

Interpreting originality reports

An example of an originality report is shown below:

The screenshot shows a Turnitin originality report interface. At the top left, it says 'turnitinUK Originality Report' with a logo. To the right, it displays 'Processed on: 03-12-09 5:53 PM GMT', 'ID: 4813425', 'Word Count: 948', and 'Submitted: 1'. The title of the report is 'Rod Digges's essay' by 'LTSS Test Account 01'. A summary box on the right shows a 'Similarity Index' of 31% and a breakdown: 'Internet Sources: 31%', 'Publications: 5%', and 'Student Papers: 29%'. Below this, there are tabs for 'include quoted', 'include bibliography', and 'exclude small matches'. The main content area is split into two columns. The left column shows the student's submitted text with color-coded highlights: orange for 'or borrowing someone else's original work or ideas', green for a paragraph about plagiarism, and red for a sentence about copying visual information. The right column shows a list of six matches, each with a percentage, a date, and a source URL. The matches are: 1. 15% match (Internet from 02/02/07) from http://www.smifforums.net; 2. 8% match (Internet from 18/09/09) from http://www.spellsofmagic.com; 3. 4% match (internet) from http://online.northumbria.ac.uk; 4. 2% match (Internet from 17/05/09) from http://en.epochtimes.com; 5. 1% match (Internet from 09/02/08) from http://work.restory.net; 6. 1% match (Internet from 24/08/09) from http://www.legalserviceindia.com.

Turnitin shows the student's submitted work on the left hand side, and the matches it finds on the right hand side. In this case, Turnitin has identified that 15% of the student's work may be from the web site www.smifforums.net and a further 8% may be from the web site www.spellsofmagic.com. Turnitin will not count quotes within quotation marks or bibliography entries in forming these percentages.

The colour coding shows where these matches appear in the students work. For example, at first glance it would appear that Turnitin has matched some fairly common sentences, but we would be unlikely to consider this plagiarism. However, some larger blocks are also matched and these would be of greater concern. We would also be concerned as, looking at the student's work, we cannot see any references within the text.

As Turnitin finds matches it will report them in different ways:

- For web sites, books and journals, Turnitin will identify the web site, book or journal that is the source of the match.
- For work submitted by students in the past, Turnitin will identify the institution the work was submitted to, but not the name of the student. Nor will it allow you to view that student's work. Instead you will be given an opportunity to contact that institution to request that the work is released.

How to view and interpret the similarity score and originality reports

From the report we can do the following:

- Clicking on the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 etc on the right hand side panel will take us to the point in the student's work where that match starts.
- Clicking on one of the coloured text blocks on the left hand side panel will show the contents of the matched web site, paper or journal page in the right hand panel
- The **include quoted** and **include bibliography** options will include quoted pieces of text and bibliographic references from Turnitin's checking, and will thus normally increase the similarity score.

The screenshot shows the Turnitin interface for a report titled "Rod Digges's essay" by "LTSS Test Account 01". The similarity index is 31%. The "Similarity by Source" table shows: Internet Sources: 31%, Publications: 5%, and Student Papers: 29%. The report includes options for "include quoted", "include bibliography", and "exclude small matches". The main text area shows a paragraph about plagiarism with several highlighted sections. The right-hand panel lists six matches with their percentages and source URLs. Match 2, with an 8% match from "http://www.spellsofmagic.com", is highlighted with a red box. A red box also highlights a specific paragraph in the main text area, which is linked to match 2. Match 1 is highlighted with a blue box. Match 2 has a red 'X' icon next to it, indicating it has been excluded from the list.

Match Number	Match Percentage	Source
1	15% match	(Internet from 02/02/07) http://www.smiffforums.net
2	8% match	(Internet from 18/09/09) http://www.spellsofmagic.com
3	4% match	(internet) http://online.northumbria.ac.uk
4	2% match	(Internet from 17/05/09) http://en.epochtimes.com
5	1% match	(Internet from 09/02/08) http://work.restory.net
6	1% match	(Internet from 24/08/09) http://www.legalserviceindia.com

Note that for text that may appear in many places in books or journals or across web sites, Turnitin may identify that the text has been copied, but it of course cannot be exactly sure which source the student used to copy it. So you may see an assignment that is properly referenced, but the Turnitin match gives a different original location to the one that the student uses in their references. In cases such as this, the cross next to each match on the right hand panel is useful. Clicking the cross excludes this match from the list. Turnitin may then uncover other sources which also match the student's work.

Things to remember

- Plagiarism is an academic judgement, and Turnitin makes no attempt to judge whether plagiarism has occurred. A high unoriginality score does not automatically mean that it has occurred, and a low unoriginality score does not automatically mean that it has not occurred.
- Students are advised that there is no score to aim for and that the important consideration is suitable referencing of sources used, rather than working for a particular score. However, over time, you may come to a working judgement of a level for the unoriginality score below which you wouldn't check each piece of work – such a level is likely to depend on the discipline and nature of the assignment being set.
- Substantial quotes used in a document may increase its unoriginality score, even if these quotes are properly referenced. In some cases you may judge that a piece of writing with a high unoriginality score and with many correctly referenced quotes might be a poor example of academic writing, but is not plagiarism.
- Turnitin makes no claims to match against every possible source. Although its database is large, there will inevitably be some cases of plagiarism which it fails to match. A very low score or a score of 0% does not prove that plagiarism did not occur.
- Turnitin can do little nothing to identify cheating where an original and genuine piece of work is written, but it is not written by the student who has submitted. This might include students asking friends or family to write for them, or buying a bespoke essay from a writing service.

Frequently asked questions

What percentage unoriginality score is sufficient to indicate plagiarism?

The unoriginality score indicates text matches with other documents, including for example quotations that are used. We advise students that there is no score they should aim for as a target. The important thing is to ensure that ideas and quotations used are properly referenced in an appropriate academic style, not to aim for a particular unoriginality score.

A piece of work has an unoriginality score of 0%. Does this mean it is not plagiarised?

No, an unoriginality score of 0% does not guarantee the work is not plagiarised. Turnitin has a large database of web sites, books, journal papers and other sources, but does not (and cannot) include everything ever written.

If students resubmit an assignment, won't it show up as a 100% match

No, work submitted within a single assignment by a particular student will never match other submissions within the same assignment by themselves. If you wish to support students in drafting work across multiple assignments, then you should set the *Store Student Papers* option to *No* to prevent 100% matches from occurring.

What file formats will Turnitin accept?

Most common word-processing formats are accepted. Turnitin will accept documents in Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, PostScript, PDF, HTML, RTF, and plain text. Microsoft Powerpoint and Excel documents, and formats for computer programming languages are not accepted.

What is the maximum file size that can be submitted to Turnitin?

The maximum filesize is approximately 20MB.