Using Turnitin originality checking to practise academic integrity

What is in this guide

- Nine tips for using originality checking to improve your writing before submitting work for assessment
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Tip 1: Don't panic: Originality reports provide feedback on your writing

At SCU originality reports are made available to students so they can be used as a learning tool, to improve academic writing and avoid plagiarism.

The originality report provides **feedback on your writing** *before* **you submit assignments**. The key is to use information in the originality report to **edit and improve** your use of paraphrases, direct quotes, and referencing.

Tip 2: Submit a final draft of your assignment through Turnitin early as possible

The originality report will give you **the most useful feedback about your writing** if you submit a **final draft**.

A final draft should meet the assignment marking criteria and contain:

- proper sentences
- coherent paragraphs
- correct in-text referencing
- a complete and correct references list.

Turnitin will generate an originality report within a few minutes the **first time** you submit work, but it will take **up to 24 hours** for an originality report to be generated if you submit your work through the same drop-box again (a second or third time).

Tip 3: Allow enough time in your study schedule for editing phases using the originality report

To make the most of feedback about your writing provided in originality reports you need to allow enough time to edit your assignments. Include originality reports into editing phases concerned with effective use of sources and referencing.

Editing phases can improve your writing by **up to two grades**. Generally, allow at least 2 or 3 hours to edit an assessment task (or up to ¼ of the total time it takes to produce the piece of work).

Tip 4: Don't worry too much about the Similarity Index

Try not to focus on the Similarity Index (the percentage score at the top right hand corner of the report). This percentage can be easily skewed by settings used by your lecturer (for example including/excluding direct quotes and list of references), and by the use of an assignment cover sheet.

There is **no 'safe' score**, or match percentage that indicates the assignment is free of plagiarism. Turnitin **cannot detect plagiarism**. It works by matching text (strings of words) in your assignment with sources held in the Turnitin database.

Tip 5: Focus on the highlighted sections of your writing in the originality report

You will need to carefully interpret originality reports. The key is to **focus on the highlighted sections of your writing** (see the left hand side of the report). The report highlights sections of your work that match sources held in the Turnitin database.

Carefully examine highlighted sections of your writing where you have used information, ideas, or words from sources.

Not every instance of highlighted text is a cause for concern. For example, the originality report may highlight assignment cover sheets, assignment questions, commonly used disciplinary language, correctly referenced direct quotes, and references lists. This means **you** need to interpret each highlighted section in the originality report to make sure paraphrases and direct quotations are correctly used, and referencing is consistent.

Tip 6: Interpret highlighted sections: ask if matched text is the result of 'disciplinary language'?

Ask yourself if matches in the originality report are instances of 'disciplinary language' and common phrases relevant to your topic. Disciplinary language includes the specialised terms and concepts (abstract ideas) used in your field of study. Often the sources you have used to write the assignment will also use common phrases and terms to discuss and explain issues.

These kinds of matches are good thing, and are expected in university assignments. This is because academic writing involves drawing upon existing knowledge on the topic, and using the language and concepts of the field.

Instances of matched-text caused by disciplinary language are usually quite small (usually no more than 4-6 words).

Examples of disciplinary language and common phrases include:

- Disciplinary concepts (abstract ideas)
- Phrases and specialist terms commonly used in existing knowledge about your assignment topic
- Titles of conferences, government policy, legislation, committees and so on.

If the highlighted section is disciplinary language you do not need to edit your work. Use this as a chance to check you have:

- clarified and referenced disciplinary concepts before using them
- acknowledged when using ideas, information, data, or words from a source (via referencing).

Tip 7: Check highlighted direct quotes are correct and referenced

Make sure you double-check highlighted quotes. Direct quotes are word for word extracts from sources. Depending on the originality checking settings, quotes could be highlighted even though they are referenced properly. The solution is to make sure you have used quotes correctly according to your referencing style guide.

- Is the quote correct (does it match the original source word for word)?
- Is the quote formatted according to your referencing style (for short and long quotes)?
- Does the referencing information provided in-text include author, year, and page number?

Tip 8: Re-work highlighted paraphrases in your assignment

It is very common for paraphrases to be highlighted in originality reports. This happens where the phrasing is too similar to the original source (just a word or two have been changed around).

Paraphrasing is where you put the meaning of the source into your own words. When you find a highlighted paraphrase it is important to re-work the phrasing and reference appropriately.

Follow these five steps to edit and improve your paraphrasing:

I. Make sure you are paraphrasing small sections (one sentence not a page) while learning to write academically.
II. Re-read the original source to make sure you understand what the author is saying.

III. Try to ignore the wording (phrasing) used in the original source. Instead, focus on the idea or point being made. Cover the original source (so you will not be tempted to keep the same phrasing) and edit the paraphrase.

IV. After you have re-worked the paraphrase, re-visit the original source to make sure you have kept the meaning of the original source.

V. Check your referencing against the referencing style guide. Have you provided correct referencing details in-text (author and year of publication)? Is this source also noted in your list of references?

Tip 9: Edit referencing using a referencing style guide and the originality report

Turnitin cannot recognise whether your referencing is correct or consistent. It does not have this capacity. This means it is up to you to double-check your referencing is correct and consistent.

Practising academic integrity means carefully acknowledging when you use others' work, and clearly showing where your work ends and others' work begins. This means, every time you use ideas, information, data, examples, claims, or words from sources you need to acknowledge this via referencing.

Each source cited (referenced) in your assignment needs to be included in the references list (provided at the end of the assignment).

Make sure you download (and print if possible) the set referencing style guide. Check in-text referencing, and your reference list against the style guide.

Related Quick Guides

Student academic integrity: An introduction, Practising academic integrity: An introduction to referencing, Practising academic integrity: How to define and use concepts in your writing, Practising academic integrity: How to use pararphrases in your writing, Practising academic integrity: How to include direct quotations in your writing

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