

15 of the Best Open Source Image Sites on the Web

by GDC Team



79



60



103



43



8



Recently, a teacher we know put together a concise and effective PowerPoint presentation which was well received. The only thing was that when the students inquired where the photos came from, the teacher said he searched for them using Google. The students replied, "You mean you *stole* them!" Some of the images still prominently displayed the watermark from [iStock Photo](#). It looks like open source image sites weren't a consideration here!

Trust me, you don't want to be in this position, especially if you are trying to teach the [21st Century Fluencies](#) of Global Digital Citizenship. Through this experience, the teacher was gently reminded that he shouldn't use any random image from the Internet without permission.

The lines have become foggy as the Internet blurs the lines of fair use copyright issues. We all know that copying and pasting text without permission or attributing to the author is plagiarism. What's unclear is what falls into that category. Here is our list of the top open

source image sites that are safe to get pics from. You might find that one site will be your go-to site for open source images, but there are indeed choices out there, and you might even contribute some of your own images to share.

Resources for Copyright:

- Future Conscience Blog: [Ethical Blogging: Sourcing Images](#)
- Stack Exchange: [How do I know which images are copyrighted and not?](#)
- Hubspot Blog: [10 Great Ideas for Valuable Curated Content](#)

Google

So let's address the giant in the room: Google. Let's face it, there's no escaping the monolith. The word has even become a verb: "Hold on, Google that for me." Google's capability to come up with literally millions of search results is a source for, well, literally anything. But when searching, how can we retain this 'ease of use' and 'choice' factor while remaining true Global Digital Citizens at the same time?

When you pull up Google's main page, you'll see at the top of the page this:

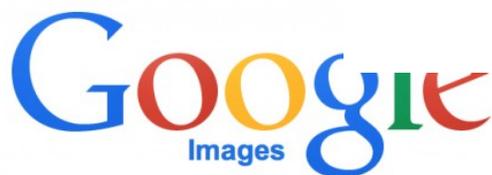
+You Gmail Images 

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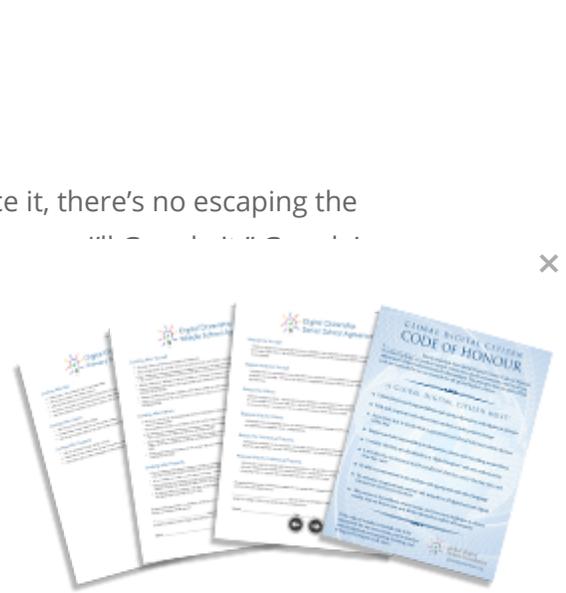
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Click "Images." This will pull up the Image search page beneath the Google logo.

Download Now



Go to the bottom right which shows Privacy, Terms, and Settings. Click "Settings" and select "Advanced Search." At the bottom, you'll see a drop-down menu showing the options for usage rights.



any size

any aspect ratio

any color
 full color
 black & white
 transparent
 this color: ■

any type

any region

Show most relevant results

any format

not filtered by license

Next, ask Google to filter your search for images that

- not filtered by license**
- not filtered by license
 - free to use or share
 - free to use or share, even commercially
 - free to use share or modify
 - free to use, share or modify, even commercially



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It's that simple! Both knowing this step and teaching it puts you well on the road to true Digital Citizenship.

Creative Commons

Let me introduce you to [Creative Commons](#), if you don't already know each other. (CC, you. You, CC.) Upon watching the video, CC specifically points to teachers as being in the best position to use "work and wisdom from around the world" in their presentations. They know that today's artist "builds beauty from bits and pieces." Creative Commons, then, is about "sharing creative wealth."



I want something that I can... use for commercial purposes; modify, adapt, or build upon.

Search using:

Europeana Media	Flickr Image	Fotopedia Image	Google Web
Google Images Image	Jamendo Music	Open Clip Art Library Image	SpinXpress Media
Wikimedia Commons Media	YouTube Video	Pixabay Image	ccMixer Music
SoundCloud Music			

As you can see, the tried and true common sites are r Images, Open Clip Art Library, and Pixabay.

To clarify, the Creative Commons gives the following

"Please note that search.creativecommons.org is not convenient access to search services provided by other sites. The results returned from this search portal are under a CC license. You should use these services under a CC license by following the link. Since there is no way to determine what has and hasn't been licensed, CC has no way to determine what has and hasn't been licensed. If you are in doubt you should contact the creator of the content or contact the site where you found the content."



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There is also a [Creative Commons plug-in](#) for WordPress and Creative Commons search in Mozilla Firefox.

While Creative Commons lets you search other open source image sites, it is only a starting point. So with Google and Creative Commons out of the way, here are a few of our other favourites.

For the following open source image sites reviews, we considered 4 separate criteria:

- Strictly open-source (no permission needed)
- Quality/variety of images
- How the site works (User Friendly Factor)
- How easily can people upload their own images to share?

Free high quality images you can use anywhere

Search photos, vectors and illustrations All images

Pasta / stevepb

Over 300,000 free photos, vector

Finding free images of high quality is a tedious task - due to copyright issues, at inspired us to create Pixabay - a repository for stunning public domain pictures. Yc

You can use any Pixabay image without attribution in digital and prin

Strictly open-source (no permission needed)

Yes! You can copy, modify, distribute, and use the images without asking permission and without paying attribution.

Quality/variety of images

All images are stunning and useful. Each has to be approved according to strict guidelines.

How the site works (User-Friendly Factor)

Pixabay claims to be “a repository for stunning public domain pictures.” We agree! Pixabay is extremely well laid out. The Search Bar is prominent and you can’t miss it. Just type and search. For the newbie, questions and answers are just a click away on the main page.

You can browse by Editor’s Choice (“handpicked by our team”) or browse by Photographers. This section is a great addition to honour the numerous artists who have contributed their work for your use.

How easily can people upload their own images to share?

You can join Pixabay for free to upload your own images. Pixabay has a great tutorial detailing guidelines for submission and tips for taking awesome pictures. Also useful is a tagging tutorial so you can apply keywords to your pics for the best search results.

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morgueFile

FREE PHOTO ARCHIVE BY CREATIVES FOR CREATIVES



By zevik

Like 38k

Looking for high resolution stock photos for your illustration, comp or design needs? Search morgueFile for free reference images. Yes, they're all completely free. whether you're an illustrator, art director, instructor or looking to add a defining visual to a presentation. Wondering **why is it called morgueFile?**

Disco

Free

Quest

Class

Comm

About

Login



Strictly open-source (no permission needed)

Yes!

Quality/variety of images

The image selection here ranges from amateur to stu

How the site works (User Friendly Factor)

MorgueFile derives its name from a term used in the files or "past issues flats." Such an apt name for our 3 that "provide free image reference material for use in all creative pursuits!"

The MorgueFile site not only allows you to search for content that is free, but it also features an ongoing contest (Quest), and a handy online tutorial to help you take better pictures (Classroom). You can also join their Community to stay connected to the MorgueFile discussions.

When you actually search for an image, make sure you stay in the "free" zone. Of course, there are other options that lead to paid services if you want. (iStock, Getty, Dreamstime, Deposit Photos, Fotolia, etc.) The only quirk to this site is how it auto-zooms on each image as you hover. I wish I could turn it off, so I can simply browse for what I want. Other than that, it's easy to use.

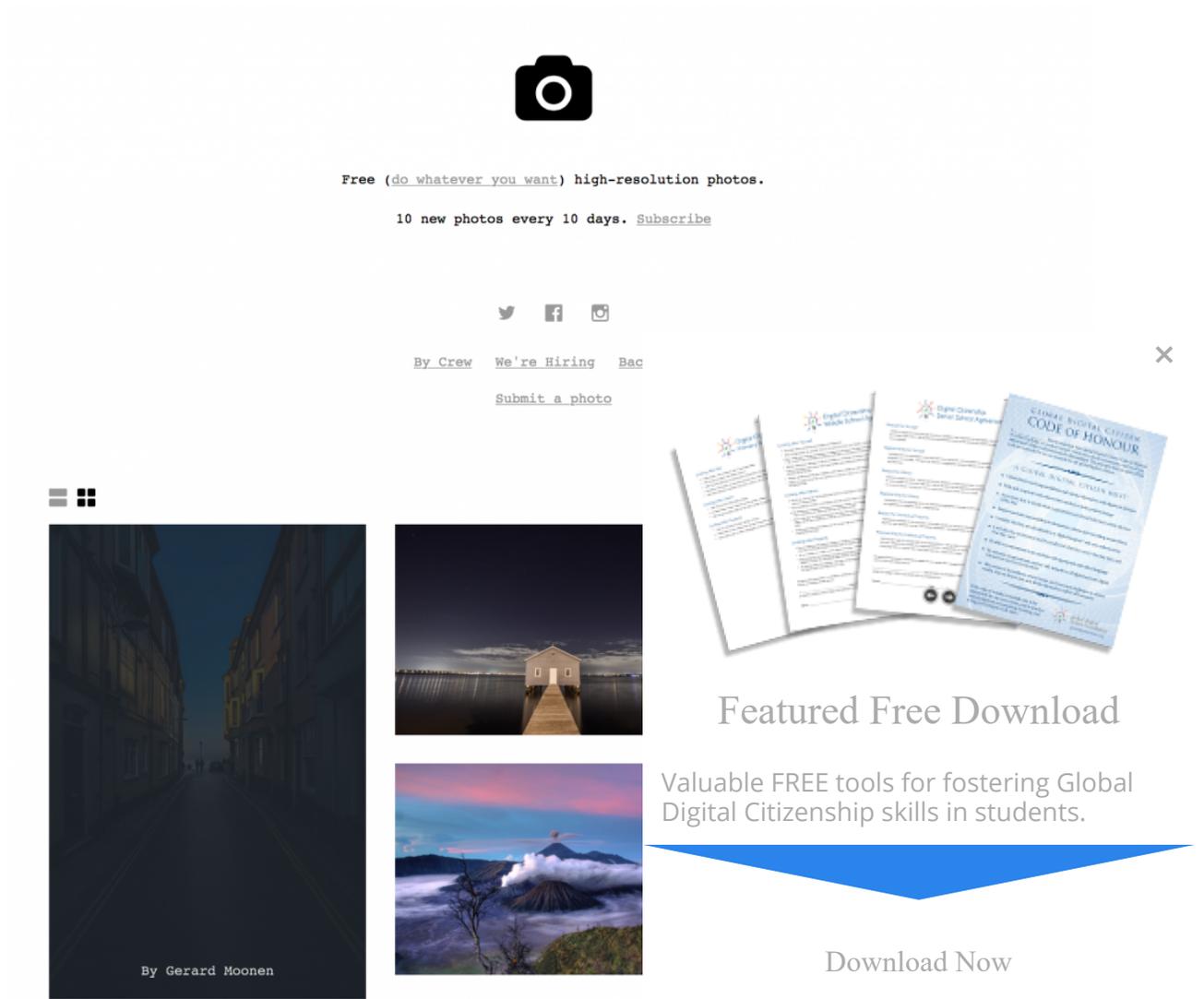
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How easily can people upload their own images to share?
Simply click the upload button. You'll have to register and login.

Unsplash



Free (do whatever you want) high-resolution photos.

10 new photos every 10 days. [Subscribe](#)

[Twitter](#) [Facebook](#) [Instagram](#)

[By Crew](#) [We're Hiring](#) [Bac](#)

[Submit a photo](#)

By Gerard Moonen

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Strictly open-source (no permission needed)

Absolutely!

Quality/variety of images

Stunning. Extra points here!

How the site works (User Friendly Factor)

No frills, just the photos! And they are amazing—photos are reviewed and determined to be published by the staff upon submission. If you subscribe, 10 images will be sent to you every 10 days. You find images by browsing: scroll through and right-click on what you want. More images load as you scroll down. You can browse by full images or thumbnails. If you like what you see, download it and use it!

One limitation is that you can't search, as none of the photos are tagged in such a way. You simply have to scroll down and let the vast library load. If there are older photos at the bottom of the list, you might miss them if you get tired scrolling.

How easily can people upload their own images to share?

Joining the site allows you to submit photos which can then be verified that they are your property.

Freepixels

Categories / Description	Images	Views	Latest free p
Abstract and Concept Backgrounds, Internet, Signs and Symbols	469	1,813,394	31.10.13 06:
Architecture Details, Indoor views, Modern buildings, Cities, Industrial, Landmarks	511	1,349,526	28.05.14 01:
Nature Animals and Pets, Birds, Flowers, Landscapes, Miscellaneous, Insects, Sky, Trees and Leaves	2,493	4,724,086	22.12.14 12:

Strictly open-source (no permission needed)?

Yes, as long as you stay in the “free” search.

Quality/variety of images?

Wide range of photos between amateur and professional-looking.

How the site works (User Friendly Factor)

This is a no nonsense website in forum format. Freepixels uses tags to categorize and find photos. You simply type your category into the search field and enter—it's that easy.

If your search results are zero, Freepixels automatically suggests results from a search of [Shutterstock](#) images, which is *not* free. If this happens, just change your search terms in the free image search. Using the search link at the uppermost part of the page gives you even more search options. As long as you are careful, you shouldn't be too confused with

differentiating between free photos and Shutterstock's intrusion into your browsing experience—just be sure to use the correct search field.

How easily can people upload their own images to share?

At the time of this review, no options were readily available for users to submit their own photos.

Compfight

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Strictly open-source (no permission needed)

Options are available to search for Creative Commons Creative Commons material may have conditions of u

Quality/variety of images

Amateur to professional quality.

How the site works (User Friendly Factor)

Compfight's tagline is "Locate the visual inspiration you need. Super fast!" Never mind the strange name—Compfight is very easy to use, and its web interface is sparse. There is just a centralized search bar and then technical links at the bottom. Compfight claims to use the Flickr API but is not affiliated with Flickr.

The FAQ section gives you insight on how to filter your searches. Make sure you decide if you want to filter for any license, Creative Commons, or Commercial only. To be safe, always choose Creative Commons, and remember that you'll have to give attribution if the license requires it. The FAQ also gives a good example of attribution.

For those concerned, there is even a filter to hide the majority of “Inappropriate content.”

How easily can people upload their own images to share?

No ability to upload through Compfight.

Flickr

Strictly open-source (no permission needed)

Some rights reserved. Remember that not all photos want. You will need to examine the copyright details

Quality/variety of images

Great quality, with many varieties of image.

How the site works (User Friendly Factor)

Most of the Flickr main page is an ad for their mobile apps. Only concern yourself with the upper bar, which includes “Explore, Create, Upload,” and your indispensable Search Bar.

“Explore” allows you to browse the library, participate in forums, and read Flickr blogs. “Create” gives you the opportunity to make a physical photo album of your pictures, as well as access to the curated collection.

How easily can people upload their own images to share?

Flickr always lets you upload your own submissions, and it’s fairly easy to do as well.

Download Now

Want More?

Here are 12 other open source image sites you'll find useful:

- [A Kid's Photo](#)
- [Classroom Clip Art](#)
- [Copyright Free Photos](#)
- [Geek Philosopher](#)
- [Paul Getty Museum Open Content](#)
- [Open Clip Art](#)
- [Ookaboo](#)
- [Pics 4 Learning](#)
- [Smithsonian Institution Archive Collections](#)
- [stocksnap.io](#)
- [uhdwallpapers.org](#)
- [kaboompics.com](#)

We hope this article will help you stay informed when you find content to use in your presentations or projects. It's a credit to those whose work we are thankful to use as "from around the world" to create opportunities for our students.



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free Global Digital
Citizenship Agreements
receive a free
senior grade
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4 Comments



Lynda Van Winkle on August 3, 2015 at 1:10 pm

My favorite is Photos for Class because even when my students use open source images, I want them to cite their source. Photos for Class automatically inserts a citation for each photo downloaded as part of the

photo. This is especially great for elementary students that are just starting to learn about citations.

Reply



Ross Crockett on August 4, 2015 at 8:07 am

Hey, that's great, Lynda! Another tool that I hadn't discovered yet—there are so many out there and it's great when our readers bring them up in the comments. Thanks so much for sharing!

Reply



PLiXS on August 6, 2015 at 10:13 am

Hi, one more great source for free images: <https://plixs.com> Maybe you can add it to your list of sites.



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Yinan Chen on May 16, 2016 at 11:5

Hi,
Nice article.

For free photos, please take a look at thousands of high-resolution public domain images. In-house, we have over 6,000, and add more every day. You could add it to your list of sites.

Reply

Join our 300,000+
Awesome Subscribers

Your email address