

University Statement on the Use of Turnitin

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University Statement on the Use of Turnitin as a tool to help identify possible instances of plagiarism

What Turnitin is and what it can do

Turnitin is a web application integrated into the University's VLE (Virtual Learning Environment) for electronic assignment submission, marking and providing feedback to students. It includes functionality for the detection of text that has been written previously and gives each assignment submitted a similarity score and report (note: Turnitin synonymously uses the terms 'similarity' and 'originality', for the remainder of this document 'similarity' will be used). To provide this functionality Turnitin accesses a large database of academic material, that includes a vast store of online publications, as well as student work that has previously been submitted to Turnitin from the University of Sunderland and other institutions using Turnitin.

Turnitin is a valuable tool that can be used to teach students learn about appropriate academic practice. For example, formative Turnitin assignments can be set up that allow students to view their similarity score and report. When used in this manner, Turnitin becomes a powerful tool to help students learn about plagiarism and how to avoid committing it.

Academics commonly use Turnitin to help identify text that may have been plagiarised and to detect possible collusion, when, for example, a second or subsequent copy of a piece of work is uploaded.

Turnitin will:

- show the extent to which a piece of text replicates text that is already held in its database or that exists in a database to which Turnitin subscribes.
- produce a similarity score and report that assigns a percentage score of similarity and annotates text to show which source(s) the duplicated work has come from.

Turnitin will not:

- reveal replication of material that is not held in, or accessible to, Turnitin. This includes electronic material to which it does not have access as well as material that is available only in hard copy.
- identify an essay that has been written 'to order' for the student or bought from a 'cheat-site' unless the work has previously been put through Turnitin or is otherwise accessible to Turnitin.
- identify material that has been worked extensively to re-word original text, but with the same meaning. (Unless given proper attribution, this is still plagiarism).

Note that:

- There is a difference between what Turnitin flags as matching text and plagiarism. Turnitin will highlight any matching material, but this does not necessarily mean it has been plagiarised, merely that the material matches something in the Turnitin database.
- Module tutors can set up Turnitin to identify and exclude material that has been correctly referenced so that it will not be identified in the similarity report. In this case, typically, Turnitin will recognise text that is in quotation marks or indented (so it will not filter out text that has been paraphrased within a sentence). Tutors that intend to use this feature must ensure that students are aware of how they should format their work before submitting it.
- Turnitin is only one tool to help academics identify possible cases of academic malpractice and this Statement should be read in conjunction with the University's guidance on academic integrity and its infringement regulations and processes.

This means that:

- Turnitin can be used by students to improve their own academic practice.
- Turnitin is a valuable tool for identifying work that **may have been** plagiarised.
- The value of the percentage match in the similarity score has no relevance to plagiarism: where replicated text is highlighted by Turnitin the tutor needs to review the work to see whether the replicated text has been correctly referenced. If it has not, then the student may be guilty of plagiarism.
- Turnitin cannot report on similarity to source texts that are not accessible to it, e.g. assignments submitted to other plagiarism detection tools and assignment submitted non-electronically (paper assignments).

The University policy

The University policy on the use of Turnitin's text matching is that its primary purpose is to provide a formative opportunity for students to acquire the habits of good academic practice. By using Turnitin formatively, students can understand what constitutes good academic practice and why it is necessary. In doing so, they can be taught about plagiarism and why it must be avoided.

Where staff believe that a student has engaged in plagiarism they may wish to check their work through Turnitin. Use of Turnitin is only one of a range of approaches that could be used to help identify plagiarism when it occurs.

Programme teams are responsible for deciding whether and how Turnitin will be used within modules. Options are:

- module tutors requires all students to submit work through Turnitin.
 - setting up Turnitin to allow students to submit multiple drafts until the submission deadline so they can check their similarity scores and reports - using Turnitin formatively in this way can help students develop good academic practice.
 - setting up Turnitin to allow only one submission. In this case, students will not be able to revise their work, but they will still receive a similarity score and report, either immediately or after the assignment due date and time depending on selected settings.

- setting up Turnitin to accept a submission as a draft enables students to see a similarity score and report but the submitted work will not be added to Turnitin's database.
- the marker submits a random sample of student work through Turnitin.
- the marker submits student work through Turnitin where plagiarism is suspected.

Notes on these options:

- Allowing students to submit each draft multiple times before the due date helps them foster the development of their own writing. Students who turn in their work early will have a chance to look at their similarity score and report to see if they have adequately integrated their sources and then make changes as appropriate before resubmitting. There is a 24-hour waiting period before the next report will be generated to prevent students from resubmitting their assignments too often. This serves to prevent students from trying to lower their similarity score iteratively.
- Module tutors may allow students to submit drafts for self-help - or they may require that students submit drafts under their 'supervision' so that they can, for example, a) discuss similarity reports with them to aid their learning; or b) assess developmental portfolios where students reflect on the contents of the similarity report and how they have used it.
- If the exercise is purely formative then the module leader may choose to set Turnitin to receive drafts only.
- Where a student submits a draft to Turnitin the work is not stored on the database - so when the final version is uploaded it does not automatically show as a copy.
- Whether students submit assignments as drafts or as a final version, module tutors retain control over whether or not to allow students to view the similarity score and report.
- Staff may choose to use more than one option, e.g. formative use and use to investigate possible plagiarism.

The programme handbook must make students aware of which of the options above will be used in the various modules in their programme.

Where a module or programme is taught on and off campus, the same approach must apply to all students. Programme leaders should ensure that Assistant Programme Leaders in partner colleges understand the use that will be made of Turnitin in their programme and that this must be adhered to also for off-campus provision. Partners may not use Turnitin in alternative or additional ways as this would give different students taking the same programme inconsistent and inequitable opportunities.

Note that:

- The university's Turnitin licence only allows University of Sunderland staff and students to access our instance of Turnitin. If partner college staff will be marking, then they must use their own college instance of Turnitin.
- In the absence of Turnitin, a partner college may use functionally equivalent software only by prior agreement with the Academic Registry.

If Turnitin shows that student work has comparable material in its database then the relevant module tutors should review the analysis and:

- consider whether in fact the replicated text has been referenced;
- consider the nature and extent of the replicated text, particularly,

- a) whether this appears to constitute a misunderstanding of academic practice that should be addressed by the module tutors;
- b) or may be a case of deliberate plagiarism that should be referred to a faculty infringement panel.

There is no 'acceptable level' for the similarity score and each case must be judged on its merits. (More information is in the University's guidelines on plagiarism and other infringements). A tutor sending work to an infringement panel must provide a commentary that explains why the tutor believes that evidence points to culpable plagiarism. The Turnitin similarity report on its own is not sufficient.

Further advice

The Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching can offer staff development sessions and advice on the use of Turnitin and the development of students' academic practice. Such sessions and advice are also available to staff in partner colleges.

For further advice about the processes to be followed in the event of an infringement being discovered or suspected, see the infringement policy in the Academic Quality Handbook or consult the Assistant Director of the Academic Registry.