Charles Sturt University

Interpreting your similarity report
  Guide for students

Charles Sturt University

What does Turnitin do?

Turnitin checks for the similarity between your work and other people's work. It will highlight any groups of words that match, or occur in a similar order to another text.

It gives you a score based on the percentage of your text that is similar to others. The score is colour coded according to its range as follows:

Blue - No matching text

Green - One word to 24% matching text

Yellow - 25-49% matching text

Orange - 50-74% matching text

Red - 75-100% matching text

Source: https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/student/the-similarity-report/similarity-score-ranges.htm

What doesn't Turnitin do?

Turnitin won't identify plagiarism, but you and your lecturers can use it to check whether you may have plagiarised.

You need to view the report and interpret what it is telling you.

Plagiarism means that you have used someone else's words or ideas without appropriate acknowledgement. Generally, we use **in-text citations** quotations (where needed) and a **reference list** to acknowledge the sources we have drawn on.

The examples below show how to understand what is highlighted and what you can do to make sure your work demonstrates appropriate referencing practices.

What score is OK?

There is no ideal score! Generally, a score between below 25% *could* be considered trustworthy, but this still doesn't exclude the possibility of plagiarism because there could be parts of the text highlighted that haven't been correctly cited. Also the it is vital to correctly cite quotes and long quotes when present. Turnitin may highlight these correctly cited passages.

For the report to be useful, you have to check what is highlighted.

Too high?

A score above 25% could indicate plagiarism, or it might just mean that the assignment has a long bibliography and a number of direct quotes.

> For example, in a literature assignment, it would not be unusual to include direct quotes from a primary source (e.g. novel, play or poem) as evidence. This might generate a high similarity rating, but the report would indicate the original work as the main source of similarity. It might also indicate other essays written about that primary source. See Example 1.

If small stretches of text are highlighted, just one or two words, it could be that these words are commonly found together in multiple texts. See Example 2.

However, if there are longer stretches of language highlighted with a word or two in between, then it could mean that you haven't paraphrased effectively. See Example 3.
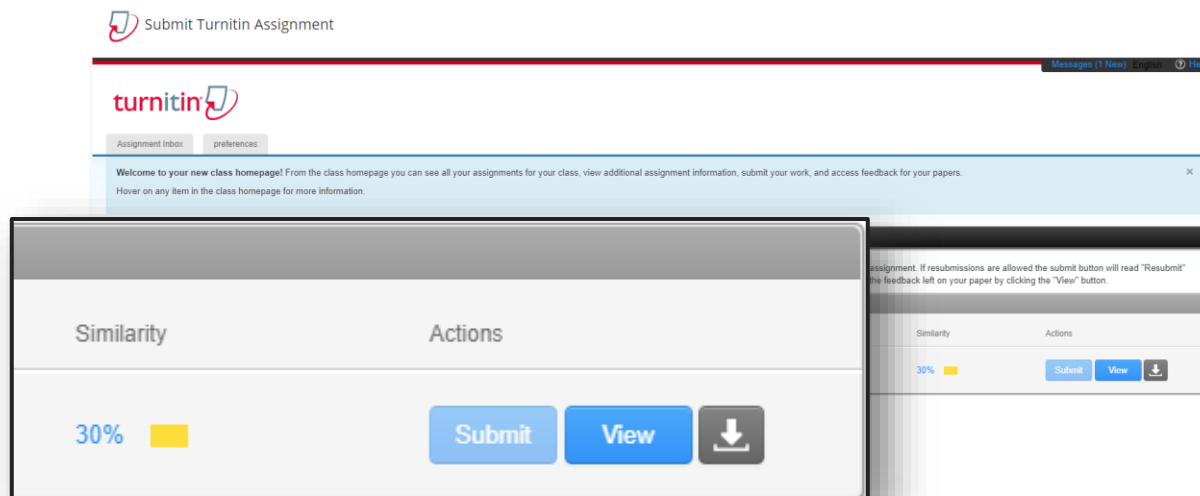
If there are large blocks of text highlighted **without** quotation marks or references, then plagiarism or collusion is the likely cause. See Example 4.

> *You need to:*
> - *check the sources,*
> - *include quotation marks around direct quotes, or*
> - *paraphrase the highlighted sections, and*
> - use appropriate in-text citations and reference list entries.

Example 1 – 30% match – block highlighted

To see your similarity report, click on the percentage score or 'View' button.

Interpretation

The paragraph below is from an essay with one or two direct quotes per page and an extensive reference list. This resulted in a 30% match, without plagiarism.

WHY?

- The highlighted text has a quotation mark before and after.
- The source is acknowledged at the beginning of the sentence and the page number follows the direct quote.
- There is a reference list entry corresponding to 'Helyer and Lee (2012)'.
- The matched source, indicated by clicking on the number 10 at the beginning of the highlight, is the same source acknowledged by the writer.

So this is not plagiarism because the original source has been correctly acknowledged.

Example 2 – small sections highlighted

Sometimes, words that commonly occur together can be matched to a source you have not used, as in the example below. In this case, the match is just a coincidence.

Learning will not be bound by the walls of the classroom but occur across multiple sites in formal and informal contexts (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012, pp. 31-32). In the context of a regional university with a high proportion of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds who are often the first in the family to attend university, the work of ALL advisors supports students to achieve literacy levels they need to cope with the demands of their studies. Retaining students is crucial for the university funding. Regional universities

Interpretation

The phrases 'from low-socio-economic …backgrounds' and 'the first in the family to attend university' are typical examples of collocations that could occur in many places. The writer was not referring to any evidence when they included the phrase to make a point in their own argument. The word 'of' could easily appear in any context following the highlighted phrases. So this is not plagiarism.

WHY?

- The highlighted words don't have quotation marks because the author was not referring to another source.
- The source that Turnitin identified (similarity match 22) wasn't a source used by the author at all, and doesn't appear in the reference list.
- There is no need to add a citation because the words used are common collocations.

Example 3 – Multiple highlights close together

If there are multiple phrases highlighted, close together and without quotation marks or clear attribution, it could be a case of poor paraphrasing resulting in plagiarism.

Interpretation

Turnitin showed three matches from the same source. The matches indicate that all the phrases, including some references, are from different parts of the same source. When the full source is viewed, it shows the words have been taken from three separate parts of the same text and combined in the same paragraph. In match 1, one name in the reference has been altered. In match 2, additional parts of the surrounding text can also be seen without quotation marks. Match 3 shows that the wording has only been slightly changed. This is a case of poor paraphrasing practice resulting in plagiarism.

WHY?

- Citations have been copied wrongly from the original, so it looks as though this student used those sources when they haven't.
- The order of information is similar, with only a few words omitted.
- Direct quotes have been used without quotation marks.
- The source has not been appropriately acknowledged.

Example 4 – Large blocks of text copied exactly

When whole blocks of text are highlighted, showing an exact match from the same source, it is likely the material has been cut and pasted without editing.

> The extent to which protein digestion is affected depends on the source of the tannins. For example, *Lotus pedunculatus* Cav. tannins reduced the *in vitro* degradation of the major protein in green plants (Rubisco) much more than *L. corniculatus* tannins. It is likely that the binding strength in tannin–protein complexes is an important factor in ruminal protein digestion. However, the effect of tannins on bacteria, both in the rumen and in the intestine, may be another factor. In the presence of *L. corniculatus* tannins, lower concentrations of bacteria were found in the rumen and in the digesta flowing out of the rumen. The *L. corniculatus* tannins had a direct effect specifically on the proteolytic bacteria in the rumen. However, pre-incubation of *L. corniculatus* tannins with rumen bacteria resulted in more Rubisco degradation than pre-incubation with *L. pedunculatus* tannins. It is possible that *L. pedunculatus* tannins are not useful in ruminant nutrition because they inhibit the ruminal degradation of dietary protein too strongly (Mueller-Harvey 2006).

X

Interpretation

The whole paragraph is highlighted, without breaks and from a single source. Even though there is an in-text citation at the end of the paragraph, this is still plagiarism.

WHY?

- The quoted paragraph is not indented as a block quote.
- No quotation marks are used.
- The words have been copied exactly, not paraphrased.

Summary

- Turnitin is a useful tool to check that you have referenced accurately.
- Highlighted sections are words that are similar to other sources.
- Check that direct quotes are in quotation marks and are followed by an in-text citation
- If the quote is over 40 words long, indent it by 1cm on the left.
- If the highlighted words are 'patchy', with some words not highlighted, check that you have paraphrased appropriately and included an in-text citation with the paraphrased or summarised information.

Resources

- Learn more about referencing in our online workshops: https://student.csu.edu.au/student-life/workshops-events

- Referencing resources and guides are available on the Referencing at CSU webpage: https://www.csu.edu.au/current-students/learning-resources/build-your-skills/academic-skills-help/referencing

- For information on how to set up your Turnitin account to check your CSU assessments visit the CSU Plagiarism Checking page on the student portal: https://www.csu.edu.au/current-students/learning-resources/information-planning/assignments/plagiarism-checking

- Turnitin Student Resources include more detail about how to interpret your report: Interpreting the Similarity Report (turnitin.com)