# The University of Manchester

**What is the Originality Report?**

The University uses an electronic system, Turnitin, to identify similarities between text in a submitted assignment and that in other sources, to assist staff in identifying potential plagiarism. An Originality Report is generated.

The Originality Report provides a summary of matching or highly similar text in a submitted assignment with text in Turnitin’s repository of previously submitted work, active & archived internet information & electronic periodicals & journals.

Any match found will be highlighted on the Originality Report. This will result in an overall % score as well as a % score for the text attributed to individual sources. The % scores are calculated from the number of words taken from a source compared to the total number of words in the assignment.

The Originality Report is NOT a plagiarism report. Originality Reports help you readily locate potential plagiarism.

Academic judgement **must** be used to determine whether or not the highlighted text in the assignment has been correctly cited and referenced. Highlighted text in the Originality Report is just unoriginal.

Many resources are not in the Turnitin repository and you should use the Originality Report in conjunction with traditional methods to detect suspected plagiarism.

**Guidance for Staff on Interpreting Turnitin Originality Reports**

This Guidance should also be read in conjunction with the [Academic Malpractice Procedure](https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=639) and the [Contract Cheating Toolkit](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/umitl/teaching-toolkits/contract-cheating-toolkit/) on the Institute of Teaching and Learning’s website.

The University’s definition of academic malpractice is:

“*…any activity – intentional or otherwise - that is likely to undermine the integrity essential to scholarship and research. It includes plagiarism, collusion, fabrication or falsification of results, contract cheating and anything else that could result in unearned or undeserved credit for those committing it. Academic malpractice can result from a deliberate act of cheating or may be committed unintentionally. Whether intended or not, all incidents of academic malpractice will be treated seriously by the University*.”

## The Similarity % Score

Originality Reports need to be carefully interpreted; they are simply a tool to help you find sources that contain text similar to the submitted assignment.

The % scores are colour coded for ease; however there is no target % score to look for. 1% matched text in a 12,000 word dissertation would contain the same number of matched words as 12% matched text in a 1000 word essay.

Low % scores do not necessarily mean that there is no plagiarism; high % scores do not necessarily mean that the assignment contains plagiarism.

Substantial quotes used in an assignment may increase the % score, even if these are properly cited and referenced.

Low % scores MAY mask academic malpractice if:

* the matched text is the key idea/conclusion from a longer piece of work.
* paraphrased or summarised work is used without acknowledgement.

Higher % scores require further investigation because they MAY indicate:

* poor academic writing.
* a mere lack of knowledge and understanding of how to cite sources properly.
* overuse of quotations.
* Plagiarism.

You should look to see if the matched text is properly cited, referenced and in an appropriate academic style.

**Things to note**, Turnitin:

* does not look beyond the first source it finds (best match), which might not be the original source material. Putting the passage into a search engine usually helps identify the potential original source.
* finds it difficult to recognise matches where many small changes have been made to the copied text.
* does not always find everything.

**Poor Academic Practice or Plagiarism?**

A single instance of the copying or close paraphrasing of two or three sentences of perhaps no more than 50 words in total of someone else's material, without direct acknowledgement, or the reproduction of a single unacknowledged diagram should not necessarily be regarded as plagiarism. These might better be described as ‘poor academic practice’, rather than malpractice. In such cases, students should be informed why they fall below the standards required, and should then have a mark applied based on the assessment criteria. The assessment criteria explicitly mention the need for the use of quotation marks, referencing and the provision of a full bibliography, so the absence of these may resultantly lead to a lower mark. To note, this is not a penalty for the student, it is just applying a mark reflective of the examiner’s academic judgement of the standard of the work.

Similarly, it would be unhelpful to classify one or two unsubstantiated results in an extended series of otherwise verifiable results as evidence of falsification or fabrication. Students should be made aware of the need fully to document all programmes of investigation and research and with any mark applied through normal assessment procedures and based on the examiner’s academic judgement.

In coming to a professional judgement in cases of possible academic malpractice, it is appropriate to consider both the nature of the assignment and the year of the student in question; assignments subject to formative assessment only should be used constructively to encourage good academic practice and first-year undergraduate students may expect a greater degree of understanding compared to final-year or postgraduate students.

## Things to consider in deciding if work is poor academic practice or plagiarism

* has the student attempted to reference the source?
* does the reference list match any of the sources in the Originality Report?
* are there long sections of completely unreferenced text?
* are there inconsistencies in style, layout, font or writing style?

## Turnitin Originality Checks (general guidance)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Turnitin % Match | Comments |
| 0 – 19% | High scores in this range would normally be considered to reflect poor academic practice. This is unlikely to be considered ‘plagiarism’ unless a significant proportion of the text has come from a single or very limited number of sources. You should mark  the assessment as seen taking account of poor academic practice if appropriate. |
| 20 – 40% with less than 10% from one source | This score would suggest poor academic practice and would require some further consideration. We would normally expect some reflection of poor academic practice in the mark awarded for the piece of assessment. The feedback for the essay should include some reference to poor academic practice and give students an indication of how to improve their practice in the future. If you are in doubt about the severity of  academic malpractice, you should speak to your School Officer for advice. |
| 20-40% with at least 10% from one source | Papers where the % of matched text is between 20-40% and at least 10% comes from one source should be marked and then forwarded to your School Officer who will make  a decision about the extent of poor academic practice/plagiarism. |
| >40% with at least 10% from one source | Where there is clear evidence that more than 40% of the paper is not original and at least 10% comes from “one or two” sources, the paper should be referred to your  School Officer. |
| If in doubt | Contact your Authorised University Officer (AUO) (\*see para below) |

**What do I do if I suspect academic malpractice?**

All suspected cases of academic malpractice should be marked up by you to show the location and extent of relevant passages and their possible original sources, then referred in the first instance with the reasons for your suspicions to the AUO in your School. \*This will usually be a specific Academic Malpractice Officer, Programme Director or the PS Teaching and Learning colleagues may be able to signpost you. The AUO will determine what action should be taken depending on whether they judge that the case does or does not constitute academic malpractice.

It is important to try and prevent academic malpractice by promoting, and educating students on, good academic practice. Use the assessment and feedback processes to pick up on poor academic practice, and only refer onwards where you feel the work displays academic malpractice.

**Checklist when reviewing suspected plagiarism**

This checklist may help examiners compile their thoughts as to why they think a piece of work may constitute malpractice. This checklist should be sent to the Authorised University Officer with the Turnitin Originality Report and sources of concern.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Examiner name** |  |
| **Assessment unit / title** |  |
| How much is the assessment worth of the unit e.g. 50% of a 10 credit unit |  |
| What similarity score was returned by Turnitin? |  |
| How much of the similarity score do you consider could represent malpractice? |  |
| Which are the main sources from the Originality Report that concern you? |  |
| Have you been able to acquire the main sources of concern? If you’ve had difficulty obtaining some, please indicate which ones. |  |
| What concerns you about the work? (please tick those which may apply) | The work gives the appearance that the student has generated the ideas not the original author.  Across the work a large amount of text is unattributed.  There are multiple sections of unattributed text.  The student has failed to use quotation marks and italics appropriately to indicate quotes.  Minor wording changes have been made within the work, such that the work is still largely similar to the source material.  It is not credible to associate any similarity to poor paraphrasing alone.  The work makes insufficient references to the sources of concern.  The sources are not referenced in the body of the work.  The sources are not included footnotes.  The bibliography does not list some/all of the sources. |
| Could any of the similarity be accounted for by common language / concepts from the academic field? |  |
| Has the student shown any novelty / originality in their work? |  |
| Can you provide any examples from the work and sources that you consider demonstrates malpractice? For example, paragraph 1 on page 2 of the student’s work, matches paragraph 3 on page 4 of source 1. |  |
| Do you have any other reasons why you consider the work to contain malpractice? |  |

Source: Faculty of Humanities’ Teaching, Learning & Student Experience Office, The University of Manchester