



## WHAT IS TURNITIN?

Turnitin is a web-based plagiarism prevention system used by most universities in the UK. There are three main uses of Turnitin:

- To act as a deterrent against plagiarism.
- To provide reports which can help identify occurrences of plagiarism.
- To provide students with a tool to identify and correct possible occurrences of plagiarism in their own work and improve their academic writing.

### How does Turnitin work?

A Turnitin assignment is set up by a lecturer, either through Queen Mary's online learning environment or directly at Turnitin's own website ([www.submit.ac.uk](http://www.submit.ac.uk)). Students then access this assignment online and upload their work before the due date. Turnitin will then analyse the submitted work to identify text matches with other sources, usually completing this task within a few minutes. Staff can also view the work that has been submitted and there is also an option to mark the work online and include grades and comments which can be returned to the student once all papers have been marked.

For each piece of submitted work, Turnitin provides two things:

- A *similarity index*, which indicates the percentage of the submitted paper that Turnitin has identified as being matched against other sources.
- An *originality report*, which shows each of these matches in more detail, including the source(s) that Turnitin has found. These can be websites, books, journals and articles, or work that has previously been submitted through Turnitin.

### WHAT OUR STUDENTS SAY



"I think Turnitin is a great idea. It offers a level playing field for all students to achieve their high grades without thinking that some students have got them through plagiarising."

Wilson Wong  
Genetics student  
Queen Mary, University of London

## Things you should know

- The most important thing to understand about Turnitin is that it does not directly identify plagiarism; instead it provides a report that allows students and staff to see where plagiarism **may** have occurred. No student would be accused of plagiarism without a member of staff first reviewing this report in detail to verify that there are indeed grounds for such an accusation based on reasonable academic judgement.
- When you submit work to Turnitin, it is usually stored within the Turnitin database so that it can be cross-checked against future submissions from other UK universities. You retain the copyright and intellectual property of all work that you submit. The makers of Turnitin also work closely with the UK Information Commissioner's Office to ensure that your work is used fairly and legally.
- The Turnitin database is very large and growing. Turnitin has agreements with many major publishers to include books, journal articles and conference proceedings when they are published. There is also an ongoing project to include many older, out-of-print and back-catalogue books and articles. However, Turnitin does not contain every word ever written, and so may miss some matches even where text has been copied from another source.
- Although a high originality index may indicate possible plagiarism and a low originality index **may** indicate original work, this is not always the case. In many subjects, learning the 'language of the discipline' is part of the university academic process, so it is highly likely – perhaps even desirable – that some matches will occur. The extent of this depends on the nature of the subject, how many quotations you use and your own academic writing style.
- Do not aim for a specific originality index that you think will be low enough to avoid detection. Accusations of plagiarism can occur even if only a small amount of text is copied. Instead aim for academically sound writing with all your sources properly acknowledged.
- Turnitin is only one of the tools used to identify possible occurrences of plagiarism. Don't forget that your work will also be read by subject experts with years of experience in marking student work. They are able to spot instances of plagiarism even where electronic systems such as Turnitin do not.