How to Interpret a Turnitin Similarity Report

What is a similarity report?

It is a tool that checks your assignment against various electronic resources for matching text and highlights the areas of your assignment where a match has been found. Examples of resources that are checked are:

- billions of pages of active and archived internet information
- a repository of tens of thousands of periodicals, journals and publications
- a repository of works previously submitted to Turnitin, including student assignments that have already been submitted through Turnitin at UCT and other higher education institutions around the world.

There will be many sources, however, that are not checked against, such as new web content (e.g. today's news articles) and password protected sites (e.g. intranets). It is important to note that similarity reports **do not detect plagiarism** – they merely highlight unoriginal text (i.e. text that matches text already in the Turnitin comparative database) and reference quotes in your submission.

How do I access the similarity report?

Your lecturer may decide to employ Turnitin when creating (an) assignment(s) in (an) Amathuba site(s). If the lecturer has allowed students to view their Turnitin reports, you will be able to access the report by clicking on the link in the **Completion Status** column of the assignment (in the Assignments tool). For example, see the **Check your assignment for Plagiarism** assignment in Figure 1 below, which has one submission:

Assignment	Completion Status	Score	Evaluation Status
No Category			
Submissions for Turnitin review	1 Submission, 1 File	- / -	
Check your assignment for Plagiarism Due on 30 May 2024 11:59 PM 27 March - 30 May	1 Submission, 1 File	- / -	

Figure 1: Access the Similarity Report

After following the link to the assignment submission (in the **Completion Status** column), you will see a colour-coded similarity icon and the option to view the report (see Figure 2). The colour percentage shown represents the percentage of your document that has been matched to other sources:

- Blue (0% similarity)
- Green (< 25% similarity)
- Yellow (25-49% similarity)
- Orange (50-74% similarity)
- Red (> 75% similarity)

Submission ID	Submission(s)	Turnitin Similarity Report	Date Submitted ▾
316926	✉ 📄 Student Assignment.docx (17.97 KB) Turnitin™ Submission ID 2334632614	2 %	29 March 2024 4:23 PM

Figure 2: View the Similarity Report

The similarity index

This is the percentage of text in your assignment that has been matched to other sources. If the figure is high, it does not necessarily mean that you have plagiarised, as the report could be matching text against the following:

- quotations that have been correctly referenced
- your reference list/bibliography, particularly if the citations you used could be exactly the same as those of another student
- a common phrase or series of words used in context of the topic.

Similarly, a low or zero percent similarity index does not necessarily mean that plagiarism has not taken place. As there are many sources that Turnitin does not check against, the similarity index cannot be used as an indicator of whether plagiarism has occurred or not.

Understanding the Turnitin similarity report

Click on the colour-coded similarity report icon (see Figure 2) to see the detailed similarity report.

What information is included in the report?

- An overall 'similarity index' percentage. This indicates the amount of text in the whole assignment that has been matched with other sources. The similarity index is a sum of the percentages matches for all sources (i.e. 20 1% matches would produce a similarity index of 20%).

- Text that has been matched will be number/colour-coded for easy reference.

Click on the similarity index icon on the right-side of the similarity report to view the **Match Overview**. This is a list of original sources and the percentage of text that has been matched against each source.

Figure 3: Similarity Index

Viewing the match breakdown

Clicking on one of the sources in the match overview allows you to see how many times that particular source has been matched in your assignment. Once you click on a matched source, an arrow appears next to the source, which you can click on to show a list of additional sources that could be the original source of the text. This is known as the 'Match Breakdown' and is shown in the example in Figure 4 below.
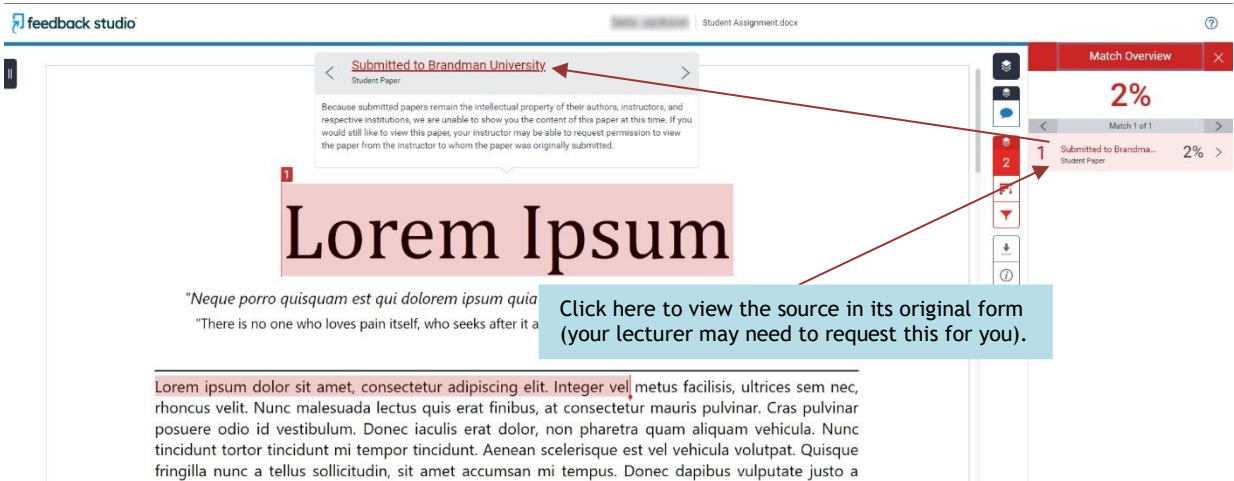

Figure 4: Match Breakdown

Figure 5: Accessing Original Sources

Filtering the matches

Some text matches are easily explained, such as quotations and bibliographies. You can exclude these from the similarity report by clicking the **Filter** icon (see Figure 6 for example below). Here, you can also exclude matches that are less than a certain number of words or less than a certain percentage.

If you select some/all of these filters, you also need to click on the **Apply Changes** button for them to take effect.

Please note: As you are accessing the similarity report as a student, you are not able to exclude sources from the comparison.

Match Breakdown

1	Submitted to Brandma... Student Paper	2%

	Match 1 of 1	

•	Submitted to Roehamp... Student Paper	2%
•	Submitted to The Unive... Student Papers - 3 papers	2%
•	Submitted to University...	2%

Click on the **Filter** icon to exclude quotes and bibliography from the similarity report. You can also exclude matches that are less than a certain number of words or percentage.

•	Submitted to Victoria U... Student Papers - 3 papers	2%
•	admissions.colostate.e... Internet Source	2%
•	aulasdefotografia.com.... Internet Source	2%
•	bkpsdm.salatiga.go.id Internet Source - 4 urls	2%
•	dev.lv Internet Source	2%
•	documents.mx Internet Source	2%
•	en.lipsum.com Internet Source	2%
•	isa.ee	2%

Filters and Settings

Filters

Exclude Quotes ☑

Exclude Bibliography ☑

Exclude sources that are less than:

○ _____ words

○ _____ %

● Don't exclude by size

☑

Apply Changes

Filters and Settings

Filters

Exclude Quotes ☑

Exclude Bibliography ☐

Exclude sources that are less than:

● 5 words

○ _____ %

○ Don't exclude by size

Optional Settings

Multi-Color Highlighting ☑

Apply Changes

Figure 6: Filtering Options