Good Practice Guide on use of text matching software (TurnItIn)

This guide relates to the use of the text matching software Turnitin by staff and students at the University of Western Australia (UWA). It promotes the educative use of the software for students to enhance their academic practices and in the development of an institutional culture of academic integrity. When used as a tool to indicate potential plagiarism in students’ work, this guide should be read in conjunction with the University Policy on Academic Conduct.

What is Turnitin text-matching software?

Text-matching software analyses submitted work and identifies sections of text which match electronic sources on the internet, in electronic publications, and in other students’ work. It is a tool to assist in identifying plagiarism as well as one to help students improve their academic writing by increasing their awareness of how effectively they are incorporating external sources and referencing them.

UWA has a license for University staff and students to use the Turnitin commercial software. It is available as an activity within an LMS unit and set up by academic staff.

How Turnitin works

Turnitin matches electronic text publically available on the internet.

Turnitin will not match texts from sources such as books that are not digitally available, journals that Turnitin does not subscribe to, text that has been converted to an image, material that is password protected on intranets, material that has been electronically translated from a non-English source, or work written by someone else (ghost writing). Turnitin will not check specialised text such as graphics, formulae and software coding. Other software products may support these uses for disciplines where such text is integral.

Turnitin is neither the only nor a definitive method of identifying plagiarism. It assists in signalling poor academic practice and should be used judiciously by staff in the cases of suspected plagiarism. It is not appropriate for all student assignments.

Good practice #1: Academic staff determine whether Turnitin is appropriate for each assignment.

Good practice #2: Academic staff use other supporting evidence in suspected cases of plagiarism.

Turnitin generates an originality report that identifies all areas of the submitted work that are similar or the same as content as sources in the Turnitin repository.

Good practice #3: For future content-matching effectiveness, staff should set the TurnItIn submission activity so that work submitted to Turnitin is added to the Turnitin world database.

Turnitin provides a similarity index for each piece of work, which represents the percentage of the assignment that matches text in other sources. High scores should always be investigated further; for lower scores, the similarity index provides limited information. The figure that might be expected for an assignment can vary greatly depending on

• the nature of the assignment
• the use by students of non-electronic source materials
• the options chosen when setting up the assignment (e.g. excluding the bibliography or small matches).

Viewing the similarity index with the originality report provides a breakdown of all the areas of content match (with the largest listed first) and highlights the matching text in the student’s work. A high similarity index may have an originality report showing a large number of small matches, each properly cited, whereas an assignment with a lower index may have a significant section plagiarised from a single source.

**Good Practice #4:** Staff do not identify or communicate to students an ideal, minimum or maximum score for the similarity index.

**Good Practice #5:** Originality report and similarity index are viewed together to determine whether plagiarism is suspected.

For detailed support in using *Turnitin* please refer to the *Turnitin* section of the [LMS Staff Help Site](#).

**Good practice in using *Turnitin* at UWA by role and responsibility**

UWA’s approach to the use of *Turnitin* is one of promoting academic integrity in an educative context.

**Good Practice #6:** *Turnitin* is used in conjunction with supporting practices and attitudes, such as correct referencing and citation styles, copyright management, and information literacy.

**Overall responsibilities**

Faculties, in conjunction with the central bodies including the Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL), University Library and Student Services, clearly communicate to staff and students the role of *Turnitin* as both an educative tool and a means of confirming originality of submitted work. Staff articulate to students the process and procedures related to the use of *Turnitin* in their courses and units.

**Deans / Heads of School**

Under the guidance of Deans, Associate Deans, and Heads of Schools, Faculties and Schools are responsible for developing policy on the role and use of *Turnitin*.

**Good Practice #7:** Faculties develop locally-specific policy on the role and use of *Turnitin*.

**Good Practice #8:** Faculties / Schools communicate the policy to their staff and students in appropriate locations such as School or Faculty websites, handbooks, and other relevant places.

**Course Coordinators**

Developing student knowledge and effective practice in academic integrity is an educative process that requires focus and experience in student learning over time.

**Good Practice #9:** Students engage with *Turnitin* as often as possible in their first year of study at university.

**Good Practice #10:** Students have the opportunity to learn about *Turnitin* and learn from those experiences.

**Good Practice #11:** Given Good Practice #1, Course coordinators should ensure all students have the opportunity to use *Turnitin* in at least one level one unit. At UWA, with New Courses, this practically would mean that all level one courses use *Turnitin* to ensure no student misses the opportunity to learn. Where
another content-matching software is available and more relevant for a particular discipline, then Good Practice 11 should be applied to that software.

Unit Coordinators
Unit coordinators are responsible for ensuring that students learn about how Turnitin works, how to learn from originality reports, how to use it, its role in plagiarism detection.

Good Practice #12: Unit coordinators identify all assignments within their units that are compatible with the functions of Turnitin and use where appropriate.

Good Practice #13: Unit coordinators ensure that students are fully aware of the requirements regarding the Turnitin assignment by listing them in the unit outline, on LMS, and other appropriate avenues for the dissemination of unit based information to students.

Note: Turnitin support for students that is available within the Turnitin topic of the LMS Student Help Site and the STUDYSmarter Turnitin Survival Guide.

Good Practice #14: Unit coordinators provide students, particularly in Level 1 units, with the opportunity to check draft assignments using Turnitin, for educative purposes.

Good Practice #15: Draft submissions with an educational intent are not set for inclusion in the Turnitin databank – this is to allow students to trial and learn with confidence, and technically as once an assessment item is submitted in the database it will treat the final submission as a near complete copy and interrupt the integrity of the originality report.

Good Practice #16: Student final draft submissions are technically enabled so that they are added to the Turnitin world database to support the integrity of the process.

Good Practice #17: Unit coordinators communicate to students that submitted work, in particular final submitted versions, will be added to the Turnitin database.

Good Practice #18: Unit coordinators ensure that all teaching staff within the unit are informed and trained in the use of Turnitin and are aware of their role and responsibilities in relation to alleged academic misconduct.

Good Practice #19: Unit Coordinators who suspect plagiarism in an assignment where there is no accompanying originality report request an electronic copy of the student’s work if submitted in hardcopy or run the student’s work through Turnitin themselves to generate an originality report.

Good Practice #20: Unit Coordinators follow the procedure outlined in the University Policy on Academic Conduct, Procedures, Item 3.2 in cases of suspected plagiarism supported by a Turnitin report.

Good Practice #21: Unit Coordinators gather other supporting evidence and do not rely solely on text-matching software as the only evidence of potential plagiarism.
Other teaching staff (including sessional staff, tutors, demonstrators, etc)
All other staff have a role to inform and educate students, and report on suspected cases of plagiarism as appropriate to the Unit Coordinator. All staff with a teaching oriented role in an LMS unit (lecturer, tutor, non-grading tutor) have access to Turnitin through the LMS.

**Good Practice #22:** Teaching staff familiarise themselves with the use and limitations of Turnitin particularly in relation to interpretation of text match reports.

Detailed information is available in the Turnitin section of the LMS Staff Help site.

**Good Practice #23:** Teaching staff ensure that students are aware of the use of Turnitin and where necessary direct them to Turnitin support for students that is available within the Turnitin topic of the LMS Student Help Site and the STUDYSmarter Turnitin Survival Guide.

Academic Conduct Advisers (ACA)

**Good Practice #24:** Academic Conduct Advisers respond to reports of suspected plagiarism based on a Turnitin report by carefully reviewing the originality report and seeking further supporting evidence outside the Turnitin text matching process.

For further information about Turnitin and support available, staff should refer to the Turnitin section of the LMS Staff Help site.

**Support for UWA Staff and Students**

**STAFF**

*Self-access information:*
- CATL Turnitin Webpage
- LMS Staff Help site

*In Person*

E: help-elearning@uwa.edu.au, P: 6488 8190

Demonstrations in your School/Faculty or at CATL workshops


**STUDENTS**

*Self-access information:*
- AskUWA
- LMS Student Help Site
- STUDYSmarter Turnitin Survival Guide

*In Person:*

E: askuwa-is@uwa.edu.au

Via library staff in subject libraries,

Unit Co-ordinator, Lecturer or Tutor