Quick Staff Guide: Turnitin Similarity Detection Software

Turnitin similarity checker is the software used by HWU to help in the detection of plagiarism and collusion. The software searches the internet and assignment databases for matching text. A similarity report is then produced which highlights identical sequences of text, details which sources they match to, and provides an overall similarity percentage for the submitted work.

**Turnitin is a similarity checker, not a plagiarism detector**

Some students may believe there is a threshold percentage below which the work is considered to be plagiarism free; anything over that percentage indicates plagiarism. **This is NOT true** and can lead to student practices that will harm the quality of their work (e.g., repetitive use of paraphrasing to reduce the similarity score).

A high Turnitin score does not necessarily mean plagiarism has occurred. Submissions with many quotes, a long reference list, or an appendix may increase the similarity of a document, but this is not evidence that a student has passed another’s work off as their own. Equally a low score is not evidence that plagiarism has not occurred. Students may be using detection avoidance strategies or may have plagiarised one specific part of a document representing a small overall percentage of their submission, thus resulting in a lower score.

All Turnitin reports, regardless of similarity score must be checked by the marker to ensure plagiarism has not occurred.

**How to use Turnitin Tools**

There are several tools available in Turnitin that aid in the detection of plagiarism and collusion. The table below explains how each tool should be used.

| Accessing the report: Turnitin similarity reports can be accessed via Speed Grader in Canvas. Next to all submissions, there should be a coloured box with a percentage score. Clicking on this box takes you to the report. Note the assignment should be set as a ‘Turnitin Assignment’ to be able to access the report. | ![43% - C18MT.pdf](image) |
| Source Matches: The report will show the student’s submission with similarity highlighted and numbered. A column on the right-hand side of the screen contains tools to use. To inspect for similarity, click the tab indicating the overall similarity score which will open the ‘Match overview’ screen. | ![Match Overview](image) |
| Accessing & Isolating Sources: From the ‘match overview’ tab, clicking on a source will take you to the first instance of highlighted similarity and a box will appear. From here: Clicking the left and right arrows will take you through all instances of similarity of that source. Clicking the link heading of the box opens a new tab with the original source. Clicking the ‘full source view’ button in the top right corner of the box, shows the report with only that source similarity highlighted. | ![newsroom.hilton.com](image) |
Student Paper Sources:
Some sources will match to ‘student papers’ from other Universities. This is usually not an indication that the student has taken work from a student at another University, it is an errant result from Turnitin’s similarity matching algorithm. Students from different Universities may have taken work from the same source. In these cases, rather than similarity being attributed to that original source, similarity is attributed to the submission of another student who has copied the same work. Taking the highlighted section and putting it into quotation marks into an internet search engine will usually reveal the original work.

If there is no match, this could indicate collusion with someone outside of the University. By clicking on the matching source, you can request access to the similar document.

Red flags:
Turnitin’s algorithms can at times detect suspicious inconsistencies in a submission, that are attempts to avoid similarity detection. These can include character swapping and using hidden text between words. In such cases, Turnitin raises a red flag for you to investigate.

Filters:
Turnitin allows you to include/exclude quotes and reference lists if these are reducing/raising similarity to an extent where a true read of the source document cannot be given.

For more information refer to Turnitin’s webpage on filters: https://help.turnitin.com/ithenticate/ithenticate-user/the-similarity-report/filters-and-exclusions.htm

Exclude sources:
Staff also have the option to exclude individual sources if these are interfering with reading the document. This is especially useful if the student has inadvertently uploaded their submission twice, sometimes to different Canvas courses.