Interpreting the Turnitin Originality Report in studentcentral – staff guide

The Originality Report is an effective way to check that your students have properly cited their sources in an assignment and have not simply copied text without appropriate referencing.

The Originality Report does not attempt to judge whether plagiarism has occurred, it highlights text that matches another source. The decision of whether this is plagiarism remains your academic judgment. Because of this, it is not simply a matter of reading the percentage scores against a paper and saying, for example, anything above 25% is plagiarism. In the video that accompanies this document we discuss how to interpret the report and score.

What is the Originality Report?

The Originality Report is an indication of similarities found between the submitted work and the:

- Internet, including archived web pages,
- A database of work submitted by other students,
- And other online sources, such as books and journals.

It shows the amount of matched text that the system has found; highlighting the matching text and identifying the source of the match in the submitted work.

What doesn’t the Originality Report show?

The Originality Report only checks text. Any images, drawings, diagrams or plans included in the assignment will not be picked up by the Originality Report but they still may need to be referenced.

Turnitin won’t pick up every match – for example the database does not contain the contents of all books and journals. So even if the score is low, you still need to check the assignment to ensure nothing has been missed.
What percentage of matches is “safe”?  

There is no ideal percentage to look for since, hopefully, the work is bound to contain some words from other sources. The percentage will vary depending on the type of assignment and the requirements of the work involved.

The Similarity Score is a traffic light system.

**Blue** indicates a matching score of zero. This could mean that the work has no references at all and that there is little or no use of direct quotes. Depending on the nature of the assignment this is not necessarily an issue but a Blue score is worth checking just in case the student has simply submitted a paper with text that Turnitin cannot recognize.

**Green** indicates matches between 1% and 24% and is the most common. While a Green score might suggest the document is OK, it is simply an indication of the amount of matched text, so potentially, up to 24% of the document could still have been copied without referencing.

**Yellow** indicates matches between 25% and 49%. The score then becomes **Amber** which matches 50% to 74% and finally **Red** which matches 75% to 100%.

Higher percentage matches may indicate:

- Relying too much on direct quotation as a result of poor academic writing
- Cutting and pasting from other sources

A 100% match means the assignment has previously been submitted to Turnitin. This can happen if the student is making a re-submission of their work and the file had already been submitted to the Turnitin database. This could be a student error – they submitted to another assignment area by mistake, or a re-submission of work after a previous failed mark. A 100% match might also indicate collusion or copying an essay from a student from a previous year or another institution.

**Types of frequently found ‘acceptable’ matching text**

There are certain types of matched text that it is normal and acceptable to find. These include:

- **Quotations**: Properly referenced quotations can be ignored. These can be excluded using the filter as will be explained later.
- **References and Bibliography**: Other students will have used the same references at some point and these will show up.
- **Matching formats**: e.g. the same essay title.
- **Tables and Charts** showing shared or copied data or statistics.
• Appendices may also have a large amount of matching text as other students may well have used the same sources
• Small matches: The Originality Report will highlight short phrases in a sentence and these can be commonly used terminology particular to a subject
• Paraphrasing: The Originality Report will highlight words in paraphrased text that matches a source. The source needs to be cited but, again, this remains an academic judgment as to whether the text has been suitably paraphrased. Matches cannot be avoided by simply changing a few words from the source. The report will still pick it up

Navigating to the Originality Report

In the Inbox, click any of the % links in the Similarity column to open the assignment in the Originality view

In the right hand column is a list of all the sources that have been matched with an individual percentage

These sources are colour coded with the highlighted text in the assignment which makes it easy to match the source with the text

You can also click on the small Funnel icon down the bottom of the screen that allows you to filter out properly referenced Quotations and the Bibliography from the report.

In the top right of the page the overall percentage match is displayed.
Examples of the Similarity scores

Blue scores

As explained earlier, this would indicate no references or no matches. It is uncommon to see this and would possibly warrant closer investigation and reading the text in full.

In the example below, the student simply created and submitted a document full of made-up words. This generated a 0% score.

Green scores

These could be one entire match or made up of numerous small matches.

In the example, the assignment received a score of 15%. Looking at this closely it can be seen that the 15% is made up of several 1% matches.
When the quotes and bibliography were filtered out from that example, the score reduced to only 5%. On investigation, those that remained appeared to be referenced appropriately.

Another green score example gave a score of 21%. In that example 16% came from a single source.
Using the **Full Source View** shows this very clearly.
Yellow scores

Expanding an example score of 27% shows that it is also largely made up of 1% matches but there are a couple of bigger matches. This could need further investigation before you can make a judgment on copying.

In this example, even a 1% match can show you that the student has included the reference for a source but failed to format this correctly as a quotation.
Amber scores

In the example used, a score of 57% shows that there is a considerable amount of copying from other sources. There are 4 main matches. It would appear that these sources have also not been cited in the paper.

The main 37% match, even if it had been correctly referenced, would show an over-reliance on a single source by the student.
Red scores

In the example used, a 100% match, 90% seems to be matched with a single piece of work submitted to the University of Brighton. If you were an instructor in the study area that work was copied from, then you get the ability to view the copy. If you were not an instructor you do not get to see the original work because submitted papers remain the intellectual property of their authors. But you can request to view the paper by clicking a link which emails the instructor.

As these examples show, Turnitin can be a useful tool in the ‘toolbox’ of approaches a tutor can employ to enhance academic integrity of their course.