

Understanding the Turnitin Similarity Report

An educator guide

The Turnitin Similarity Report is the result of a comparison between a submission and the search targets selected for an assignment. These search targets include billions of pages of active and archived internet information, a repository of works previously submitted to Turnitin, and a repository of tens of thousands of periodicals, journals, and publications.

Similarity Score

The Similarity Score represents the percentage of a student's writing that is similar to something found on the internet, in our databases, or in someone else's paper. Similarity does not mean that this work is plagiarized. Consider a student's use of quotations, citations, and bibliographic material when reviewing the score.

Match Overview 1

The Match Overview offers a clear summary of sources that match text in the writing. A high percentage score shows a larger degree of text that is similar, and matches are highlighted in the same color.

Similarity Insights Panel 2

Flags

The Flags insight identifies potential issues by highlighting evidence of hidden characters and/or text replacement within a student's writing.

Match Overview

The Match Overview reveals the overall Similarity Score and a list of sources that match student writing. The colors in this list match the colors highlighted in the student's writing.

All Sources

Every source that matches the text in a student's paper is available to review.

Filters and Settings

Use filters and settings to exclude citations, quotes, or bibliographic information from a student's score.

Excluded Sources

Access every source omitted from a student's Similarity Report through the All Sources tab.

What is a reasonable Similarity Score?

There is not a right or wrong number to receive as a score. Your institution may have assigned a number as an acceptable threshold for assignments. If not, consider the following:

- Set a reasonable threshold for assignments. Some similarity is usually expected if students are using text from sources. Asking for zero similarity means that students will not be incorporating any source-based evidence in their writing.
- Use the filters available in the Similarity Insights Panel to strategically exclude citations, quotes, or bibliographic information from affecting a student's score.

How can I talk with my students about their scores?

As the educator, you can access the same Similarity Report that your students see.

- Address what you expect to see in students' scores. For instance, assignments that require the use of sources will often display a result with some similarity, especially depending on how you have configured the filters and settings. Acknowledging those expectations can help students better understand how to interact with their Similarity Scores.
- Utilize details and data from a student's paper and report so you can have an informed conversation about the student's current score and how they can make changes to improve.
- Provide time for students to reflect on their work and Turnitin Similarity Scores using the [Post-Assignment Student Questionnaire](#) or the [Where Did I Go Wrong? Student Self-Assessment Tool](#). Ask them to consider ways that they might be able to improve their scores, noting areas where they may need particular assistance from you as the educator.

Guiding students to make improvements

One of the most effective ways to utilize the Turnitin Similarity Report is to guide students to make improvements in their writing and research practices. Consider doing the following to help your students learn from their Turnitin Similarity Report:

- Use the report to identify areas that are exceptionally heavy on text similar to database or internet sources. Conduct a mini-lesson to review with students effective quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing, and ask them to rewrite that section of text, reducing the amount of similar text within their writing.
- Use the report to identify areas that are exceptionally light on quoted text (i.e., no support is provided to back up a student's own ideas). Conduct a mini-lesson to review with students effective ways to incorporate research-based support.

Using the Flags Panel

The metadata in the Turnitin Flags Panel can assist you in determining when a student is explicitly trying to trick the Turnitin system. Consider the presence or absence of each of these elements when addressing questionable student work.

- **Hidden characters:** hidden text that has been colored white to disappear. A student may intend to inflate word count and decrease the overall Similarity Score.
- **Text replacement:** characters from one alphabet being used to replace characters from another alphabet. A student may intend to circumvent similarity detection by replacing characters and making words slightly different from the original source.