

## Turnitin® Guidelines for Instructors

### What is Turnitin® and how does it work?

Turnitin® is a text matching tool that is commonly used to detect plagiarism, but it can also be integrated into course activities as an educational tool to help students understand the proper use of quotation marks, how to cite sources properly, and how to paraphrase.

When students submit their assignment to the Turnitin® dropbox in LEARN, the text in each student's submission is compared to a large database of other students' submissions that have been collected through Turnitin® from many institutions and to textual material located on the web (for example, websites, electronic documents, and ejournals).

These files are housed on the Turnitin® server based in California and on a local D2L server. Students' submissions are added to a private pool of UWaterloo documents, therefore they are not accessible to others for comparison as part of the general Turnitin® database.

After comparing the submission to the database, Turnitin® generates a **similarity index** and an **originality report**. The similarity index indicates how much of the writing matches writing from previously existing sources. The originality report highlights all phrases that match the text in an existing source and provides links to those sources. The originality report can be used to help instructors evaluate the students' use of unoriginal content and they can be used to help students understand the proper use of quotation marks, how to cite sources properly, and how to paraphrase.

As scholars in our own disciplines, we know that we need to acknowledge the ideas we build on from others; this is an important scholarly activity. It is important for instructors to recognize that not all students have received appropriate training or adequate practice in scholarly writing skills and that there are some discipline specific differences in scholarly writing conventions (e.g., the use of quotations).

### Using Turnitin® in your course

All course outlines as of Spring 2018 must include the boilerplate statement on the next page. You must inform students that Turnitin® will be used in the course. You should also state *how* Turnitin® is being used in your course (i.e., as an educational tool and/or to uncover plagiarism).

You must also provide students with an alternative to Turnitin®. Because students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server you must give students an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography) in order to protect their privacy and security. \*Please be aware that your name as a course instructor, if it is included in a submission, will also be retained on the server and subject to U.S. law.

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The following statement *must* appear in your course outline:

**Turnitin.com:** Text matching software (Turnitin®) 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.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit the alternate *assignment*.

Ensure that your teaching assistants (TA) review these guidelines and understand the use of Turnitin® in your course. Teaching assistants may bring issues of concern to the course instructor and Associate Dean, Undergraduate Studies; however, an incident of plagiarism should be determined by the Associate Dean and not the TA.

#### **To use Turnitin® as a text matching tool**

To use the Turnitin® originality report to help uncover plagiarism, you must contact the LEARN support team to have Turnitin® dropboxes added to your course. The team will adjust your course settings to make these dropboxes available.

#### **To use Turnitin® as a text matching tool and as an educational tool**

To use Turnitin® as a text matching tool as well as an educational tool, you must contact the LEARN support team to have Turnitin® dropboxes added to your course. The LEARN team will set up a dropbox for the assignment. Students will be able to see the Turnitin® originality report for their draft through the dropbox then make changes before submitting their final version to the dropbox.

The following practices are recommended for using Turnitin® as an educational tool:

- For each assignment, limit students to one draft submission and one final submission.
- Advise students to submit their draft early so that they have time to interpret the originality report and make the necessary changes to their draft before the assignment is due.

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- The Turnitin® dropbox is to be used only for their submission of their draft of that assignment (i.e., no other assignment).
- The draft assignment will not be graded.
- The originality report for the draft assignment will not be reviewed by the instructor or TA: it is for the student's use only.
- 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.

For further information on interpreting the originality report refer to the instructor's training: [http://turnitin.com/en\\_us/training/instructor-training/viewing-originality-reports](http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training/viewing-originality-reports)

To ensure that students are taught how to interpret the originality report refer them to the student training video: [http://turnitin.com/en\\_us/training/student-training/viewing-originality-reports](http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/student-training/viewing-originality-reports) and have a discussion about how to review the results.

### **Preparing Students for Turnitin®**

Provide a rationale for the use of the tool in both the course outline and the assignment instructions (<https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/integrity-waterloo-faculty/how-help-your-students> ; Ledwith & Risquez, 2008).

Make students aware of the citation conventions that exist in your discipline (Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005). Your Liaison Librarian can help you incorporate resources which will help students learn to use citations appropriately.

Discuss the concept of original thought with your students, remembering that scholarly papers are built on the scholarship of others. If you are asking students to be highly original, then you may have higher incidence of plagiarism because students may be reluctant to cite their sources properly (Johnson & Clerehan, 2005).

To help avoid misconduct, clearly define plagiarism within the context of your discipline and how it relates to the assignment that is being submitted, and explain the extent to which students are allowed to work as a group (Goddard & Rudzki, 2005; Johnson & Clerehan, 2005).

Remember that mastering the skill of scholarly writing takes time and that students are bound to make errors along the way.

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Taking time in class at the beginning of term to discuss academic integrity and providing resources for students who may not fully understand plagiarism can reduce unintentional plagiarism (Ledwith & Risquez, 2008). Contact your Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Liaison to add learning activities such as “The Evils of Plagiarism”. These activities can be implemented as a requirement to gain access to course content.

Scaffolded assignments where students hand in a series of documents that illustrate the construction and evolution of major papers for instructor feedback can help to document the development of the ideas in a paper and may deter students from plagiarism (Emerson, Rees, MacKay, 2005). Ask your Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) Liaison or your Centre for Extended Learning (CEL) representative for details about designing these sorts of assignments.

Recognize that the use of Turnitin® may control plagiarism through the threat of detection rather than by instilling academic values in students (Ledwith & Risquez, 2008).

### Interpreting Turnitin® Reports

When the originality report is ready, you will first see the **similarity index** which indicates how much of the submission was not original. The similarity index is a percentage that represents the number of words 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 similarity index for a submission is 10%, then 10% of the total words in the document can be matched to sequences of words in the database. These words may be in one passage or may be in several, separate passages. The following is an example of a similarity index.



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

Blue:  $\geq 0$  and  $< 20\%$

Green:  $\geq 20$  and  $< 40\%$

Yellow:  $\geq 40$  and  $< 60\%$

Orange:  $\geq 60$  and  $< 80\%$

Red:  $\geq 80$  and  $\leq 100\%$

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The percentage itself only tells you how much of the paper is the same as other sources (i.e., how much of your content is not original).

Turnitin®'s originality report highlights and colour-codes the phrases and series of words that match text that exists in the Turnitin® database or on the web. These highlighted areas can help you identify where students have used direct quotes and where students might have intentionally or unintentionally used poor paraphrasing when summarizing information from another source.

**Note that there is no “safe” colour or percentage: no percentage or colour in the originality report can fully evaluate whether text has been plagiarized.**

For example, Turnitin® will identify direct quotations as matched text and this will be reflected in the similarity index score. However, as long as those quotations are properly cited, plagiarism has not occurred. Rather than focusing solely on the percentage, go through the paper and look at the highlighted sections. 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 students' sources.

If Turnitin® is being used as a text matching tool to detect plagiarism, it is important to check each paper to judge whether the overall similarity index that has been calculated is due to chance matches, matches to common terms or phrases used for an assignment (e.g., the title of a key document, process, legislation, etc.) or intentional copying from a source that has not been cited.

There are options to generate reports that exclude text in quotations marks and in bibliographies. Originality reports need to be interpreted on a case-by-case basis and any determinations of plagiarism require human judgement. Depending on the number of students in a course and the length of their papers, this process can be time consuming. However, the evaluation time will likely be reduced as the reader becomes more familiar with, and adept at, using the originality report.

This is an example of an originality report (click on the image below to open an instructional video).

### 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 Number	Source	Match Percentage
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	coffebreak.com.br Internet source	<1%
6	Kate Birkenhead. "The ... Publication	<1%
7	Haruyuki Atomi. "Prese... Publication	<1%

### **Practical considerations and Limitations of Turnitin®**

Turnitin® measures originality but it does not verify authorship.

In a pilot study of Turnitin® use at UWaterloo, it was reported by faculty member(s) that Turnitin® may not be helpful for the review of graphs, images, or tables of numbers because it focuses on text. Turnitin® will not fact check numbers or statistics in a document.

Using Turnitin® may result in more time required to mark assignments, and you may want to factor in the reading of the Turnitin® report into the time allotted for marking by you or your teaching assistants (Sutherland-Smith & Carr, 2005; Waterloo Turnitin® School of Accounting and Finance Pilot Results, 2008).

Recognize that a greater incidence of reported plagiarism could occur with the use of Turnitin® and that University of Waterloo faculty member(s) and teaching assistants are required to report any incidents of academic misconduct as outlined in [Policy 71](#).

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Make sure to document your actions and evidence when bringing a suspected case of plagiarism to your Associate Dean Undergraduate or Graduate Studies.

Check out the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) tip sheet [Encouraging Academic Integrity in Your Course](#) for more ways to encourage academic integrity.

### Resources

[Turnitin® Guidelines for Instructors](#) (course outlines, informing students of Turnitin® usage, alternatives, etc.).

[Frequently asked questions about Turnitin® at UWaterloo](#)

[Training videos](#) to help you use the correct settings to generate “originality reports” for the outcomes that are relevant to your course.

[Using Turnitin formatively: good practice guidelines for Brookes teachers](#) (University of Oxford Brookes, U.K.)

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