

Policy and Guidance on the Use of Text-Matching Software (including Turnitin)

Definition and context

Text-matching software programmes are web-based computer tools that support students in the development of good academic practice when preparing written work for assessment. Text-matching tools allow academic staff to check students' work for improper use of sources or potential plagiarism by comparing it against continuously up-dated databases (including web-pages and student work). Text-matching tools produce an 'Originality Report' for each submitted piece of work which indicates all the matches in the student assignment to the web-based sources on its database, and thus can provide academic staff with the opportunity to help students develop proper citation methods as well as to safeguard students' academic integrity. Oxford Brookes University currently uses Turnitin as our preferred text-matching software but may also use other services. Partner institutions that deliver programmes leading to an award of, or validated by the University are expected to have appropriate text-matching software procedures which meet the requirements of this Policy.

Policy

All students at Oxford Brookes on taught undergraduate or Masters programmes are required to use text-matching software both to help in the process of developing academic writing skills and to ensure adherence to standards of academic integrity. All students on the undergraduate modular programme will normally use text-matching software on a minimum of **three compulsory** occasions: once during a compulsory module at Level 4; once again in a compulsory module at Level 5 or Level 6; and finally during the dissertation or project module. All students on taught Masters programmes will be required to use text-matching software on a minimum of **two modules**: once during a taught module (this could be the Research Methods module); and once during the dissertation or project module. All other taught postgraduate students (taking PGDip or PGCert programmes) are required to use text matching-software **once** during one taught module. In addition, text-matching software may be used optionally on other modules for one or all pieces of assessment in that module as decided by the Module Leader. Text-matching software may be used as part of an investigation into an

alleged case of plagiarism, but it is more frequently used to support students' academic development and enhance good academic practice.

Therefore, at each compulsory occasion where Turnitin is used, an opportunity for a draft submission should be given to students and guidance to interpret Turnitin reports should be provided by staff in the form of individual feedback, general feedback and/or specific support from teaching materials.

In instances where a module leader suspects plagiarism or another breach of academic integrity regulations in a student's work and decides to refer it to the Student Investigation and Resolution Team ([SIRT](#)) based within Student Central. **The said module leader must download a copy of the student's Turnitin similarity report and send it directly to the student.** This is to help the student to prepare if they are called for investigation.

Practical support - staff section

How to set up draft submissions:

1. Go to your Moodle course and **turn editing on**.
2. In the section where you will add a draft submission dropbox, click **Add an activity or resource** (bottom-right of section).
3. From the activity chooser select **Turnitin assignment 2** (towards the bottom of the list) and click **Add**.
4. Give a name to the assignment.
5. Under Assignment Part 1, select a start and a due date.
6. **Important:** Under *Store Student Papers* choose **No repository** to prevent Turnitin from storing the submissions in the database.
7. You don't need to change any of the other settings.
8. Click **Save and return to course** (bottom of the screen).

More details: <https://telsupport.brookes.ac.uk/articles/how-do-i-set-up-draft-submissions-in-turnitin/>

To avoid getting email notifications when students submit their drafts, you can disable instructor notifications from Turnitin:

1. In Moodle click your **profile menu (your name)** on the top-right hand corner.
2. Click **Preferences**.
3. Click **Notification Preferences**.

4. Find *Turnitin Assignment Instructor Digital Receipt notifications* and toggle off both for web and email.

Changing this setting will disable email notifications for both draft and final submissions. We recommend leaving these notifications enabled, as they can work as proof that students submitted on time or evidence that students resubmitted a revised version of their work when they shouldn't have. Email notifications, also, give you a better real-time overview of what is happening in a given module. For example, if you aren't receiving submission notifications on a day where you expect to, this can be an early warning that something is wrong with that assignment. We recommend filtering these notifications out in Gmail using filters. For guidance, see: <https://telsupport.brookes.ac.uk/articles/why-do-i-receive-emails-from-turnitin-when-students-submit/>

How to ensure draft submissions avoid matches to final assignments:

When setting up a Turnitin assignment for draft submissions, make sure that the setting *Store Student Papers* has been set to **No repository** to prevent Turnitin from storing the student submission in the database. Changing this setting after students have already started submitting their drafts will affect only submissions made after the change. Any submissions made before you changed the setting to **No repository** will be stored in the Turnitin database and appear as a 100% match in the final submission. In cases where the final submission shows match with the draft one, contact digitalservices@brookes.ac.uk with the following information, so they can request the deletion of the draft submission on your behalf:

- Module run
- Name of the assignment (where the student work was submitted)
- Paper ID of the draft submission (you wish to remove)

More information on requesting the deletion of a Turnitin submission:

<https://telsupport.brookes.ac.uk/articles/how-do-i-remove-a-submission-from-the-turnitin-database/>

How to ensure more accurate originality reports (avoid cohort essay question and citations being included):

When setting up a Turnitin assignment make sure that the following settings have been configured as below:

- Check against stored student papers: Yes
- Check against internet: Yes

- Check against journals, periodicals and publications: Yes
- Exclude Bibliography: No
- Exclude Quoted Material: No
- Exclude Small Matches: leave blank*

*It is recommended not to exclude small matches as they can highlight good practice with academic phrases or could indicate other use of sources including attempts at paraphrasing problems.

Recommendations for interpreting Turnitin:

1. Never make judgements about student submissions in terms of marks or absence/presence of plagiarism **based on the overall similarity percentage**. It is always about what the match consists of. There is no ideal overall similarity, nor any figure below which an assignment is ok, and above which it is not ok.

Turnitin has both **false positives** (where matches are highlighted to text that is not problematic e.g. cover sheets, institutional addresses, reference lists, commonly used references, templates, quotations, appropriately cited tables, standard academic phrases etc.), and **false negatives** (where no matches are found, but markers may find similarity to texts by using other software or Google, or checking source texts themselves).

2. High scores do not necessarily indicate plagiarism: reasons could include lists of appendices or given tables, and extensive use of quotations. **Low scores** do not necessarily indicate absence of plagiarism, as Turnitin does not find all plagiarism, and essay writing companies are known to produce texts with 0% match. Low scores may also indicate poor or little research or use of sources, so students should not set out with the aim of keeping Turnitin scores low – they should set out with the **aim to write effectively with sources**.

3. More important than the overall similarity are the **highest ranked** sources in the breakdown of matches. If there are high individual matches, this may indicate plagiarism, or if correctly cited and formatted, may indicate over-reliance on sources, although there may still be understandable reasons for high matches.

4. The matches do not necessarily show the sources the student used; they show the **latest use of the words on the Turnitin database**. Very often, this means the use of words from a published source by another student; small matches to many other students' work just indicates that they are writing about the same subject using the same sources, it is not collusion.

How to respond to Turnitin UK paper view requests:

Paper view request emails are sent by Turnitin when instructors from other institutions are requesting to view a student paper which has been submitted to Oxford Brookes institutional repository. All users enrolled as 'Turnitin tutors' in an assignment will receive these emails. The majority of these requests refer to very small matches between student work which just indicates the same sources and therefore **should be ignored**.



More details on Turnitin paper view requests: <https://telsupport.brookes.ac.uk/articles/how-should-i-respond-to-turnitin-paper-view-requests/>

Where to get further support:

For help and guidance with using Turnitin, staff need to contact your Faculty's Digital Media and e-learning Developers (DMeLDs). When they are not available, contact Digital Services in Learning Resources: digitalservices@brookes.ac.uk.

Practical support - student section

How to use the draft submissions upload section:

Turnitin assignments (both for draft and final submissions) are signposted with the Turnitin logo . In cases where you need to submit a draft of your work, look for the Turnitin logo and the words "draft" or "draft check" or "draft submissions" etc in the title. Click on the Turnitin link to see the submission inbox and click **Submit Paper**  (right-hand side) to see the submission area:

1. Type the **submission title**.
2. Drag and drop the submission file from your computer onto the submission area (blue arrow looking downwards).
3. Click **Add Submission**.
4. Wait until you see the message **Your submission has successfully been uploaded to Turnitin** (in red) and a Turnitin submission id.
5. Click **Close** for the top-right hand corner.
6. Once the page refreshes you should see your submission and an originality percentage on the right.
7. Click on the originality percentage to access the originality report.

Note: You should also have received an email with information about your submission. You must keep this email for your records.

What to look for in the originality report:

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The originality report will show you a breakdown of all the matches that have been found on your submission, ordered by highest similarity match to lowest:

1. Click the numerical similarity score shown in red colour from the similarity layer on the right.
2. The *Match Overview* will appear to show you a list of matches in descending order. This will also show highlighted matches within the paper itself. Each match will be colour-coded to help you identify the matches in the paper.
3. Click on the *Match Overview* panel to see how many matches have been found for each source.
4. To see a match breakdown for each source, click the arrow to the right of the source, which will show you a list of all the sources relevant to this particular match. Click any of the matches shown to see which part of your paper they matched against.

How to amend assignment and prepare for final submission

Check all possible problems, especially avoid copying and pasting from sources: take notes and write in your own way. Avoid copying from other authors' reading: only cite texts you have read. Check references and citations very thoroughly so that they are consistent, and format quotes carefully, check for accuracy. Work on effective paraphrasing by using synonyms, changing word forms, changing word order and interpreting ideas from sources in your own way with your own views.

Do not change matches that are OK or good practice!

Where to get further support:

Check guidance from your module or programme. Also check the library resources, CiteThemRight to help you with referencing, and Upgrade for individual support with writing. See links below.

- Library <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/library/library-services/information-skills/citing-references-in-your-work-and-plagiarism/>
- CiteThemRight <https://www.citethemrightonline-com.oxfordbrookes.idm.oclc.org/>
- Upgrade <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/students/upgrade/>

Interpreting Turnitin matches:

Remember that Turnitin is only a text matching tool; staff marking assignments are the detectors of plagiarism. The **overall similarity percentage is not in itself an indicator of plagiarism** – it depends what the match consists of. Turnitin has both **false positives** (where matches are highlighted to text that is not problematic e.g. cover sheets, institutional addresses,

reference lists, commonly used references, templates, quotations, appropriately cited tables, standard academic phrases etc.), and **false negatives** (where no matches are found, but markers may find similarity to texts by using other software or Google, or checking source texts themselves). **High scores** do not necessarily indicate plagiarism: reasons could include lists of appendices or given tables, and extensive use of quotations. **Low scores** do not necessarily indicate absence of plagiarism, as Turnitin does not find all plagiarism, and essay writing companies are known to produce texts with 0% match. Low scores may also indicate poor or little research or use of sources, so do not set out with the aim of keeping Turnitin scores low – set out with the **aim to write effectively with sources**.

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Oxford Brookes University adheres to these principles as outlined in the above policy.

To follow in due course, we will provide two sets of guidelines:

- Students: How to Learn from a Turnitin Report
- Staff: How to Use Turnitin to Provide Feedback to Students

Approved by Quality and Learning Infrastructure Committee, February 2020
Minor updates made in June 2022, as approved by the Teaching & Learning Enhancement Committee on 19th May 2022 (see TLEC220519/13)