

## Guidelines for Students on How to Use Turnitin®

### What is Turnitin®?

Turnitin® is a text matching tool that works by comparing your written assignment with a database of web pages, academic books and articles, as well as other students' papers. After comparing your assignment to the database, Turnitin® generates a **similarity report** for your submission. The report indicates how much of your writing matches writing from previously existing source (given as a %), and highlights all phrases that match the text in an existing source, and provides links to those sources.

### How Turnitin® Is Used in Courses at UWaterloo

If your instructor is using Turnitin®, they must include the following statement on your course outline:

*Turnitin.com: Text matching software may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.*

Submitted files are housed on the Turnitin® server based in California, and these files are subject to the [USA PATRIOT ACT, 2001](#). Therefore, if you have concerns about your privacy and or security, you may opt out of using this software and choose another alternative with your instructor. If you do not wish to use this software, please contact your instructor as soon as possible, and discuss an alternative within the first week of the term.

In addition to residing on the U.S. server, files are kept on a local D2L server, and your submissions are added to a pool of UWaterloo documents, but they are not accessible by other people as part the general Turnitin® database.

According to [Turnitin®](#), "The TURNITIN system makes a 'fingerprint' of the work. This is merely a digital code that relays the fact that certain pre-defined content is present in the work. The 'fingerprint' does not include any of the work's actual contents, and is therefore neither a copy nor a true derivative of the original text." ([Canadian Legal PDF](#), 2015, pg. 1) Therefore, it is not possible for another party to print and profit from your intellectual property. Visit the [Turnitin® website](#) for more information on its Canadian legal policies.

Prepared by the [Office of Academic Integrity](#), in collaboration with UWaterloo's [Centre for Teaching Excellence \(CTE\)](#), and [Centre for Extended Learning \(CEL\)](#). Created August, 2015. Updated September 2019.

Turnitin® dropboxes can be configured so that only the instructor views the analysis of the submission (i.e., the similarity report – see below) or it can be configured so that you can submit and see the analysis (i.e., the similarity report) of your work.

### Turnitin® as a Text Matching Tool

Your instructor can use Turnitin® in order to look at whether or not the work that you submit matches the work of others. Your instructor will evaluate the similarity report in order to assess whether the work is original. Any instances of suspected plagiarism are sent to the Associate Dean, Undergraduate or Graduate Studies for review.

### Turnitin® as an Educational Tool

Your instructor can also use Turnitin® as an educational tool to help you understand the proper conventions for referencing work that is not your own. If your instructor is using Turnitin® as an educational tool, he or she will provide you with an opportunity to view the Turnitin® similarity report for your draft and then correct any problems before you submit your final version for grading.

### How to submit to the Turnitin® Dropbox

From the Assessment tab on the course navigation bar, click the link to the dropbox. Select the Turnitin® dropbox. Click the “Add a File” button in order to submit your draft, then click “Upload” to browse and select the draft that you are submitting. Once you see your file name in the window select “Add”. You will receive an email confirmation receipt if your submission was successful. Keep all email confirmation receipts until the course is over, as proof of submission.

Once you submit your draft to the dropbox it might take some time (i.e., usually minutes, but, in some cases, a day or more) to receive the Turnitin® similarity report. You’ll need to give yourself time to interpret the report and then make any necessary adjustments before submitting your final paper for grading.

Once you upload your assignment to the Turnitin® dropbox, you will see a note at the bottom of that page directing you to the Submission History page to view the similarity report.



Click on the “View History” button to go to the Submission History page.

Please note:

- The instructor will determine how many submissions a student is allowed to submit to the dropbox.
- The dropbox is to be used **only** for your submission of the draft of the assignment in question (i.e., no other assignment).
- Only content related to the course may be submitted to the Turnitin® dropbox. Materials for use in other courses are not to be submitted. Unauthorized submissions will be treated as a breach of academic integrity.

### Interpreting the Turnitin® Similarity Report

Once your submission has been scanned and compared to the Turnitin® databases, a **similarity report** will appear in the dropbox. Click on the coloured square beside the percentage to access the report.



The similarity report is a measure of the similarity between your work and work found on websites, electronic journals and others' work that has been stored on the UWaterloo's Turnitin® database. In other words, the percentage displayed shows how much of the submission was not original. The percentage represents the number of phrases that the program finds in common with database content and divides that number by the total number of words in the file. If, for example, the overall percentage for a submission is 10%, then 10% of the document can be matched to sequences of phrases in the database. These words may be in one passage or may be in several, separate passages.

A lower percentage rating indicates that most of the content is original and a higher percentage rating indicates that much or all of the content matches content found in other sources and requires further investigation. The percentage ranges are associated with colours, as follows:

**Blue** = 0% (no matching text)

**Green** = 1% to 24% (one word or more matching)

**Yellow** = 25% to 49%

**Orange** = 50% to 74%

**Red** = 75% to 100%

**\*Note that there is no "safe" colour or percentage. No percentage or colour in the report can fully evaluate whether text has been plagiarized.**

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For example, Turnitin® will identify direct quotations as matched text and this will be reflected in the similarity score (%). However, as long as those quotations are properly cited, plagiarism has not occurred. Rather than focusing solely on the percentage, go through your paper and look at the highlighted sections. Those are where some revisions may need to be done. When evaluating your draft, check to see if the matched text in an assignment is the result of phrases or terms that are commonly used. Also, look at how you have paraphrased others' works, and check to make sure that you cite your sources in the body of your assignment. Along with the identification of matched text, Turnitin® provides a link to the original source of that matched text as well as the option to view the original source in full. This enables instructors to evaluate the quality of your sources.

Turnitin® highlights and colour codes unoriginal content in your paper. The similarity report can help you identify where you might have unintentionally used poor paraphrasing when summarizing information from another source.

You can view the similarity report from the Folder Submissions page. Click the coloured section beside the percentage rating to view the associated report. After taking a close look at the highlighted sections, you can make a decision about which parts need to be re-written and which parts are referenced accurately.

This is an example of a similarity report:

#### Material and Methods:

Experiments were conducted as outlined in the <sup>1</sup>Biology 331 Advanced Cell Biology lab manual, written by the Department of Biology and Published in 2014 (UW Biology, 2014). Experiments can be found on pages 10-29 of the manual. The first three experiments were conducted as outlined in the manual. Two deviations were made to the fourth experiment, however, these included not heating the standard run on the polyacrylamide gel and completing the stain and de-stain processes in the lab on the same day the gel was run, rather than in a follow up period.

#### <sup>1</sup>Results:

Table 1: Summary of samples collected through differential velocity and density gradient centrifugation

Match Overview		
1	Submitted to Universit... Student paper	9%
2	www.coursehero.com Internet source	<1%
3	www.library.uq.edu.au Internet source	<1%
4	www.ma.uni-heidelber... Internet source	<1%
5	coffeebreak.com.br Internet source	<1%
6	Kate Birkenhead. "The ... Publication	<1%
7	Haruyuki Atomi. "Prese... Publication	<1%

#### How can Turnitin® help me?

Turnitin® can help promote scholarly writing which requires appropriate referencing, so that others can determine which ideas are your own, and which ideas were originally created by others. Appropriate referencing is also important as it allows your reader to know where your sources came from and to be able to find them.

In many cases of academic misconduct, students have unintentionally plagiarized due to lack of knowledge or skill in appropriate writing and referencing for scholarly assignments. Writing is a challenging skill that needs to be practiced. If you are unsure of your skills, additional help is available from your instructor, TA, academic advisor, the Student Success Office, or The Writing Centre.

#### For More Information

If you need help interpreting the similarity report you can refer to these resources:

- <https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/student/the-similarity-report/interpreting-the-similarity-report.htm>
- <https://www.turnitin.com/support>
- <http://www.cumbria.ac.uk/StudentLife/Learning/SkillsCumbria/DigitalLearning/Turnitin.aspx>

If you need help with paraphrasing or other writing skills, you can seek help from the Writing and Communication Centre <https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/>

- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/563/02/>
- <http://www.uc.utoronto.ca/paraphrase>

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