



## IMPROVING YOUR ACADEMIC WRITING WITH TURNITIN

Writing is key to doing well at university and Turnitin gives you feedback on your writing. If you know how to use this feedback, it can help you to become a better academic writer.

### How can Turnitin help?

If your lecturer has set Turnitin up to let you see the originality report, you can use it to improve your writing. The originality report not only highlights text that might be plagiarised, it also draws attention to important features of academic writing. Sometimes it confirms that you are doing the right thing and sometimes it highlights skills you need to work on.

The originality report will draw your attention to:

- Your use of quotations, citation and referencing: It is fine to quote from your source texts but you need to use quotation marks and reference correctly. You also need to decide when to quote and when it would be better to summarise or paraphrase.
- Your ability to summarise and paraphrase: It is not easy to rewrite something in your own words. It is especially difficult if the original is well-expressed and the writer is an authority in the subject. However, this is an important skill to develop.
- How well you are using the terminology of your discipline: The report may highlight words and phrases that you are certain you did not copy. This is probably because all academic writing about your topic uses similar terms. You would not be accused of plagiarism for doing this.

Remember that Turnitin will show where your writing matches other documents but it cannot tell why.

### Tips on using Turnitin to help with your writing

#### General guidance

- Do not be shocked by the similarity index or the colour coding.
- Investigate all the matches that Turnitin finds even if there are very few and your assignment has a low similarity index.
- Question the Turnitin report: if you do not understand or accept something that it finds, ask your tutor about it.
- Make use of all of the academic writing support that QMUL offers, both within your department or through the Language and Learning Unit. You may also find it useful to work through the online resource *Plagiarism and how to avoid it* available at [www.learninginstitute.qmul.ac.uk/elearning/support/turnitin/turnitin-students](http://www.learninginstitute.qmul.ac.uk/elearning/support/turnitin/turnitin-students).

### WHAT OUR STAFF SAY



“Turnitin can enable students to understand what we mean by accurate and thorough referencing.”

**Dr Alastair Owens**

Director of Teaching and Learning, School of Geography  
Queen Mary, University of London

## Suggested activities

- Each time you study an originality report, write one tip for yourself. Make sure you act on this when you work on your next piece of writing.
- If the assignment allows it, work with one of your peers. Swap originality reports and write action plans for each other.
- Look at the originality reports for two different types of writing (for example a piece of creative or reflective writing and an essay on a set topic). How do the similarity indexes compare? How might you account for any differences?
- Ask yourself questions about the quotations Turnitin has highlighted. Have you identified them all by using quotation marks? Why did you choose to quote rather than use your own words? If you have quoted a long passage, do you need to quote all of it? Would it be better to summarise the main ideas and quote only short extracts or phrases that are particularly well-expressed? If you have a very high proportion of quoted text, is this because the assignment requires it? If there are very few quotations, is this appropriate for the assignment or does it suggest that you have not used enough sources?
- Paraphrasing: The ability to do this develops over time. Good paraphrasing is not just a skill with words but a sign that you have assimilated the ideas you are expressing into your own thinking – a sign that you have learned. Remember that you still need to acknowledge the source(s) you are paraphrasing.
- Sources and referencing: You should follow your department's referencing and citation guidelines. As with quotations, you must acknowledge the source of statements, ideas, images, diagrams – anything that you have included that is not your own, original work. If Turnitin identifies any of these, you can check the source and make sure that it is referenced correctly in your bibliography.
- The language of your discipline: Part of learning to write well in your discipline is using the vocabulary that practitioners use. If Turnitin has identified short phrases and terms that occur in most of the other writing in your discipline this may be a sign that you are becoming a more confident academic writer. Take a few examples from your assignment and compare the way you have used these expressions with the way they are used in the sources that the originality report has shown.
- Common words and phrases: Turnitin is likely to find matches with commonly-used expressions. These may not need to be investigated, but if you notice that you are using an expression very frequently you might ask yourself whether this was intentional.
- What if you do not see your originality report? You can still ask your lecturer to suggest the areas you need to work on.