

Guidelines for Instructors on How to Use Turnitin®

What is Turnitin®?

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, it compares their submission with a database of web pages, academic books and articles, as well as other student papers. After comparing their submission to a database, Turnitin® generates a similarity report. The report indicates how much of their writing matches writing from previously existing source (given as a %) and highlights all phrases that match the text in an existing source, providing links to those sources.

Using Turnitin® in your course

All course outlines as of Spring 2018 must include the boilerplate statement below. 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.

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.*

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.

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 student's intellectual property. Visit the [Turnitin® website](#) for more information on its Canadian legal policies.

Regarding Turnitin's AI Detector Tool: The Turnitin statement in your course outline is considered to also cover the Turnitin AI Detection tool. Please see the memo from the Office of the Associate Vice-President, Academic (AVPA) regarding [Turnitin and AI](#).

Setting up Turnitin® as a Text Matching Tool

To use Turnitin® as a text-matching tool when creating a new dropbox, click 'Evaluation and Feedback' and then 'Manage Turnitin®'. To add Turnitin® to an existing dropbox, click 'edit folder' and select 'Evaluation and Feedback' then 'Manage Turnitin®'. To configure your settings (for example, to exclude bibliographic material, quoted materials, or to allow late submissions), click 'More Options'. Once you've configured your settings, click 'Save and Close'.

Setting up Turnitin® as an Educational Tool

To use Turnitin® as a text matching tool as well as an educational tool, allow students to submit a draft to Turnitin® and make changes before submitting their final version to the dropbox. Create two dropboxes for the assignment: a 'draft' dropbox, and a 'final submission' dropbox. Enable Turnitin® for both dropboxes using the 'Setting up Turnitin as a Text Matching Tool' steps (above). In the 'draft' dropbox folder, click 'More Options' and select 'Allow students to view Similarity Reports'. Students will then be able to view the similarity reports for their draft submission and make changes before submitting their final version. Note that Turnitin will not compare their final submission to their draft submission.

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 similarity report and make the necessary changes to their draft before the assignment is due.
- 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 similarity 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.

Preparing Students for Turnitin®

Provide a rationale for the use of the tool in both the course outline and the assignment instructions.

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.

Taking time in class at the beginning of term to discuss academic integrity. 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 the Turnitin® Similarity Report

Once the 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 the submission and work found on

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 November 2023.

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%

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. 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 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 student's 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 percentage 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.

Instructors can configure settings in their dropboxes to exclude quotations and bibliographic materials. Similarity 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 similarity report.

This is an example of a **similarity report**:

Material and Methods:

Experiments were conducted as outlined in the **1** 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.

1 Results:

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

Match Number	Source	Similarity 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](#).

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

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Resources

Turnitin:

- [Turnitin for Instructors and Teaching Assistants](#)
- [Turnitin Support](#)

Academic Integrity Resources at UW

- [Office of Academic Integrity](#)
- [Writing and Communication Centre](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Purdue Owl](#)
- [Encouraging academic integrity in remote, online, and in-person learning contexts](#) (CTE)

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