The Rectorate
Vice-Rector for Academic Affairs

Submitting assignments using Turnitin

A guide for students

Contents

About this handout

When submitting written work for assessment, some courses give you the possibility to have your academic work checked by Turnitin. The present handout is intended as a guide to help you understand **what Turnitin is**, **how it works**, and **how it should be used at the University of Luxembourg.**

Turnitin is a resource that can help you identify missing citations and references, or passages that need to be adjusted in order to avoid plagiarism, i.e., passages that you have quoted incorrectly or paraphrased insufficiently. Turnitin should normally be used just before you submit an assignment.

For more information on how to quote and paraphrase correctly, and how to avoid plagiarism, please refer to the University's handouts *Academic writing: A style guide for students* and *Understanding and preventing plagiarism: A guide for students*, which you can access on the web pages for academic skills resources of the Learning Centre. There, you also find this handout for download.

Turnitin for students

What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is a **text-matching tool** that checks the similarity of your submitted work with existing texts, by comparing it against a database of electronically published material, including academic publications, web pages, and documents previously submitted by you and by other students of the University.

At the University of Luxembourg, Turnitin is embedded in the University's Learning Management System **Moodle** and is offered for courses in bachelor and master programmes. Turnitin is managed by course instructors. If activated by the instructor responsible for the course, Turnitin results will be available to students.

What should I use Turnitin for?

When you are ready to submit a written assignment (nearly final version), Turnitin can help you with the final revision of your text:

- By drawing your attention to passages in your text that miss a citation, lack quotation marks, or otherwise fail to properly acknowledge their source(s);
- By guiding you towards passages that you may need to re-work in order to clarify how you have used a given source, to better integrate sources in your line of reasoning, or to render your text more original.

Turnitin can give you indications of where your text may benefit from revisions. It can thereby help you to make your text more original and convincingly your own work, and to avoid plagiarism. It will not, however, tell you how to revise your text. Nor is Turnitin simply a plagiarism detection tool. The software will not tell you whether you have cited all your sources, or whether your efforts to paraphrase faithfully and in your own words are successful. It is your responsibility to develop your own voice, produce an original work, and to cite or quote your sources correctly.

If you have doubts about plagiarism or if you struggle with the writing process, please ask your course instructor for advice. You can also consult the University's handouts *Academic writing: A style guide for students* and *Understanding and avoiding plagiarism*.

Please also remember to always follow the instructions for submission that you have received from your course instructor. Some course instructors may require you to submit your assignments to Turnitin (for more information, please refer to the section 'How to submit an assignment via Turnitin?' below). Others may advise you to use Turnitin before submission without, however, making it compulsory. Yet again others may discourage its use entirely.

> Your instructors will inform you in due time about their approach concerning the use of Turnitin. For more information on this question, please refer to the FAQ section: Am I obliged to use Turnitin?
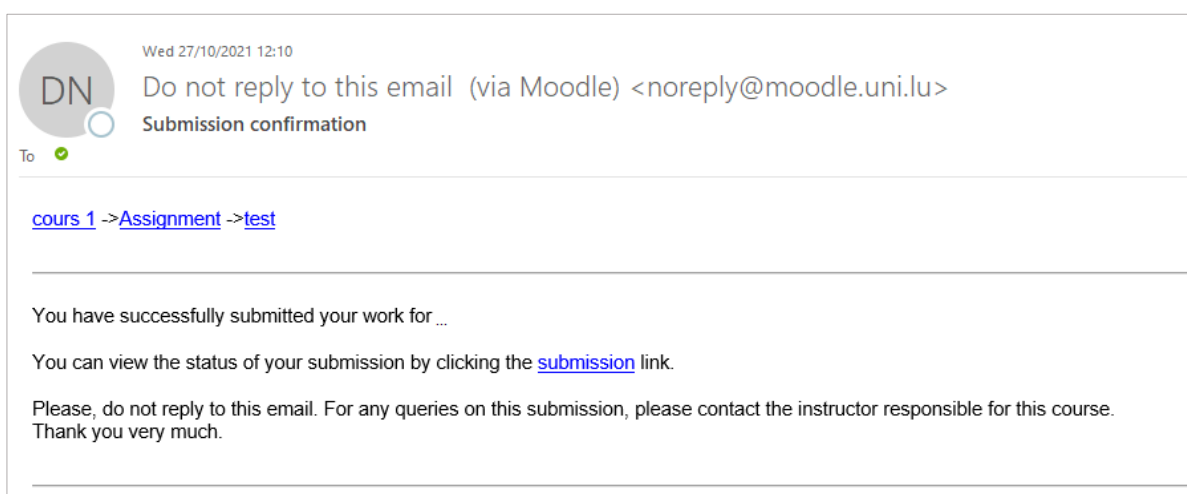
How to submit an assignment via Turnitin?

In courses for which Turnitin is available, simply submit your assignment in Moodle and it will be uploaded directly to Turnitin for text-matching.

Please follow the instructions below to submit an assignment in Moodle:

1. Select your *Course* and go to your *Assignment*.
2. Go to *Submission status* and click *Add submission*.
3. Accept the *Turnitin End-User Licence Agreement (EULA)* and the *Submission statement*.
4. *Add your document* and *Save changes*.

Once you have finished, *Submission status* will show you all the information concerning the grading of your assignment, the due date and the time remaining to edit your submission.

You will also receive an e-mail confirming the submission:

Remember that until the due date of the assignment and while your assignment has draft status, you will be able to edit or delete your submission, provided your course instructor has enabled this option. Please, see the example below:

Submission status

Submission status	Submitted for grading
Grading status	Not graded
Due date	Monday, 18 October 2021, 12:00 AM
Time remaining	6 days 12 hours
Last modified	Monday, 11 October 2021, 11:44 AM

How does Turnitin work?

When you submit a text to Turnitin, the software scans your document and compares the phrasing and choice of words with a vast corpus of electronically published texts included in several databases, using a proprietary algorithm. The corpus contains texts in different languages, including English, French, and German, and concerning all academic disciplines. On the basis of this comparison, Turnitin generates a **similarity index** and a **similarity report** for your submission.

Further information on Turnitin's databases can be found at: https://www.turnitin.com/about/content.

Please note that:

- For Microsoft Word files, Turnitin disregards the words in text boxes, footnotes, and endnotes.
- For PDF files, all text is considered, including footnotes, endnotes and words in text boxes, which would usually result in a higher rate of similarity.

Note about the use of quotation marks: Turnitin will disregard any text inside the following quotation marks: "…"; «…»; »…«; „…". However, it will not identify other types of quotation marks (e.g., '…'), and therefore consider those parts of text when matching against its database.

The similarity index

Table 1. Similarity index

No matching text: 0%	Blue	
One word to 24% matching text	Green	
25-49% matching text	Yellow	
50-74% matching text	Orange	
75-100% matching text	Red	

The **similarity index** gives you the percentage of the text you submitted to Turnitin that uses language identical or near-identical to other texts in its database. Depending on the amount of similarities found in the document, your work will be flagged with one of the following colours (see Table 1).

Please find below an example of how the similarity index is displayed in Moodle after you have submitted your assignment.
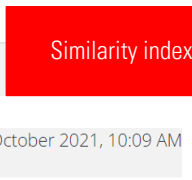
Example 1. Similarity index in Moodle
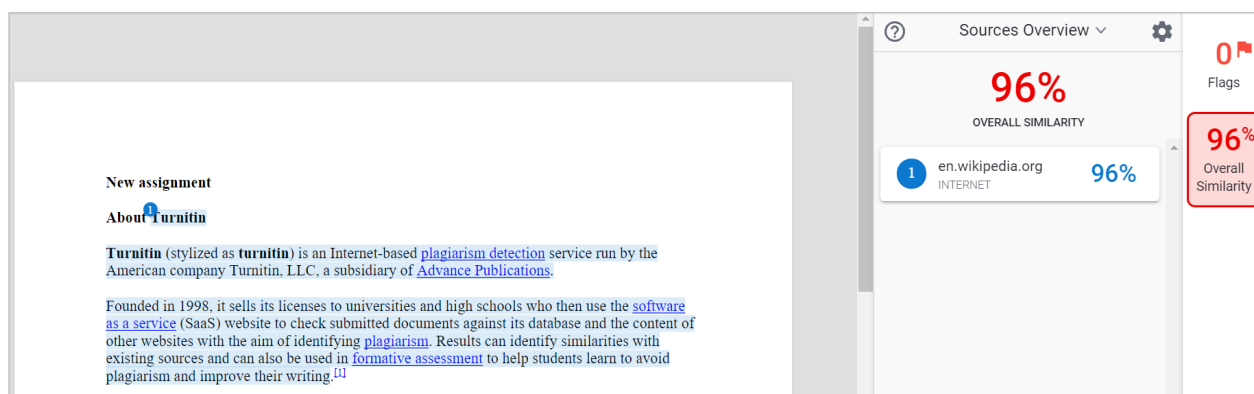
The similarity report

The **similarity report** (formerly called *originality report*) lists the source(s) that Turnitin has identified as matching your work. These could be websites, electronic resources such as e-journals, papers, data or reports, or works previously submitted by you or other students through Turnitin. The report includes the following:

- *Sources overview:* the list of the most frequent sources found in your document.
- *All sources:* the list of all sources found in your document.
- *Flags:* Whenever Turnitin identifies something in your document that it cannot read or that it considers erroneous (hidden text, replaced characters), this will be flagged for your review.

To have access to your similarity report, please see the FAQ section below: How do I get to see my similarity report?
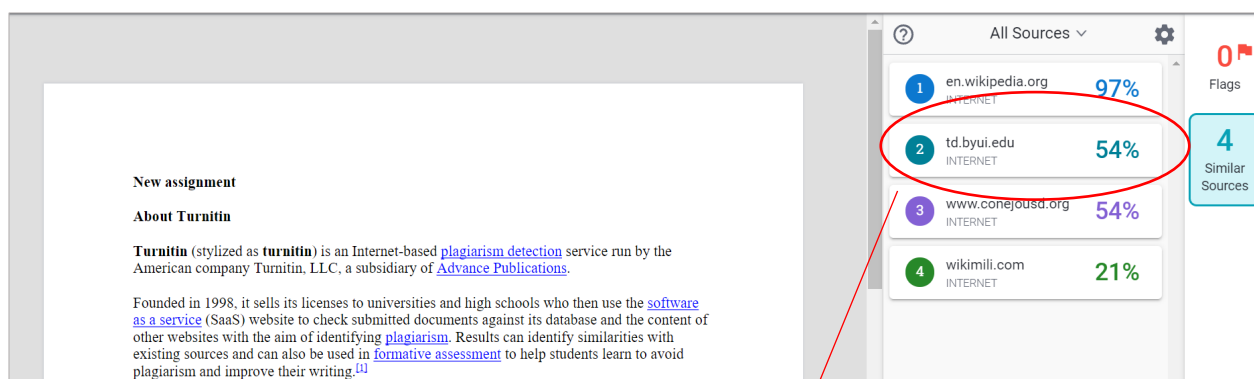
The following is an example of how a similarity report is displayed in Moodle.

Example 2. Similarity report – Sources overview: It shows you the overall index of similarity

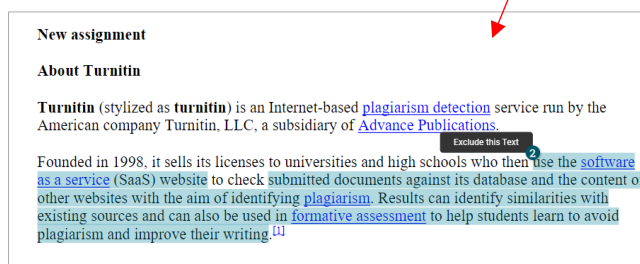Example 3. Similarity report – All sources: This option displays the percentage of all sources identified in your work, using different colours. If you click on a source, Turnitin will highlight the part of your work that matches the source in the same colour.

How to interpret the similarity index and report

The similarity index and the similarity report do not determine whether your work constitutes plagiarism or not. The information provided by Turnitin highlights the amount of text in your document that matches other sources. It requires your judgement to determine whether the similarity score for a given text passage is problematic and you need to revise it.

When reviewing a passage flagged by Turnitin, you should consider the following:

▶ **Use quotation marks**:
Always confirm first whether you have included all necessary citations for the passage. If the passage contains a quote, make sure you have used quotation marks.

▶ **Re-work your paraphrasing**:
If you are paraphrasing one or several sources in the passage and you conclude that the text comes too close to the source, try, in addition to re-phrasing, to increase the distance between your text and the source, e.g., by being more selective in view of your own argument or by using markers ('previous research has shown', 'the authors of study X argue', etc.) that allow the reader to better distinguish the source from your use of it.

▶ **Put the similarity score into context**:
You do not necessarily need to aim for a similarity score of zero, but in a **similarity report**, a lot of highlighted sections indicates a problem. If entire pages are highlighted, then you are at risk of being marked down for lack of originality. A high score in your **similarity index** indicates that a lot of material is highlighted as being written in language that is identical or nearly identical to the work of others (but see also the following paragraph). There is no similarity score below which your voice is automatically considered authentic, your writing original, or your paraphrasing adequate, but a high similarity score needs to be examined carefully. What is considered original depends on a variety of factors, including the role of your cited sources in a given passage of your text, the function of this passage in the text, or the type of assignment. Plagiarism is never acceptable, however, so unless you are convinced that you have valid reasons that can justify a similarity index above around 15-20%, you are advised to check your sources and citations, and to re-write your text where necessary.

▶ **Bear in mind how Turnitin functions**:
Similarity can sometimes be an artefact of Turnitin's algorithm, e.g., where it fails to recognise quotation marks. Also, if you or, in the case of a collaboration, one of your co-authors have previously submitted drafts of your text to Turnitin, the software will include it in its database. You may then find a high similarity with the previous draft version. Always check the sources that Turnitin has identified and verify that they are those that you have used and cited.

▶ **Avoid self-plagiarism**:
If you find among the sources identified by Turnitin a paper you have previously submitted for assessment, e.g. in a different course, you should make sure to confirm rules for re-using material you have written for other classes, in order to avoid being accused of self-plagiarism.

▶ **Do not rely on Turnitin blindly**:
Even if the report for your paper gives you a similarity score of zero, you can still have citation issues and find yourself accused of plagiarism if you do not address them. This could be the case if the source for which a citation is missing is not included in Turnitin's database or if you have translated the original source.

For more information on how to read the scores from your report, please refer to the FAQ section below.

FAQ

Am I obliged to use Turnitin?

For those courses where your instructor(s) makes Turnitin available, you are required to submit your work to Turnitin and accept the *Turnitin End-User Licence Agreement (EULA)* before you upload your document:

> For this submission to be sent to Turnitin, you must accept the Turnitin End User Licence Agreement.
>
> I accept the Turnitin EULA   I decline the Turnitin EULA

If you do not want to use Turnitin, please contact your course instructor a few weeks in advance of the submission date to discuss alternatives for submitting your work. Remember that the ultimate decision will be made by your instructor.

I got a 32% on the similarity index. What exactly does it mean? Is it good or bad?

The similarity index is the percentage of material in your work that matches the sources in the Turnitin databases. To interpret this index, you should review the passage(s) of your text that are concerned and the information on matching sources provided in the similarity report, using the guidance offered by your course instructor and this handout (see the section How to interpret the similarity index and report above).

The University of Luxembourg does **not** define a general threshold for the similarity index below which your work would be considered free of plagiarism. Vice versa, there is no strict threshold above which you would necessarily find yourself accused of plagiarism. Similarity scores are indications that must be interpreted in context. That said, **a similarity score above 15-20%** is usually a sign that a text requires attention. If in doubt, you should seek advice from your course instructors, whose academic judgement, and their knowledge of their course materials, is important in interpreting Turnitin similarity reports.

Who has access to my similarity index and similarity report?

Turnitin is managed by your course instructor who has access to the similarity index and the similarity report. You have access to the similarity index by default but it is your instructor who decides whether or not to let you see the similarity report. Please ask your course instructor for more information about accessing the report.

Note: Study programme administrators (SPAs) and Moodle administrators may also have access to this information for administrative reasons.

How do I get to see my similarity report?

Your course instructor must make the similarity report available to you in Moodle. On the Moodle page for the concerned course, go to your assignment. You will be able to see your report by clicking on the similarity index.

If this option is not active, your course instructor has not made similarity reports available for the course. Please ask your instructor for more information about this topic.
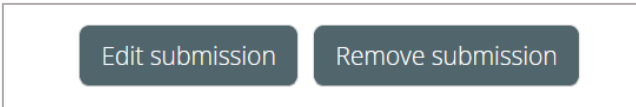
How long do I need to wait to receive a Turnitin report?

If your course instructor has enabled you to view the similarity report, you should normally receive access to your report within 15 minutes of submission. Be aware, however, that occasionally it can take significantly longer (up to 24 hours). Plan ahead and submit your work sufficiently in advance of the due date.

Note: If multiple submissions are permitted for your assignment, the first three re-submissions will generate a new similarity report immediately. After three attempts, there is a 24-hour waiting period between each submission.

How can I edit or delete work previously submitted to Turnitin?

Once you have submitted your assignment, you can still make changes to your submission until the due date. Go to your *Course*, select your *Assignment* and, in *Submission status*, select the required option: *Edit submission* or *Remove submission*.

Edit submission   Remove submission

How can I resubmit my work to Turnitin?

Turnitin is managed by your course instructor, who decides whether or not to give you the possibility to resubmit your assignment for multiple checks by Turnitin. Ask your course instructor for more information about how to resubmit your work.

Note: If your course instructor has configured Turnitin to automatically save all documents submitted for a specific assignment in the University's Turnitin repository, your new submission will be compared with your previous submissions and with those of other students of the University. In that case, the re-submission of an assignment will, absent major revisions, necessarily result in a high similarity score.

Where can I find more information about Turnitin?

Please refer to the References section below for additional information about Turnitin. Turnitin also maintains a Support Centre and Help section on its web pages.

References

The following sources were consulted in the preparation of this handout. They can be used for complementary information on the use of Turnitin.

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