# Using Turnitin more effectively

## Staff Resource Booklet

*About*

This booklet is designed to help staff use the Turnitin software. The booklet itself has been created as one of the outcomes of a Teaching and Learning Project which was funded through the Teaching and Learning Strategic Grants 2010 process.  The project addressed the area of Academic Integrity and specifically gathered information on the issues that are of concern in the School of Humanities and Social Science at the University of Newcastle. It is envisaged that all University staff will find the information useful in their efforts to use Turnitin more effectively.

This booklet has been updated following the change in learning management system (LMS), from Blackboard to Canvas.

*Credits*

*The team who created and designed this resource:*
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Additional resources were made available by the Learning Design and Teaching Innovation, and the Faculty of Education and Arts.

*Screenshots have been sourced from:*
The Turnitin Program which is copyright **Turnitin, LLC,** and
The University of Newcastle Website and the implementation of its LMS

*The Documents used in this resource:*
The documents used as examples for the Turnitin screenshots were written by Greg Preston and Michelle Douglas

# What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is an internet-based text matching system which is used by many higher education institutions to assist staff and students deal with issues surrounding academic integrity. The primary purpose of Turnitin at the University of Newcastle is to assist students with their academic literacy. Additionally, the Turnitin software may be of use to staff in the process of ensuring that student work conforms to the standards of academic integrity outlined within university policy and expected within their specific discipline.

The Turnitin system allows students and staff to submit electronic files to be checked against electronic resources held within the Turnitin database. The files submitted are usually text-based files and are accepted in many common formats, such as Microsoft Word, PDF, Word Perfect etc. Work is usually submitted through an assignment portal that is associated with a specific Canvas course site. The work submitted is compared to the information already held within the database, and against material which is generally available on the Internet. A report is generated, and the report is then visible to both the person who submitted the material and the course owner. The report details areas that have been matched to previously available work and gives an "overall" percentage of match for the document in its entirety.

Students can then identify any areas where they may have failed to conform to the standards of academic literacy required and make appropriate changes and resubmit the work in order to generate a new report. Once a final submission is made, staff are able to view the report as a tool to assist them in assessing the work submitted.

It is important to note that Turnitin is not a plagiarism detection system. The Turnitin software can only identify text matches - it cannot exercise academic judgement as to whether or not any specific piece of work has breached the academic conventions expected within a specific context. Therefore, a "high level of match" does not automatically mean that a work is problematic, and a "low level of match" does not indicate that a work submitted is free from errors. The Turnitin system is a guide which directs the attention of students and staff to specific areas of the work to allow them to exercise their academic judgement.

# Creating a Turnitin Assignment

The basic process for creating a Turnitin Assignment consists of the following steps:

1.  **Navigate to the Assignments tool link in your Canvas course site.**

2.  **Click the + Assignment button to add a new assignment.**

3.  **Select the settings relevant for the assignment and in accordance with University recommendations.**

Each of the above steps are shown in detail alongside other resources in the Support Centre article accessible via the Canvas Help menu.

In addition, it is important to ensure that students can both make multiple submission attempts as well as  view their originality reports.

The University Academic Integrity Policy document states:

> *Program Convenors and Assistant Dean (Teaching and Learning)s are responsible for ensuring that mechanisms are in place to provide students with education about academic integrity, including (but not limited to) compulsory Academic Integrity Module (AIM)s and the use of electronic text-matching software as a learning tool, where appropriate* [https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=35](https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=35)

To ensure that students can meaningfully use the Turnitin software they need to be able to view the results of their submissions and make appropriate changes prior to making a final submission. **To allow this to happen it is important to ensure that the following options have are selected:**
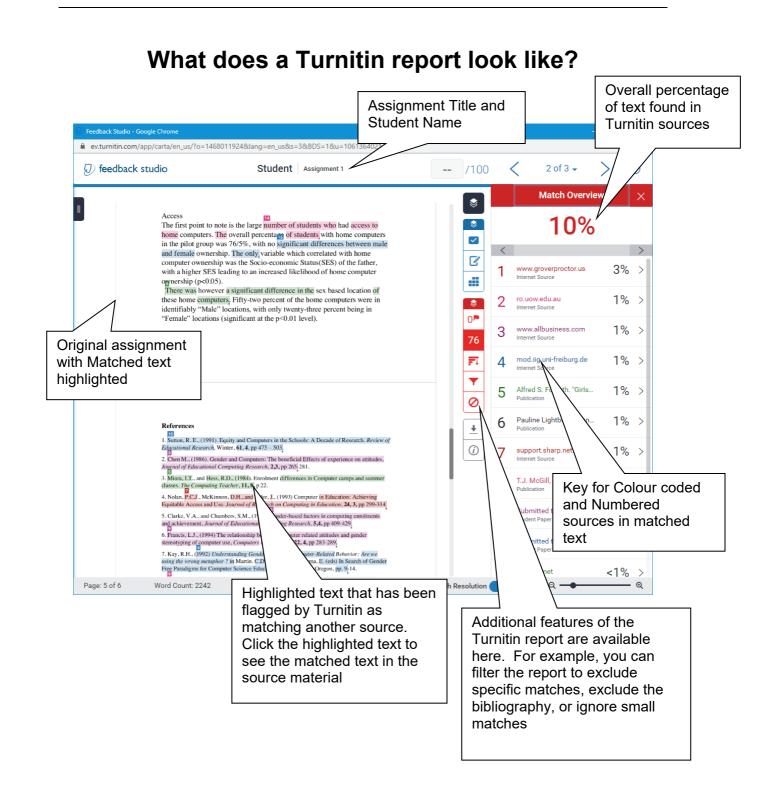
**Submission Attempts**

**Allowed attempts**

Unlimited ⌄

Multiple attempts permitted to allow students to make necessary adjustments before resubmission.

**Plagiarism Review**

Turnitin ⌄

turnitin ⊘     ❶ Need help?

Store submissions in:

Standard paper repository ⌄

Compare submissions against:

☑ Student repository

☑ Website content

☑ Periodicals, journals and publications

**Similarity Report:**

☐ Exclude bibliographic materials

☐ Exclude quoted materials

☐ Exclude small sources

☐ Enable grammar checking using ETS® e-rater® technology

☐ Save as default settings

Show report to students

Immediately ⌄

Similarity report is shown to students immediately following submission.

# Viewing a Turnitin Report

The basic steps for viewing Turnitin Reports for student submissions are:

1. **Navigate to the Canvas course site and click the Grades link in the course menu to navigate to the gradebook.**

2. **Open the student submission by selecting the relevant grade cell and then clicking the grade options button.**

3. **Click the SpeedGrader link in the sidebar to open the student submission.**

**Click the percentage indicator in the sidebar on the right-hand side to view the report for an individual student.**

# What does a Turnitin report look like?

Assignment Title and Student Name

Overall percentage of text found in Turnitin sources



Original assignment with Matched text highlighted

Highlighted text that has been flagged by Turnitin as matching another source. Click the highlighted text to see the matched text in the source material

Key for Colour coded and Numbered sources in matched text

Additional features of the Turnitin report are available here. For example, you can filter the report to exclude specific matches, exclude the bibliography, or ignore small matches

# Interpreting a Turnitin Report

**What does 'match' mean?**

The percentage of match reported by Turnitin is in indication of how much of the material that has been submitted in an assignment has a degree of similarity to previously created material that the Turnitin program has been able to access. The material which Turnitin checks includes previously submitted student assignments, certain journal articles and database repositories, and material which is generally available on the internet. The program uses a "text-matching" system that identifies text patterns, strings of repeated words, and direct word sequences to calculate an overall match for the work.

**Levels of match**

The level of match is expressed as a percentage of the material that has been located in the previously published material which can be accessed by Turnitin.

At first glance it might seem that a high level of match means that the work submitted is likely to have been copied from another source or has otherwise breached the academic integrity guidelines of the University. Similarly, a low level of match might be taken as an indication that the work submitted is free from any academic integrity issues. This is NOT the case. There can be legitimate reasons for student work to have high levels of match to previously published material, similarly, a work which has a low level of match might be completely plagiarized from a source which Turnitin cannot access. So objectively the "level of match" really doesn't mean a great deal. However, when the "level of match" is considered in relation to a specific assignment, trends will usually emerge, and your knowledge of both the subject matter and the expectations of your discipline come into play. For example, it could be expected that an original poem submitted to a Creative Writing course, would have a lower level of match than an 1st Year assignment on characterisation in Hamlet. In either case the level of match is a guide to your exploration of the specific matches, rather than an indication of, or exoneration from, anything else. Consideration of both the "type" of match and the "source" of the match in relation to a specific assignment items are much better indicators of academic integrity issues.

**Types of match**

Once a Turnitin report has been generated for a specific submission from a student, you can view the Turnitin report (see above) to look at the items that Turnitin has identified as "matching sources". One of the dimensions of your consideration could be the type of match that is being reported. The following are some common types of match you may see in Turnitin reports.
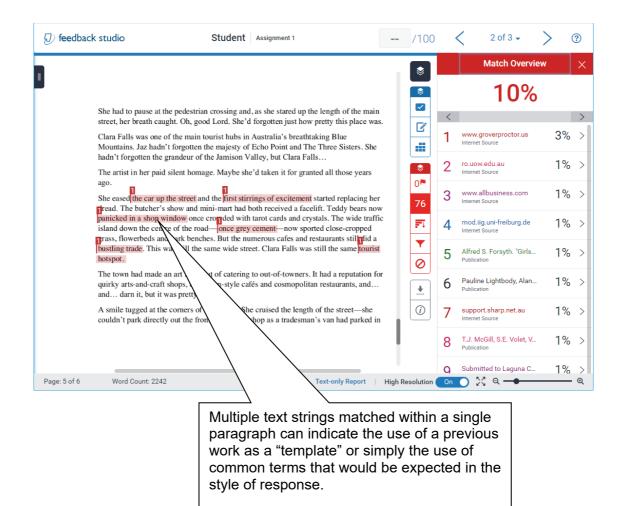
### *i*      *Block match*

In this type of match a large section of text has been directly matched to material in the Turnitin repository.  The text is a "word for word" match to existing material.  If this material comes from a "publication source" or "Internet source" it *may* mean that the student has not referenced the material correctly.  If the material matches to a previous student submission the material is often more problematic, however it might be that the two students have both used the same source which is not available to Turnitin (eg a book).  In either case these "block" matches need careful examination.



Block of text matched "word-for-word" to existing material

### *ii.* *Scattered words match*

This type of match usually indicates that the student has made an attempt to paraphrase an existing source. How well they have done this is a matter for academic judgment, however the source of the match is again important. A "scattered word match" to a previous student submission, combined with a high overall percentage from that work may indicate that the student has used a previous student assignment as a "template" for constructing their own response.
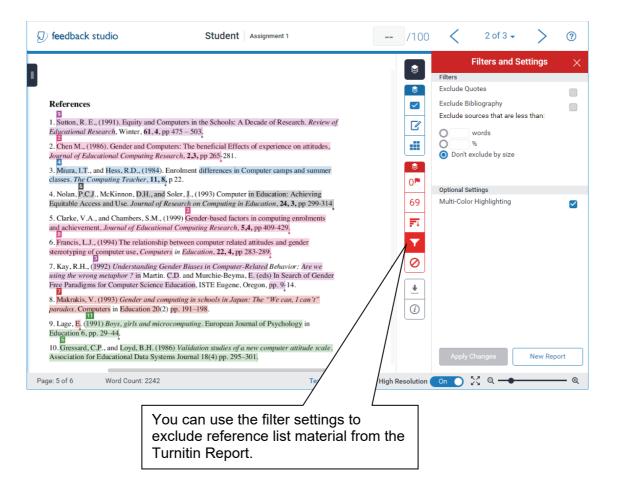


Multiple text strings matched within a single paragraph can indicate the use of a previous work as a "template" or simply the use of common terms that would be expected in the style of response.

### iii.    *Checkerboard match*

The checkerboard response is potentially the most concerning of all.  While it can represent a poor attempt at paraphrasing the work of another, it can also be an indication of an attempt to eliminate a "block" match within the submission. Care should be taken to view the original source closely to look at which words within the paragraph are different.



Close examination of these types of matches is required.  Click on the highlighted text to see the original source in its context.

### iv.   *Reference match*

Reference matches can contribute to a high overall match within the work, and may, in some cases, cause students unnecessary concern.  It is possible to exclude reference lists from the material examined by Turnitin through the "filters and settings" icon in the similarity toolbar (see below).  However, the submission of identical reference lists by separate students may also be a matter of concern within a specific discipline.



You can use the filter settings to exclude reference list material from the Turnitin Report.

### *v.* *Trivial match*

It is important to note that assignments can build-up a significant percentage of match simply by using phrases which are common to academic work. In the example below, I would be very surprised if the student had "copied" these words as they are quite "standard" for the field.



Turnitin has identified that the words "significant differences between male and female..." as having been used in previously submitted work.

## Sources of match

The source of the match of material can be a useful consideration when looking at the work submitted by students. Large matches from previous student work, for example, can be problematic, whereas a large match from a common internet source might simply be matched text which has been correctly (or incorrectly) referenced. Likewise, large matches from a single source are more likely to be problematic than a similar overall level of match which is derived from a large number of sources.

# Common Questions and Issues - FAQ

***How do I ensure that student can view their Turnitin reports?***
When setting up an assignment, ensure that the following setting
*Show report to* students is set to **Immediately**

***None of the students in my group have a Turnitin match which is greater than 20% - does that mean that the submissions are all OK?***
No. The overall percentage may provide you with a guide to certain features of the work, but it isn't an indication of plagiarism.  The judgement on plagiarism is an academic decision and this requires you to look at the report.

***Do I have to use Turnitin for all my assignments?***
No. The University Policy simply states that Turnitin must be available for students to use. There is no University requirement that all assignments are submitted to Turnitin.  Some schools have policies on this matter, and you should check with your Student Academic Conduct Officer (SACO) if you are unsure.

***One of the assignments submitted to my course has a 75% Turnitin match. That has to be a problem doesn't it?***
It depends on the assignment. The high level of match is probably a cause for concern; however it may be related to the response style rather than the academic integrity of the work. For example, if a student has used a large number of quotes within an essay, the level of match could be high, even if they are correctly referenced.  Thus, the level of match may be an issue of poor writing rather than poor referencing.  Similarly, within some assignments, this level of match might not be a cause for concern at all.

***Students have a right to not submit their work to Turnitin don't they?***
In most cases students have signed a waiver which allows the University to require students to submit their work to text matching software.  This is one of the items that is usually listed on course outlines.  However, if issues arise in relation to this area, contact the University Student Academic Conduct Officer coordinator.

***How do I manage all the extra work that comes with using Turnitin?***
At one level, there is no extra work which is generated by Turnitin.  As academics we have the responsibility to ensure that the work submitted by students conforms to the expected guidelines within our discipline and to the University Policy on Academic integrity.  This has always been the case. The rapid expansion of material available to students has made this more difficult.  Electronic text matching software is designed to make the task we are required to do easier. However, it is important that you develop workflows which allow you to do this as easily as you can.  There are Turnitin sessions run by the Learning Technology Support team who can help you manage your engagement with Turnitin.

***Should I "teach" my students about Turnitin?***
It is important that students have a good understanding of academic integrity.  The University has moved to ensure that all students, who commence in 2011 and beyond complete an Academic Integrity Module.  This module should ensure that students have an understanding of the requirements within the University.  Additionally, it can be useful to make the resources which explain how to use the features of Turnitin available in Canvas sites for your courses (see additional resources below).

# Additional Resources

***Information about University Policy***
University Policy on Academic Integrity
https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=35

University Student Conduct Rule
https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=34

***Academic Integrity***
The general website on academic integrity for the University is here:
https://www.newcastle.edu.au/current-students/study-essentials/assessment-and-exams/academic-integrity/academic-integrity-module

***Information about using Turnitin***

*Access to the training resources provided by Turnitin is available here:*
https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/canvas/plagiarism-framework/teacher/teacher-category.htm

***Resources to help your students with referencing***
The Library Info skills resource is located here:
https://downloads.newcastle.edu.au/library/tutorials/infoskills/writing/index.html

There is information on specific referencing styles at the following websites:

General (with links to specific styles)
https://www.newcastle.edu.au/library/learn/referencing

APA
http://www.apastyle.org/

Chicago
http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html

MLA
http://library.concordia.ca/help/howto/mla.php

AGPS/Harvard
https://libguides.newcastle.edu.au/referencing/harvard

AGLC4
https://libguides.newcastle.edu.au/referencing/aglc

# Dealing with suspected Plagiarism FAQ

***What do I do if I suspect plagiarism in an assignment?***
Suspected cases of plagiarism should be referred to School Student Academic Conduct Officer.

***I have received an assignment that I am unsure about. What should I do?***
Review the material submitted and compare it to your expectations based on the instructions given in the course outline, the university policy on student academic conduct/plagiarism information, and general expectations of referencing in your discipline area. If you are still unsure consult the school SACO (Student Academic Conduct officer).

***Should I return an assignment to the student if I suspect plagiarism?***
Once an assignment has been referred to the school SACO, that assignment should NOT be returned to the student before clearing this with the SACO.

***I am a course coordinator. What do I do if I suspect plagiarism in a course, I am responsible for?***
Review any evidence relating to the allegation. If you believe that a prima facie case of plagiarism exists, then you MAY discuss the matter with the student, and refer the matter to the school SACO.

***What is the purpose of the meeting between the course coordinator and the student regarding the alleged plagiarism?***
This interview is simply to give the student an opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings and keep them informed about the process. It is not to establish "guilt or innocence".

***What is an acceptable percentage in a Turnitin report?***
There is no one figure that can be defined as a hurdle for being acceptable. The key is to look at the Turnitin reports for any assignments that are causing you concern.

***What happens when an allegation of suspected plagiarism is reported to the Student Academic Conduct Officer?***
The SACO will investigate the matter, which may include discussing the matter with both the course coordinator and the student. The outcome will be determined in line with the University policy. The course coordinator or referring staff member and the student will be advised of the outcome of the investigation, and the penalty (if any) to be implemented.

***Once I refer the matter to the SACO, how long will the process take?***
This is difficult to answer definitively. Most allegations will be dealt with within two weeks of the SACO receiving all the documentation. However, some cases, for example any referred to the university misconduct committee, may take considerably longer.

***What are the penalties which can be imposed on work which is deemed to be plagiarised?***
The full details of penalties are set out in the University policy. They range from counselling in relation to referencing, through various types of resubmission, up to exclusion from the University.

***Can I impose a penalty of a certain percentage of marks for plagiarism?***
No. The only way penalties can be imposed for breaches of the academic integrity policy are through the Student Misconduct Rule.  You can, however, establish assignment criteria which reward good referencing practices, or ask students to resubmit work (without penalty) if you are convinced that the issue is simply the student's lack of knowledge of referencing conventions. (This would be more likely in the first semester of a student's program)

***What assistance is available for my students to help them with referencing?***
There is a very useful guide available through the library at
http://libguides.newcastle.edu.au/referencing

***Can I find out if a student has been accused of plagiarism before?***
No. The details of plagiarism allegations are subject to very strict privacy provisions.  Indeed, even the SACO cannot access this information until entering the "penalty" phase of the decision-making process.

***How can I help to minimise plagiarism by my students?***
a) There is a guide produced by the Library here:
https://downloads.newcastle.edu.au/library/tutorials/infoskills/
b) be sure to set up your Turnitin assignments so that students can view their reports and make multiple submissions..  These options may be found when creating or editing an assignment.
c) You may also wish to speak to your SACO directly to discuss further options

***Where can I find the policies and procedures in relation to Student academic conduct?***
Both documents are available on the Internet through the University's policy library
The Student Academic Integrity Policy is here:
https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=35
The Student Conduct Rule is here:
https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=34
The University Code of Conduct is here:
https://policies.newcastle.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=204

***Where else can I get help on Academic Integrity matters?***
The University has a Student Academic Integrity Officer Coordinator who can advise you on any issues that you may have in relation to academic integrity