**Turnitin FAQ**

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**Pedagogical**

**What is plagiarism?**

Plagiarism is theft of ideas. Authors maintain ownership of their ideas after their work has been published and made available to anyone to read. This applies to online content as well. To take someone else’s ideas and present it as your own without giving credit to the source of the ideas is plagiarism. Rewriting someone else words is not plagiarism as long as it is referenced. Direct quotations is not plagiarism as long as it is referenced.

In a research based institute, theft of ideas is not the only problem, but the secondary issue is that of accountability as well as the integrity of the information you provide. Even if an author is not caught plagiarising, he or she may attempt to publish information that turns out to be incorrect or incomplete and without citing the sources, all accountability for the faulty information falls on the plagiarising author.
How does Turnitin work?

Once a document is submitted to Turnitin, the system compares the text of a document with a vast database and calculates the text similarity with other digital sources. An originality report is then generated which outlines the text in the document that were matched with other digital sources in Turnitin’s database. It also provides the percentage of the overall similarity the document has with other sources. Whether these matches are in fact plagiarism is up to the facilitator or grader to judge.

Are all originality report matches plagiarism?

No, statistically it is impossible to write a document of any length and not use phrases that have not been used in the same word order before. Aside from expressions native in any language, subject specific terminology, expressions and descriptions will also be detected. But these are coincidental and does not mean that these expressions have been plagiarised from a different source.

To prevent these small matches from influencing the overall similarity report, add filters like the Exclude small matches wherein you can set the assignment to ignore strings of similar text of, say, 5 words.

Does Turnitin prevent plagiarism?

No, nor does it pin-point the exact instance of plagiarism. Turnitin can only indicate text similarity and flag instances of copy and paste. If plagiarised text is paraphrased Turnitin will not be able to detect it. It still falls to the facilitator or grader to identify whether sources are acknowledged.

User based

How do I access Turnitin?

Usually the facilitator of a module will set up a Turnitin based assignment in SUNLearn (activity: Turnitin Assignment 2). Students just click on the assignment link and submit their work. Turnitin checks the similarity and provides a report.

If you are a facilitator and need to set up an assignment, contact the SUNLearn support office at learn@sun.ac.za or 021 808 2222 or follow the online instructions on the Facilitator Training page on SUNLearn.

If you are a student and need access to Turnitin, first check with your facilitator whether an assignment has already been set up, otherwise contact the SUNLearn support office.
What is the difference between the due date and post-date?

The due date is the official date when the assignment closes and after which new submissions are not accepted (however, the assignment can be set to allow submissions after the due date if leniency is granted).

The post-date is when any marks or comments from the built-in Grademark tool will be displayed.

I submitted my document, but it doesn’t generate a report. It just says “pending”.

The first time you submit a document in a Turnitin assignment the report is generated relatively quickly (2 – 20 minutes), depending on the size of the document. If the assignment is set to allow for resubmissions, you can tweak your document and resubmit it. Every resubmission will take 24 hours to generate a new report. This is set by Turnitin.com and we have no control over it.

Why does resubmissions take 24 hours to generate reports?

According to Turnitin, this time restriction prevents the students from “wordsmithing”, i.e. resubmitting and tweaking the document to the letter, over and over, until a favourable report is generated. Students are now limited to one resubmission a day until the due date and have to make the best of their revisions. This encourages students to write well from the beginning.

Can I use Turnitin to check my own work and not because a lecturer requires it?

Yes, we have several Turnitin modules on SUNLearn in which students can submit their own work in preparation for a finalised submission somewhere else. These modules are set not to store the submission on Turnitin’s own database so that when the document is submitted somewhere else, it does not generate a 100% originality report.

To request access to one of these open or “sandbox” modules, contact the SUNLearn support office at learn@sun.ac.za or 021 808 2222.

What is an acceptable originality percentage?

There isn’t a single originality percentage that determines what is allowed and what isn’t. It depends on the facilitator, the department and even faculty. However, to use the originality report as a cut off measurement (documents with reports of X% and more is not accepted) is not the recommended method to use Turnitin. The facilitator must still look at the report and render final judgement. Text that seemingly is copied and pasted may be referenced correctly as a direct quote, while paraphrased text may not be referenced at all and is therefore plagiarised.
I submitted my document and Turnitin gave a 100% originality report. What happened and what must I do?

In all likelihood, this document was submitted earlier in a different assignment. The document was stored on the Turnitin database and is now listed as a 100% match for originality.

Contact the SUNLearn support office at learn@sun.ac.za or 021 808 2222 and provide the name of the module and assignment of the submission that should be removed as well as the submission that should be the official version. The SUNLearn support team will then draw the Paper ID of the incorrect submission and send in a request to Turnitin.com to remove that document from their database.

My document is submitted, it has a Paper ID, but it’s not shown as pending or submitted with a report.

Your document was submitted, but Turnitin cannot read or open it. Check for the following:

- Any error messages that may give more information.
- Your document isn’t more than 20MB in size.
- Your document contains readable text. If a printed document is scanned in, it will probably be scanned as an image, even if it is converted to a PDF document. Turnitin won’t be able to read the text and will not accept it.
- Your document is readable by Turnitin. This includes MS Word (.doc, .docx), Word Perfect, HTML, PDF, Text and Rich Text (.txt, .rtf) formats. Turnitin cannot read native Apple Mac formats (.pages).
- Your document has a file extension.

Once the (potential) problem has been identified, apply a fix and try to resubmit. This resubmission may now take 24 hours to show a report, but once the document shows “pending” it has been accepted and a report will be generated.

Sources and additional reading material

http://turnitin.com/en_int/features/originalitycheck
http://turnitin.com/en_us/features/faqs