



## F12.3 Computer misuse and the law

Technology and society · GCSE · OCR J277 1.6.1, AQA 8525 3.8, Edexcel  
1CP2 5.2.3 · about 15 min

### What this lesson is about

The Computer Misuse Act 1990, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

- The Computer Misuse Act 1990
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- Which law applies?

### Questions

5 marks in all

1. Guessing someone's password to read their email breaks which law? [1 mark]

- ☐ A The Computer Misuse Act 1990
- ☐ B The Data Protection Act 2018
- ☐ C The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- ☐ D No law

**Answer:** A. It is unauthorised access to computer material.

2. Which word is central to the Computer Misuse Act? [1 mark]

- ☐ A Unauthorised
- ☐ B Accidental
- ☐ C Commercial
- ☐ D Encrypted

**Answer:** A. Access with permission is not an offence.

3. Copying and selling someone else's program breaks which law? [1 mark]

- ☐ A The Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988
- ☐ B The Computer Misuse Act 1990
- ☐ C The Data Protection Act 2018
- ☐ D No law

**Answer:** A. Software is protected by copyright.

4. How do you get copyright on a program you wrote? [1 mark]

- ☐ A It is automatic as soon as you write it
- ☐ B You must apply and pay a fee
- ☐ C You must publish it first
- ☐ D You must register a trademark

**Answer:** A. A patent must be applied for; copyright is automatic.

5. A penetration tester attacks a company's systems with written permission. Is that an offence?

[1 mark]

- ☐ A No, because the access is authorised
- ☐ B Yes, all hacking is illegal
- ☐ C Only if they find a weakness
- ☐ D Only if they are paid

**Answer:** A. Permission is what makes it lawful.

**The task: which law?**

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Write `which_law(action)` using the rules in the lesson: an action mentioning `password`, `hack` or `malware` is the **Computer Misuse Act 1990**; one mentioning `personal` or `customer details` is the **Data Protection Act 2018**; one mentioning `copy` or `pirate` is the **Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988**; anything else is `no law matched`. Check each action in `actions`, ignoring capital letters, and print `<action>: <law>`. At the end print `unmatched: <n>`.

```
# the two lines every program starts with: the commands, then the robot
from bugbot import *
connect()

actions = [
    "Guessing a teacher's password",
    "Selling customer details to an advertiser",
    "Sharing a pirate copy of a game",
    "Writing your own program",
    "Installing malware on a school PC",
]
```

**The hint students can ask for:** In `which_law`, lower the action then check the words in order: `password/hack/malware`, `personal/customer details`, `copy/pirate`. Count the ones that match no law.

## A solution

```
from bugbot import *
connect()
actions = [
    "Guessing a teacher's password",
    "Selling customer details to an advertiser",
    "Sharing a pirate copy of a game",
    "Writing your own program",
    "Installing malware on a school PC",
]

def which_law(action):
    a = action.lower()
    if "password" in a or "hack" in a or "malware" in a:
        return "Computer Misuse Act 1990"
    if "personal" in a or "customer details" in a:
        return "Data Protection Act 2018"
    if "copy" in a or "pirate" in a:
        return "Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988"
    return "no law matched"

unmatched = 0
for action in actions:
    law = which_law(action)
    if law == "no law matched":
        unmatched = unmatched + 1
    print(f"{action}: {law}")
print("unmatched:", unmatched)
```

Any program that meets the task's checks is marked correct in the simulator; this is one way, not the only way.

