

Faculty of Humanities

Guidance for Staff on Interpreting Turnitin Originality Reports

What is the Originality Report?

The University uses an electronic system, Turnitin, to identify similarities between text in a submitted assignment and that in other sources, to assist staff in identifying potential plagiarism. An Originality Report is generated.

The Originality Report provides a summary of matching or highly similar text in a submitted assignment with text in Turnitin's repository of previously submitted work, active & archived internet information & electronic periodicals & journals.

Any match found will be highlighted on the Originality Report. This will result in an overall % score as well as a % score for the text attributed to individual sources. The % scores are calculated from the number of words taken from a source compared to the total number of words in the assignment.

The Originality Report is NOT a plagiarism report. Originality Reports help you readily locate potential plagiarism.

Academic judgement **must** be used to determine whether or not the highlighted text in the assignment has been correctly cited and referenced. Highlighted text in the Originality Report is just unoriginal.

Many resources are not in the Turnitin repository and you should use the Originality Report in conjunction with traditional methods to detect suspected plagiarism.

This Guidance should also be read in conjunction with:

Academic Malpractice: Guidance on the Handling of Cases
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=639>

University Guidance for Teaching Staff on Academic Malpractice and Plagiarism
<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=2869>

The University's definition of academic malpractice is:

'any activity, intentional or otherwise, that is likely to undermine the integrity essential to scholarship and research. It includes plagiarism, collusion, fabrication or falsification of results, and anything else that could result in unearned or undeserved credit for those committing it. Academic malpractice can result from a deliberate act of cheating or may be committed unintentionally. Whether intended or not, all incidents of academic malpractice will be treated seriously by the University'.

% Score

Originality Reports need to be carefully interpreted; they are simply a tool to help you find sources that contain text similar to the submitted assignment.

The % scores are colour coded for ease; however there is no target % score to look for. 1% matched text in a 12,000 word dissertation would contain the same number of matched words as 12% matched text in a 1000 word essay.

Low % scores do not necessarily mean that there is no plagiarism; high % scores do not necessarily mean that the assignment contains plagiarism.

Substantial quotes used in an assignment may increase the % score, even if these are properly cited and referenced.

Low % scores MAY mask academic malpractice if:

- the matched text is the key idea/conclusion from a longer piece of work.
- paraphrased or summarized work is used without acknowledgement.

Higher % scores require further investigation because they MAY indicate:

- poor academic writing.
- a mere lack of knowledge and understanding of how to cite sources properly.
- overuse of quotations.
- Plagiarism.

You should look to see if the matched text is properly cited, referenced and in an appropriate academic style.

Things to note, Turnitin:

- does not look beyond the first source it finds (best match), which might not be the original source material. Putting the passage into a search engine usually helps identify the potential original source.
- finds it difficult to recognise matches where many small changes have been made to the copied text.
- does not always find everything.

Poor Academic Practice or Plagiarism? The University provides the following guidance:

'A single instance of the copying or close paraphrasing of two or three sentences of perhaps no more than 50 words in total of someone else's material, without direct acknowledgement, or the reproduction of a single unacknowledged diagram should not necessarily be regarded as plagiarism. These might better be described as 'poor academic practice', rather than malpractice. In such cases, students should be informed why they fall below the standards required, and should then be penalized accordingly through appropriate assessment criteria, which explicitly mention the need for the use of quotation marks, referencing and the provision of a full bibliography.

Similarly, it would be unhelpful to classify one or two unsubstantiated results in an extended series of otherwise verifiable results as evidence of falsification or fabrication. Students should be made aware of the need fully to document all programmes of investigation and research and an appropriate penalty, if merited, should be imposed through normal assessment procedures.

In coming to a professional judgement in cases of possible academic malpractice, it is appropriate to consider both the nature of the assignment and the year of the student in question; assignments subject to formative assessment only should be used constructively to encourage good academic practice and first-year undergraduate students may expect a greater degree of understanding compared to final-year or postgraduate students.'

Things to consider in deciding if work is poor academic practice or plagiarism

- has the student attempted to reference the source?
- does the reference list match any of the sources in the Originality Report?
- are there long sections of completely unreferenced text?
- are there inconsistencies in style, layout, font or writing style?

Turnitin Originality Checks

Turnitin % Match	Comments
0 – 19%	High scores in this range would normally be considered to reflect poor academic practice. This is unlikely to be considered 'plagiarism' unless a significant proportion of the text has come from a single or very limited number of sources. You should mark the assessment as seen taking account of poor academic practice if appropriate.
20 – 40% with less than 10% from one source	This score would suggest poor academic practice and would require some further consideration. We would normally expect some reflection of poor academic practice in the mark awarded for the piece of assessment. The feedback for the essay should include some reference to poor academic practice and give students an indication of how to improve their practice in the future. If you are in doubt about the severity of academic malpractice, you should speak to your School Officer for advice.
20-40% with at least 10% from one source	Papers where the % of matched text is between 20 & 40% and at least 10% comes from one source should be marked and then forwarded to your School Officer who will make a decision about the extent of poor academic practice/plagiarism.
>40% with at least 10% from one source	Where there is clear evidence that more than 40% of the paper is not original and at least 10% comes from "one or two" sources, the paper should be referred to your School Officer.
If in doubt	Contact your School Officer or Head of Division.

What do I do if I suspect academic malpractice?

All suspected cases of academic malpractice should be marked up by you to show the location and extent of relevant passages, and their possible original sources, and referred in the first instance to the designated person (the Officer) in your School. Your School Officer will determine what action should be taken depending on whether they judge that the case does or does not constitute academic malpractice.

The list of **School Officers** can be found at:

<https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/humanities/teaching-support/policy-and-guidance/academic-malpractice/>

It is incumbent upon you to address issues of improper citation and poor academic practice exposed by the online submission process at a local Divisional or Subject Area level, rather than automatically referring such work to a formal plagiarism hearing at School level.