

So, you have an idea? Congratulations, you are in the minority of people who have an idea and do something about it.

Now you have to make a decision because there are several methods of protecting your idea. Let's start by first putting your idea into a category. This will identify the choices for protection that you have.

My idea is:	Protection Choices:
A book, paper, document, instruction, song	Copyright
Tradename, logo, brand, insignia	Trademark
Idea for some type of product	Design Patent, Utility Patent, Trade Secret
Not covered yet	Well, you can't patent a theory so you better just follow the next steps in the IP process and talk to us.

Each of your choices is discussed briefly in the rest of this document. The purpose is to provide you with some basic information to proceed intelligently from this point forward.

Copyright:

This is a simple form of protection that allows the author to protect their creative art such as a song, computer program, instructions, or something else that is published. US Copyright laws help to protect these works. The first step is putting a © with text as on the bottom of this paper. Some people go even further by registering their work with the US Copyright office.

Trademarks:

A trademark provides protection from other people using your logo or brand name. Just take a stroll down an aisle at the grocery store and look at all the art with the funny little ® next to it. You will find it next to brand names and logos. To register a trademark, you must make an application to the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Design Patent:

A design patent typically covers a particular style design such as the way an IMac computer or a car looks. This patent is critically helpful to distinguish how your product looks as compared to the competition. An example of style that would be covered by such a patent would be the front of a SAAB. Anyone who knows cars just needs to catch a glimpse of the front of the car and know it is a SAAB. It is very distinct.

Utility Patent:

The utility patent will provide protection for some type of useful device or process.