@fsf.org](mailto:campaigns@fsf.org).

## Lending: A solved problem

**Lending and borrowing are not desirable activities. They are things we do when we have to, when there isn't enough of something to go around. Not to say that lending something like a book to a friend is without benefits beyond access to the material; it can create a shared experience that makes for good conversation, or provide an excuse to see each other.**



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But really, it's something we'd rather not have to do. Even the best-intentioned friends forget to return things, and sometimes during the lending period we wish we had the book back to look up a favorite quote. A good friend of mine gets upset whenever even the corner of one of her books gets bent — not an uncommon fear among book lovers — and this is a heavy responsibility to bear when borrowing.

We like lending libraries because, like public schools, they give more people access to more information and culture regardless of their wealth. They allow us to explore and research topics we are interested in, in a single location and without the difficult task of actually acquiring dozens of physical books. For many of us, libraries are wonderful places; it can be inspirational to be holed up at a desk somewhere deep in the stacks.

But really, we'd rather not have to use a lending library. All too often, the books we want to borrow aren't there, because someone else has already borrowed them. We've all turned excitedly to a promising page from a book's index, only to find the page has been glued with chewing gum to the facing page, or its key words obscured by coffee stains. The borrowing part of the library is not the good part; the fact that only one person can have a particular book out at a time — and that we all have to repeatedly use the same copies — runs counter to the most important reasons we support the existence of libraries.

If we could have the benefits of lending to friends and borrowing from libraries without the inconveniences, we would. If we could just make a copy of that good book and give it to our friend at no noticeable cost, we would choose to do that, every time. If both you and I could get the same book from the library at the same time, neither of us would deny the other that.

Fortunately, with electronic books, the inconveniences of lending and borrowing are solved problems. Books can now be infinitely read and shared. We can now all have access to all of them, all of the time. And this is why it sounds so strange to hear digital book companies like Amazon and Barnes & Noble bragging about how their ebook-reader devices "support lending."

When they advertise this "feature," what they mean is: "We have managed to take a digital book, and make it not work anymore!" They have removed one of the primary advances the digital book represents for civilization, and replaced it, by design, with a defective version.

They have managed to recreate, in the palm of a reader's hand, the thrill of tracking down a call number deep in the library stacks only to find its spot occupied by empty space. With a clever arrangement of bytes, they have enabled users to experience the equivalent of being without their books while their friends' dogs chew on them. Maybe if we're lucky, next they'll implement the feature that allows two electronic pages to be stuck together as if by gum, or that translates coffee spilled on the screen into equivalent damage to the digital pages.

It's clear from these basic observations that these companies are doing us and our books no favors. They have taken a technology which solves the lending problem and twisted it to make lending even more of a problem. But when we consider more

closely the details of *how* this electronically simulated lending works, it makes corporate excitement around the antifeature even more baffling.

When Barnes & Noble announced that its ebook reader would support lending, we raised an eyebrow. Since we knew that it was going to be restricted by DRM, we were curious to know how the device would act out an equivalent temporary transfer of a book by one person to another and back. When Amazon made their "us too!" announcement, we were really intrigued.

It turns out that "lending" to them means a user can — if the publisher permits it — give a book to another person enrolled in the same ebook system (Kindle users can't lend to Nook users, or vice versa), for a limited and preset time. During that time, the original user may not access her own copy — even though it still exists on her device. This charade can be executed one time *ever* per book. In order to receive the book, the lendee has to register with the authorities at whichever company the book was purchased from, divulging various bits of personal information and allowing the company to track her reading list (which is then also available to subpoena by law enforcement).

This setup bears only the most vague and insulting resemblance to lending. But even if they had managed to replicate the act perfectly, we wouldn't want it. We lend and borrow because we have to; because physical books *are* physical property. If someone takes one from us, we don't have it anymore. This is not true with electronic books, and it's a mistake to try and force them to work the same old way. To do so is to distort the necessary limits of a physical object into unnecessary power relationships, where companies use software to dictate the terms of our access to knowledge and culture.

Companies attempt to justify this power relationship as necessary to protect authors; but this is a false choice. Authors can be supported without robbing readers and scholars of freedoms from which everyone, including authors, benefit — especially given that there is no evidence such restrictions translate into more support for authors. Plenty of writers out there want their books read and shared, and don't agree with digital restrictions as a means to secure a living. Companies pushing restrictions are working to increase their own power, not to protect authors — in fact, Apple and Sony have refused to publish ebooks without DRM *even when the authors requested they do so*.