What's the deal with Turnitin?

Turnitin is a tool that can check the originality of writing by comparing it against a database of sources that includes other student work, publications, and online sources.

Turnitin highlights areas of similarity between the submitted piece of writing and the database. Any matches against the database *can* be a sign of plagiarism, but instructors will review suspect reports manually to determine whether there is plagiarism present.

Sometimes we might hear that anything below, say, 20% means you are in the clear or even that 0% is the goal, but that is not the case. There is no fixed number to receive as a score in your Turnitin Similarity Report. Consult with your instructor if you feel unsure what your percentage means.
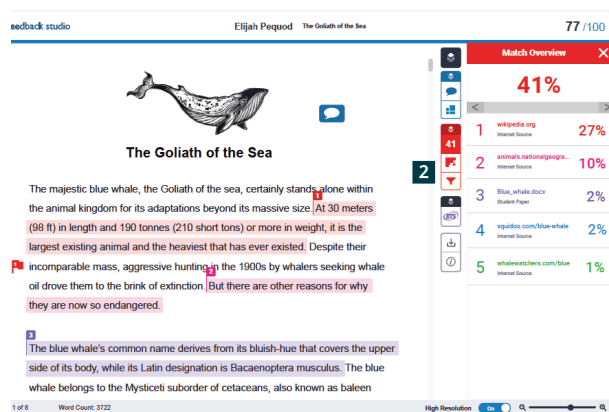
Image by Turnitin, used under CC BY 4.0

A higher percentage could indicate plagiarism, but it could also mean you have many quotations. A lower percentage could mean there is no plagiarism, but it could also mean there is plagiarism but it only amounts to a small percentage of the whole paper. A lower similarity score can also be a sign that your writing has not engaged with sources enough, which means, depending on the type of paper you are writing, you may need to integrate (and cite!) more research to support your arguments.

The information in your Turnitin Similarity Report can help you make decisions about how to improve your writing, whether that is in later drafts of the same assignment or on future assignments. If you have the opportunity to revise your writing based on your Similarity Score, consider the following:

- Choose only the most significant quotes or parts of quotes to include from your sources.
- Summarize, paraphrase, or explain an idea in your own words rather than quoting it directly.
- Cite all of your evidence (whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) using the appropriate citation style.

Be aware that Turnitin will find patchwriting, which is a form of plagiarism. Simply rewording a source that is not your own is not sufficient.

Check out "Understanding the Similarity Report: A student guide" created by Turnitin for more helpful insight into your similarity report and guidance about its features.

This handout is adapted from Understanding the Similarity Report: A student guide by Turnitin, used under CC BY 4.0.

Website links:
- turnitin.com
- turnitin.com/papers/understanding-the-turnitin-similarity-report-student-guide

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