Using Turnitin: Initial Support, Advice and Resources

# For note

This document has been developed for students studying in the Southampton Business School, where the policy (at the time of publication) for the academic year 2019-20 is to allow students to upload drafts of their assignments to Turnitin before the due date and before submitting their final version for some (although possibly not all) assignments. If you are not studying within the Southampton Business School, but your own School or discipline similarly allows you to upload drafts to Turnitin and see the similarity report for some assignments, then the following information may also be helpful to you.

# Context

From feedback from students, particularly in induction sessions, it is clear that Turnitin is something new to many of our students. In light of this, please find below some initial information, suggested support materials/resources and advice to get you started.

# Key messages

* **Turnitin matches text:** Turnitin is a tool which matches text to sources in its database;
* **Turnitin generates a report:** Turnitin generates a similarity report which highlights the matching text and the sources;
* **Turnitin doesn't specifically identify plagiarism:** Turnitin does not tell us if any matching text is plagiarised, tutors (and you if you can view the similarity report) make that decision;
* **Uploading drafts before the deadline:** In some Schools and disciplines at the University you can sometimes upload drafts of your assignments via the module BlackBoard before the assignment due date and review the similarity report;
* **The Turnitin report can help you identify some areas for improvement:** If you are given access to see the similarity report generated by Turnitin you can use it to help you ensure that your work cites and references your sources appropriately. The similarity report can also help you to identify if there is an appropriate amount of your own thoughts, ideas, analysis and conclusions evident within your assignment;
* **Don’t focus on the score:** Don't focus on the similarity percentage score or simply make amendments in order to try and reduce the score – there is no magic number to aim at;
* **Upload drafts early:** If you are allowed to upload drafts to Turnitin before uploading your final submission, make sure that you upload your draft early so that there is plenty of time to seek help and advice and/or to make changes before uploading your final version;
* **Upload the correct final version:** Make sure that you upload the correct version of your assignment for your final submission before the deadline – you might not be allowed to change it to a different version after the deadline;
* **Multiple uploads not always allowed:** If your School or discipline does not allow students to upload drafts before submitting their final version for some or all assignments then the system may be set so that only one upload can be made. Hence you will need to check with your tutor or School Office to see if you are allowed to upload a draft version and see the similarity report;
* **Seek help with plenty of time before the final submission deadline:** If you get your similarity report back and you have any concerns then your first port of call would usually be the module leader in the first instance, although some Schools and disciplines may have other people you should seek help from, for example, your personal tutor. The Library Skills Hub may also be able to give you help and advice.

# Information and Advice

The following provides information and advice for students studying in the Southampton Business School about Turnitin and using the similarity report. It may be relevant to other students if your School or discipline also allows you to do this.

You will be submitting written work for an assessment electronically via your module Blackboards and in doing so your work will automatically go through Turnitin. Turnitin is a tool which matches the text in your assignment with other source material such as internet sites, journal articles and previously submitted assignments which are held on the Turnitin database. It then generates a similarity report[[1]](#footnote-1) which shows all of these matches (see [Does Turnitin Detect Plagiarism?](https://www.turnitin.com/blog/does-turnitin-detect-plagiarism) for some information from a Turnitin blog about whether it actually detects plagiarism). Turnitin can be used in different ways, for example:

* In the Southampton Business School students are allowed to upload drafts of their written work before the deadline and see the similarity report which is generated for some assignments. You can then use this to help you ensure that your work cites and references your sources appropriately. The report might also help you to think about making other changes which will improve your work – see some of the advice we give further on in this document;
* Tutors will review the similarity report of your final submission to check for plagiarism. It is important to note that the similarity report shows up the matching text and their sources, it does not tell us if the matching text is plagiarised, we as tutors need to decide that for ourselves. This is not the only way we identify plagiarism, of course, but Turnitin is certainly a very useful tool which can help us.

The University of Southampton has some helpful guides for students which explain a bit more about Turnitin and how to use it, e.g. how to submit an assessment through Blackboard, how to view the report generated by Turnitin when it is available. You will also find useful tips such as ‘tips on uploading Excel files to Turnitin’, so check out the [University of Southampton’s Turnitin and plagiarism advice for students](https://elearn.southampton.ac.uk/blackboard/student/studentplagiarism/) webpage.

Turnitin also has some very helpful student guides. If you go to the [Feedback Studio Student](https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/student/student-category.htm) webpage and scroll down you will find several helpful links under the Similarity Report heading.

**Important:** Please note that any examples given by Turnitin will help you to understand how the ‘settings’ might affect the report and the highlights which you might see. We have standard settings which we use across all of our modules and hence please do not ask your tutor to change them. When you review your similarity report, however, you might wish to change some of the filters and settings for your own view of the report as described on some of the Turnitin webpages.

# Some Important Points to Remember

* **Upload drafts early**: If you are to get the most out of submitting a draft then you need to submit it well ahead of the deadline so that you have plenty of time to make changes;
* **The similarity report takes time to come back:** An important note which you will see on the University’s [Advice for students](https://elearn.southampton.ac.uk/blackboard/student/studentplagiarism/) webpage is:

“Please note that if you are re-submitting work to Turnitin (and your tutor has allowed students to see their originality reports), your new originality report will not be available until 24 hours after re-submitting. This rule is usually enforced following your third re-submission.”

* **It is not all about trying to lower your similarity score:** In the majority of your assignments you are most certainly going to want to show that you have done your research and reading, use quotes to illustrate and back-up the points that you are making and acknowledge where ideas have come from. It is only to be expected, therefore, that your similarity report and score will reflect this. So don't focus on the score itself but rather look carefully at the text which has been highlighted/matched and decide if anything needs to be changed;
* **It is not all about trying to get below a particular score:** There is no ‘magic score’ to aim for, so focus on the matching text and decide what, if anything, would benefit from and amendment rather than trying to change the text to lower your score.

# Where to start – two key areas to consider first

* **Check to see if you have any highlighted text which doesn’t acknowledge the source or reference it correctly:** If you have any unacknowledged text showing up in your report then you need to decide whether to place it in quote marks (“inverted commas”) and acknowledge it correctly, delete it, or rewrite it as a paraphrase but with appropriate acknowledgement. Remember that any direct/copied quote (text or from any other type of source, e.g. verbal) must have quote marks around it[[2]](#footnote-2) and the source acknowledged within the main body of the assignment. Even if you decide to paraphrase it you must still acknowledge the source. For anything acknowledged in your assignment (as either a direct quote or paraphrase), then the full reference must also be given in the reference list at the end of the assignment. Remember that the Southampton Business School asks students to use the Harvard referencing system and you have access through the library web pages (see the [Library’s Citing and referencing home page](http://library.soton.ac.uk/sash/referencing)) to ‘Cite Them Right’ which can help you with this;
* **Consider if the report shows that there isn’t much of your own work, thoughts and ideas in the assignment:** If a lot of your assignment has been highlighted as matching text then this would suggest that there isn’t much of your own work, thoughts and ideas contained within it. Even if it is referenced correctly, consider if this is going to make a good piece of work – is that what your tutor is looking for? If not then it would be a good idea to amend your assignment to add in more of your own thinking and perhaps reduce the amount of work directly coming from other sources. The key is to get the balance right – an essay simply pulled together using a lot of quotes isn’t likely to be very good, not least because it isn’t likely to flow very well, but importantly because your own synthesis, analysis and conclusions won’t be very evident.

# Who to go to for help

If you get your similarity report back and you have any concerns then your first port of call would usually be the module leader – but make sure that you aren’t contacting them close to the deadline as by then it will be too late for them to be able to help you. In addition to the module leader there may be other people you can go to for help, for example, your personal tutor and the staff in the Library’s Skills Hub. There may even be peer advisors around who can give you some advice.

# And finally

Good luck with your assessments and seek help quickly if you have any problems.

1. You might hear or see some people refer to it as an ‘originality’ report. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Note that long quotes are often separated, indented and blocked. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)