

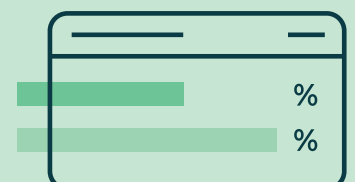
Disrupting plagiarism

Setting reasonable expectations for the Turnitin Similarity Score

The Turnitin Similarity Score represents the percentage of your students' 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 plagiarised. As the educator, consider a student's use of quotations, citations and bibliographic material when investigating the Similarity Score.

How much similarity is too much or too little?

Generally, there is not a right or wrong number to receive as a score. However, certain scenarios can dictate whether you should expect more or less similarity from your students' work. Use the following tips to help you determine when more or less similarity is expected in student work submitted to Turnitin.



Implementation

■ Consider the genre and task expectations of the assignment.

Different genre and assignment expectations will determine how much similarity may be expected from a student’s submission. Differences in similarity expectations arise because some assignment types, such as research papers, require cited evidence from external sources of information, while others, such as creative writing pieces, usually should not include similarity to other sources. Be sure to fully examine the details of each assignment independently to understand whether and how much similarity you should see and accept from student work.

		Similarity expected
Genre	Research writing	Yes
	Argumentative, Analytical, Informative, etc.	Yes
	Narrative/Creative writing	No
	Reflective writing	No
Task expectations	Research included	Yes
	Reference to provided source material	Yes
	Balance of evidence & original ideas	Yes
	Creative or reflective writing	No

■ Consider the length of the assignment.

The length of the document should be considered when determining acceptable levels of similarity. A 30% Similarity Score in a 1000-word response (~300 words of similarity) is different from a 30% score in a 5000-word response (~1500 words of similarity). While both technically comprise 30% of the writing, the amount that is included overall should be considered when determining whether the text similarity is acceptable.

■ Consider the skill level of your students, especially regarding quoting, paraphrasing and summarising.

Students who are still developing their skills in the areas of quoting, paraphrasing, summarising, and citing sources will often display more similarity in their work as they learn effective habits. Be sure to set up your assignment settings appropriately, and then investigate a student’s use of quotation marks, paraphrasing, summarising, and in-text and bibliographic citations when reviewing Similarity Scores that fall outside of the expected level.

■ Focus on score ranges rather than a single cutoff score.

Using all of the criteria mentioned above (genre, task expectations, assignment length, student skill level), keep a range of acceptable scores in mind, rather than dictating a singular cutoff score for students to meet. Be willing to accept scores within a range, rather than only those that match or fall below one specific score, and communicate those score decisions with students transparently. When a single threshold or cutoff score is implemented, students will often feel a sense of pressure surrounding the number, and may resort to creating dishonourable work in order to stay within those requirements. Of particular note, the score range for one assignment should differ from the range for another assignment, even within the same class. Be sure to consider all of the factors listed above for each assignment when setting Similarity Score expectations.

■ Navigate institution-prescribed score requirements thoughtfully.

When Similarity Score levels are set for your institution, it is important to adhere to those guidelines. In these instances, consider structuring assignments to allow time for students to receive meaningful formative feedback and make effective revisions to their writing. This more formative assignment workflow will give students the opportunity to learn from mistakes and improve their Similarity Scores prior to submitting their work for final review.

Furthermore, when setting up assignments in Turnitin Feedback Studio, consider [excluding bibliographic material, quotes, and small sources from Similarity Scores](#). These exclusions will help to highlight only those text similarities that are of significant concern within student writing.

- **Use the Flags insight to surface trends and evaluate score requirements.**

[Flags that appear in the Insights Panel](#) indicate when students have manipulated text, attempting to disguise their intentional plagiarism and circumvent integrity checks. If a high number of students have flags for an assignment, this may be a consequence of setting score requirements that are inconsistent with expected similarity for the genre and task. Consider using the Flags insight to examine these trends and evaluate when score requirements should be reassessed.

- **Provide formative opportunities for student revision based on data from the Similarity Report.**

Encourage students to use the Turnitin Similarity Score to revise their work, improving their skills in quoting, citing, paraphrasing and summarising. Within Turnitin Feedback Studio, educators can adjust assignment settings so Similarity Scores for student work are [generated immediately](#), allowing students to resubmit their work after revising based on insights gained from the Similarity Score. Additionally, [Turnitin Draft Coach](#), which is available directly in the drafting space, is a Google Docs and Microsoft Word add-on that allows students to access the Similarity Score in a formative manner, making revisions based on the information provided in the report.

- **Include the Similarity Score as one of many indicators of success.**

While the Turnitin Similarity Score is a valuable source of data, consider additional indicators that may be helpful when determining student performance, such as progress over time, proficiency of skills based on requirements of the scoring rubric, improvement based on formative feedback, and progress toward individualised goals based on self-reflection or previous rubric scores. Acknowledging multiple indicators of success will give a more complete picture of how students are progressing in their efforts on the assignment and in your class.

Communicating about the Similarity Score with your students

- **Be honest, clear and concise with students.**

Students will interact with and understand the Similarity Score based on how it is communicated to them. If extremely strict expectations are set, it's more likely that students will be tempted to manipulate their Similarity Scores with inauthentic work in order to meet that requirement. However, if score ranges are instituted and formative revisions are encouraged, it's more likely that students will feel confident in submitting authentic work and learning from mistakes that they make during the research and writing process. Be honest with students about your expectations for their work and similarity levels. This clarity will ensure that students understand and adhere to the expectations that are presented for each assignment.

Likewise, consider reassessing expectation ranges as student work is submitted. If many students are getting scores at the higher end of the range or above and you have confirmed that the majority of the matches are acceptable, communicate an increase in the acceptable score range to all students. This will help students understand class expectations clearly and avoid dishonest behavior to meet unrealistic expectations.

- **Use available resources to help you explain the concepts of similarity and plagiarism.**

When students fully understand the difference between text similarity and plagiarism, they will be better armed to avoid it in their work. Provide access to [Turnitin's Understanding text similarity for students](#) video and the [Understanding the Turnitin Similarity Report - A student guide](#) to facilitate these discussions with students.

Turnitin

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- Source Credibility
- Paraphrasing
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