

# Turnitin Guide to Interpreting Similarity Reports for Academics

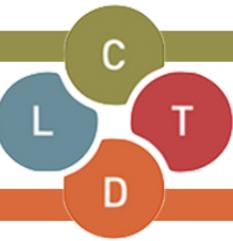
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TURNITIN GUIDE 2024

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## Contents

<b>1.1 What is it that Turnitin can do?</b> .....	2
<b>1.2 What is it that Turnitin cannot do?</b> .....	3
<b>2. Benefits of students using Turnitin</b> .....	3
<b>3. Using Turnitin as a Teaching Tool in assisting students</b> .....	4
<b>3.1 Show students the Originality Check Course</b> .....	4
<b>3.2 Make Academic Integrity and Turnitin information more visible!</b> .....	4
<b>3.3 Curbing Turnitin Myths with Students</b> .....	5
<b>3.4 Turnitin Assignment Setup</b> .....	6
3.5 Activating Turnitin Check Plagiarism Framework (CPF) .....	9
<b>3.6 Interpreting Similarity Index Score</b> .....	12
3.7 Match overview and breakdown .....	13
3.7.1 Match Overview .....	15
3.7.2 Match Breakdown .....	15
3.7.3 Acceptable matching text.....	16
3.7.4 Highlighted quotations .....	17
4. References .....	17
How to cite this resource: .....	18
Contact: .....	18

**Commented [SP1]:** Some of these headings are bold and others not. Rather leave all unbolded

## Turnitin Guide to Interpreting Similarity Reports for Academics

### Introduction:

The information in this guide is provided to help you understand and interpret the similarity reports generated by Turnitin, and to support students in using Turnitin to contribute to possible learning opportunities presented from possible instances of text matches. This guide is intended for academics/educators at Wits University to effectively use Turnitin for checking students' originality of assignments that are

uploaded and monitored through ulwazi Learning Management System (LMS). Turnitin is a valuable tool for assessing the originality of submitted work by comparing it to a vast database of academic and online content. It is important to note that Turnitin does not explicitly detect plagiarism but assists in determining the Similarity Index, which provides insights into the presence of potentially unoriginal content. This guide aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how to use Turnitin for academic purposes while maintaining academic integrity. It is important to understand that your professional expertise and judgment are vital to interpreting the Turnitin similarity score and report.

Original work matters in every discipline in both educational and professional settings. Check for plagiarism and ensure authenticity across all subject areas with Turnitin ever-growing content database.

Turnitin Database current statistics

According to Eiffelcorp (2023 meeting), they have their database:

#### **Database size:**

- 99,3 Billion web pages
- 1,8 Billion Student Papers
- 89,4 Million Journals, Articles and Publications

### **1.1 What is it that Turnitin can do?**

Turnitin electronically searches and finds text matching by comparing text submitted in a student assignment against a database of sources. It generates a similarity report by comparing student submissions to published works, web content, and a library of student assignments across the globe. If there are occurrences, once compared and processed, the system generates an originality report in which 'matched' text is

underlined and colour coded. These indicators are then linked to either the original source or a similar document on Turnitin's database. As a result, Turnitin also gives an indication of the proportion of the submitted work that matches other sources (Eiffelcorp training, 2023). Using Turnitin can therefore help you identify potential instances with academic literacies or academic integrity. Therefore, it is essential to view Turnitin as a helpful instrument rather than a definitive lens for detecting academic dishonesty. Hence, it is crucial to use your professional expertise and judgment in interpreting the Turnitin similarity score and report.

### **1.2 What is it that Turnitin cannot do?**

Turnitin is not a plagiarism detector, but you are the detector! Turnitin only matches text as Similarity Index, it does not check for plagiarism. Your judgment is crucial to interpreting the similarity report and detecting potential academic misconduct. Turnitin may also help you to identify signs of other breaches of integrity such as collusion or contract cheating. You can learn more about detecting potential academic misconduct in our [What is Academic Integrity video?](#). Turnitin cannot tell you if academic misconduct has occurred, so it is a responsibility of the educator/lecturer to make this judgment. In as much as Turnitin has valuable benefits for the academics, it also has numerous valuable insights for students using the tool.

## **2. Benefits of students using Turnitin**

The system of reviewing, improving, and uploading the assignments helps students to improve on their writing abilities. It helps students become aware of the difference between their own arguments or original case, supported by other authors' reasoning. In some instances, it also assists with grammatical errors by underlying them in red. This is the opposite of writing an article that is filled with the opinions of others without a student voice coming out. When students learn about what plagiarism entails, this may build their confidence and writing skills whilst developing their specific writing style/s. Students may learn to appreciate the power of original writing with their own work reflecting own voices. Turnitin is not to be used punitively for catching out students but rather for helping them develop a culture of academic integrity. Lessons learned offer students' potential for improved writing skills and preparation for future research. This is one of the best benefits of using Turnitin as a tool.

### **3. Using Turnitin as a Teaching Tool in assisting students**

It is easy to assume that students know how to use Turnitin and understand its purpose, but this is not always the case. Many students think that Turnitin is a plagiarism 'checker', or that there is an acceptable score they should aim for. Teaching students about how Turnitin works may help them understand its value as a learning tool, and may deter academic misconduct, saving you time and effort later.

#### **3.1 Show students the Originality Check Course**

Encouraging students to use Turnitin before submitting their final assignments may help them understand where their paraphrasing or referencing may be insufficient and give them an opportunity to improve and correct their draft before final submission, or to seek support from the Writing Centre. In them using the tool, it can also clarify future expectations when using the tool and potentially reduce the fear of the unknown or anxiety. This allows students to check draft assignments for text matching prior to submitting the assignment for marking. The submission is not added to the Turnitin Repository, so it will not match against future submissions.

#### **3.2 Make Academic Integrity and Turnitin information more visible!**

Include information about Turnitin on the same page as the Assignment details. For example:

"By submitting this assignment, you agree to the Academic Honesty Statement.

Your assignment will be automatically checked by Turnitin for text matching and similarity checking".

Allow students an encourage them to see Turnitin reports for submitted assignments.

When you set up your assessment in ulwazi Originality Check, you can set up to 'immediately' so students may see their similarity score when they submit.

If you allow students to submit a draft before the submission of their final piece of work, we suggest that you exclude the draft submissions from being added to the Turnitin database.

This will prevent false positive matches at the final submission step by giving them an opportunity to fix any issues flagged by Turnitin at the point of submission and to resubmit the assessment prior to the due date. This may help with your students demonstrate academic integrity and learn from the Turnitin report.

### 3.3 Curbing Turnitin Myths with Students

Myth	Reality
<p><b><i>If my text is not highlighted by Turnitin, then I haven't plagiarised.</i></b></p>	<p>There are different types of plagiarism, including copying without correct attribution, paraphrasing incorrectly, and presenting other people's ideas as your own.</p> <p>Although Turnitin highlights a broad range of matches, your marker is an expert on your subject and may identify other pieces of text or ideas which are familiar to them. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to work on your notetaking, paraphrasing, and referencing skills.</p>
<p><b>There is an 'acceptable' Turnitin score (e.g. 25% or lower) which I should aim for.</b></p>	<p>There is no perfect Turnitin score. A mid-range Turnitin score still indicates matched text which may be plagiarised. What matters is what the report shows, and whether you have quoted, paraphrased, and referenced correctly.</p> <p>Sometimes high Turnitin scores are fine, and sometimes very low scores still contain signs of plagiarism. You must look at each text match to decide whether it is acceptable.</p>
<p><b>I should keep editing and resubmitting my assignment until I reach 0% similarity</b></p>	<p>You should not try to 'trick' Turnitin by making small edits to avoid text matching – this is poor academic practice. Look at the highlighted text in the report and decide whether you have quoted, paraphrased, and referenced correctly. If your paraphrase is too similar, go back to the original text, reread it, and then put it aside and write your own interpretation of the information in your voice. Make sure that you use synonyms, change the structure or grammar, and your own words.</p> <p>You should not aim for a low similarity score – this can still indicate plagiarism or poor academic practice. Instead, focus on what the text highlights are telling you.</p>

<b>My matched text is referenced, so that's ok</b>	You need to ensure that matched text is in quotation marks or is a paraphrase which is significantly different from the original text as well as referencing.
<b>My tutor uses Turnitin because they don't trust students.</b>	<p>Your tutor uses Turnitin as part of their marking process. It is one of many tools they use (including rubrics) to assess your work and your use of sources and evidence.</p> <p>Turnitin is also a useful learning tool for students. It can help you to improve your academic writing, referencing, and to ensure that you are working with integrity. The aim is not to instil fear of Turnitin in students but rather to alleviate their concerns. Additionally, the goal is to offer constructive feedback, foster a positive academic environment that prioritizes originality and ethical writing, and promote a positive comprehension of Turnitin.</p>

Table 1: Adelaide University (2023)

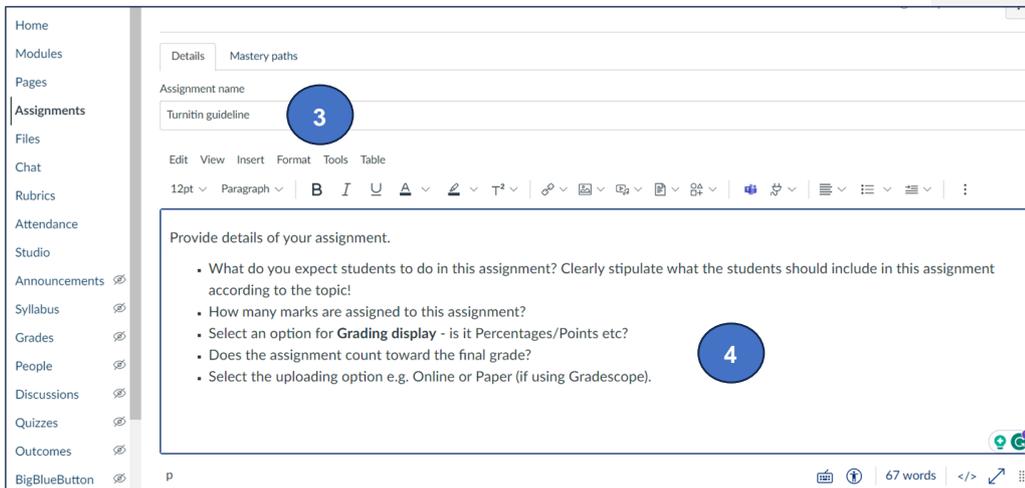
### 3.4 Turnitin Assignment Setup

For students to submit their assignments to Turnitin, you need to guide them where the assignment in your course is created. To create an Assignment within your course, please follow these steps:

Select Assignment from your course menu, then go to Assignment option. Specify the assignment details, including the title, due date, and other relevant information.

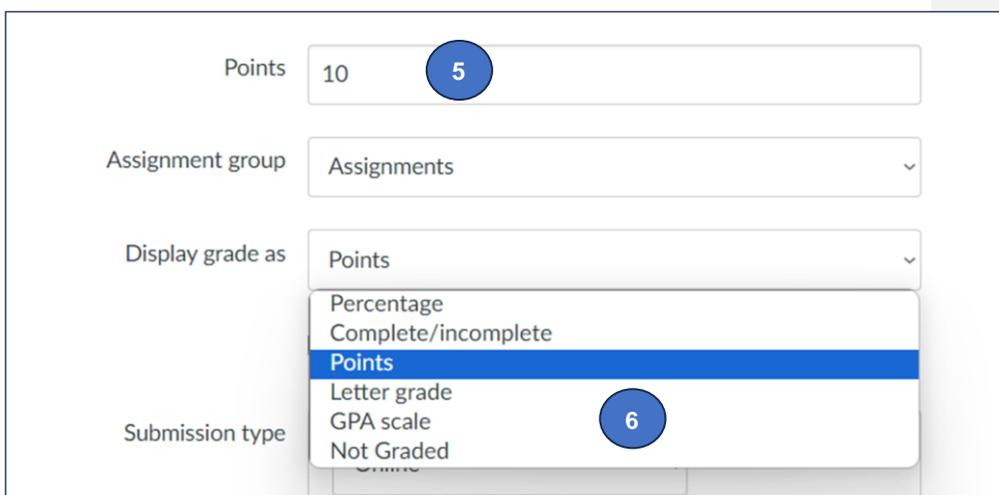
2





How many marks (Points/Percentage etc) are assigned to this Assignment? Please specify.

What are the Display grade options? Include. Display grade as Option, depends on your preference. You may decide the grades to be displayed in the Grade tool as Points/Percentage etc. which will be also visible to the students when they view their Grades feedback.



Specify if this Assignment counts toward the final grade. If it does not count toward final grade, leave it blank!

Assignment group

Display grade as

**7**  Do not count this assignment towards the final grade

Submission types include:

**Text Entry:** For students to enter text directly into a text box on Canvas.

**Website URL:** For students to enter a URL (usually to a blog, video, podcast, etc.).

**Media Recordings:** For students to upload or record media for submission.

**File upload:** Allows students to upload the assignment into Turnitin.

Under File types, you can restrict the types of files you want students to use when uploading e.g., doc, xls, txt.

Home  
Modules  
Pages  
Assignments  
Files  
Chat  
Rubrics  
Attendance  
Studio  
Announcements

Submission type

**Online entry options**

Text entry

Website URL

Media Recordings

Student Annotation

File Uploads

Restrict upload file types

Allowed file extensions  
Enter a list of accepted extensions, for example: doc,xls,txt

**8**

Submission attempts

These depend on you as an educator. You can set it up for Unlimited or Limited.

Limited allows students to be clear on how many times they can work on their assignments and after the final submission, there will be no more access.

Text entry  
 Website URL  
 Media Recordings  
 Student Annotation  
 File Uploads

Restrict upload file types

Allowed file extensions  
Enter a list of accepted extensions, for example: doc,xls,bt

Submission Attempts

Allowed attempts

Unlimited  
**Unlimited**  
 Limited

### 3.5 Activating Turnitin Check Plagiarism Framework (CPF)

To activate Turnitin Check Plagiarism Framework (CPF),

Select it from the drop-down menu under Store submissions: Once this option is selected, it also brings up the Store Submission options.

Plagiarism Review

Turnitin-CPF

turnitin **10** [Need help?](#)

Store submissions in:

Standard paper repository  
**Standard paper repository**  
 Institution paper repository  
 Do not store the submitted papers

Institutional repository  
 Website content  
 Periodicals, journals and publications

Standard Repository is the default option and will include submitted papers into the Turnitin database. This option brings up extra options under Compare submissions. These comparisons are highlighted below:

Student paper repository - compares current submissions to previous submissions in classes and assignments in Turnitin across institutions.

Institution paper repository - compares current submissions to the repository of student papers unique to your institution.

Website content (Current and archived internet) - compares current submissions to a repository of archived and live publicly available internet pages containing billions of pages of existing content and tens of thousands of new pages added daily.

Periodicals, journals, & publications - compares current submissions to third party periodical, journal, and publication content including many major professional journals, periodicals, and business publications.

The screenshot shows the 'Plagiarism Review' settings in a Turnitin interface. On the left is a navigation menu with items: Modules, Pages, Assignments (highlighted), Files, Chat, Rubrics, Attendance, Studio, Announcements, Syllabus, Grades, People, Discussions, and Quizzes. The main content area is titled 'Plagiarism Review' and contains several settings:

- A dropdown menu for 'Store submissions in:' with 'Turnitin-CPF' selected. Below it are 'None' and 'Turnitin-CPF' (highlighted in blue) options, with a 'Need help?' link.
- A section titled 'Store submissions in:' with a dropdown menu set to 'Standard paper repository'.
- A section titled 'Compare submissions against:' with four checkboxes:
  - Student repository
  - Institutional repository
  - Website content
  - Periodicals, journals and publications
- A section titled 'Similarity Report:' with five checkboxes:
  - Exclude bibliographic materials
  - Exclude quoted materials
  - Enable Translated Matching
  - Exclude small sources
  - Enable grammar checking using ETS® e-rater®

A blue circular badge with the number '11' is overlaid on the 'Periodicals, journals and publications' checkbox.

Setting up Similarity Report depends on what you expect from the students' submissions. As you set up your assignment, you can customize the Similarity Report by selecting the following options (Turnitin, 2023; (Eiffelcorp, 2023):

**“Exclude bibliographic materials.**

Exclude text appearing in the bibliography, works cited, or references sections of student papers from being checked for matches when generating Similarity Reports.

**Exclude quoted materials.**

Exclude text appearing in the quotes from being checked for matches when generating Similarity Reports.

**Enable Translated Matching**

Translated matching is an optional service offered by Turnitin, which allows your students to submit content in a non-English language, whilst retaining the ability to match against our vast database of English language content.

When Translated Matching is enabled for an account, Turnitin will identify the language that a paper has been written in. This paper will then be fully translated into English. The resulting English language content is then matched against all the databases that have been activated for the assignment. If a match is found, this will be displayed alongside any matches we have found in the non-translated version of the paper. Translated matching currently supports the following languages:

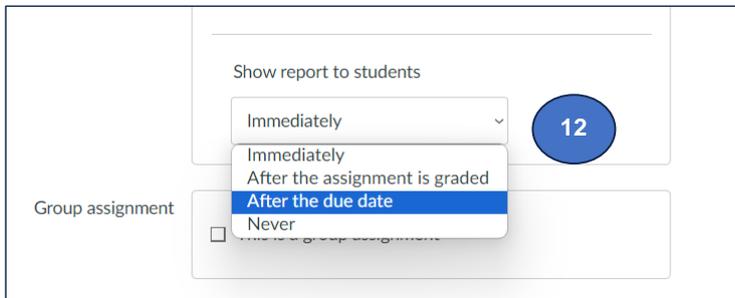
Arabic, Chinese (simplified), Chinese (traditional), Czech, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian Bokmal, Norwegian Nynorsk, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Thai, and Turkish.

**Exclude small sources.**

You can opt to exclude small sources from the Similarity Report by a set number of words or a percentage. Turnitin looks at the size of a matching source and makes any necessary exclusions based on the threshold specified by you. A minimum of 10-16 words should be set for the feature to work best (Cummings Graduate Institute, 2023; Eiffelcorp, 2022)".

**3.5.1 Show report to students**

Please set this up to immediately, to give students opportunity to see their similarity score.



At the end Save the Assignment



### 3.6 Interpreting Similarity Index Score

Similarity Reports provide a summary of matching or highly similar text found in a submitted paper. The similarity index score displays the percentage of the submitted assignment which matches other sources. Looking only at the similarity index score will not give you correct overview of the assignment. Even if an assignment has been correctly referenced or there is a potential breach of academic integrity, matched text without appropriate quotation, paraphrasing or referencing could be a breach of academic integrity hence the educator needs to go through and check.

- A score of 100% could indicate copying but it could also mean that the student has resubmitted their assignment for a legitimate reason. So, it is likely that the source is the student's own work which may be defined as a self-match.
- A very high score could indicate matches to legitimate sources such quoted text or items in the reference list. If a student has used quotes and referenced correctly, there will be instances where Turnitin will find a match and that is totally OK! The similarity score simply highlights any matching areas in the paper so an educator/marker can use this as an investigative tool to determine if the match is or is not acceptable.
- A very low score could indicate that the assignment is under-referenced, or that attempts have been made to 'trick' Turnitin's text-matching software.

The scores are colour-coded according to the amount of matching text.

<b>Blue:</b> No matching text	Blue indicates no text has been matched. This could indicate that the work has no references at all, that there is little or no use of direct quotes, or that attempts have been made to 'trick' Turnitin's text-matching software.
<b>Green:</b> One word to 24% matching text	Green indicates matches between 1% and 24%. While a Green score might suggest the document is OK, it is simply an indication of the amount of matched text, so potentially, up to 24% of the document could still have been copied without referencing.
<b>Yellow:</b> 25-49% matching text	Yellow, Amber and Red denote percentage matches in bands above 24%. Higher percentage matches may indicate:
<b>Orange:</b> 50-74% matching text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An over reliance on direct quotation as a result of poor academic writing.</li> <li>• Cutting and pasting from other sources.</li> </ul>
<b>Red:</b> 75-100% matching text	However, this could also indicate matches to legitimate sources such as an assignment template.

Table 2: Colour Codes from Similarity Index (Turnitin, 2023)

### 3.7 Match overview and breakdown

**Match** - This is text that is very similar or the same as some text you have in your paper. It is highlighted in Turnitin submitted assignment and the colours will correlate with the sources listed in your insight panel.

**Source** - The source is where a particular match has been found. This can be a web page, a student paper, or a published journal. Your sources are listed numerically in your insight panel, and it is possible to have multiple matches for each source. Selecting one of your sources will reveal information like how many matches were found for that source and where each match was found on that web page, student paper, or journal.

You access the [Match Overview](#) by clicking on the similarity score. The overview shows all the matches that have been found on a paper, ordered by highest similarity match to lowest.

Turnitin Similarity Index scores are found under Grades tool from your course menu. To view the matching text, click on the arrow next to each match. The matching text will be displayed next to the highlighted section of the submitted paper.

- Home
- Chat
- Announcements
- Modules
- Assignments
- Discussions
- Files
- Quizzes
- Grades

MS Word Assignment Out of 100 MANUAL	MS Word Assignment Cop UNPUBLISHED	MS Word Quiz Out of 26 MANUAL
		69.23%
		69.23%
42.5%		69.23%
77%		76.92%
57%		46.15%

Click SpeedGrader to reveal actual score with highlighted text and then select the actual score under Match Overview:

**Assignment Names**

Search assignments

MS Word Assignment Out of 100 MANUAL	MS Word Assignment Cop UNPUBLISHED	MS Word Out of 26 M
		69.23%
		69.23%
42.5%		69.23%
77%		76.92%
57%		46.15%
		84.62%
		84.62%
		80.77%
		92.31%
		76.92%
		88.46%
		92.31%

MS Word Assignment

SpeedGrader

Submit for Student

**Grade out of 100%**

42.5%

**Status**

None

Late

Missing

Excused

**Comments**

Leave a comment

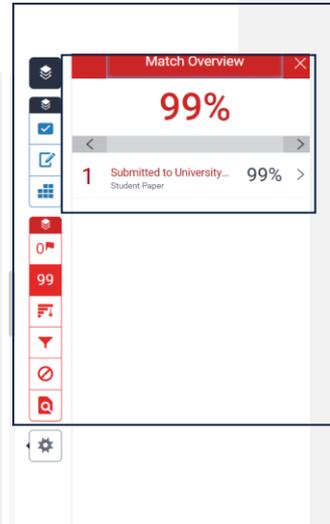
### 3.7.1 Match Overview

To reveal the actual matches or Match breakdown, select the actual score displayed in Turnitin.

I never imagined that it could be this hard to adjust in university.

My experience in university after the orientation period has been nothing but a nightmare to me. I thought it would be easy to adjust but i was wrong because for the first time in my life i had depression. It was really difficult for me to adjust to the new environment because I had no one , for the first time in my life i had no friend i was all alone in this new world .during the time of the orientation I couldn't make friends mostly because of the language i speak . I come from a small village in KwaZulu natal and the only language I can be able to maintain a conversation in is Isizulu hence i wasn't able to communicate with the other students because the most spoken language here in university is English. I do understand English, but the problem is that I'm not well spoken which is why i couldn't make friends.

I also had a hard time with the workload, back in high school we usually finish a chapter in a month time but here in university we finish a chapter in just a couple of days which was stressful to me because i'm not use to the workload as a result I was very behind with my schoolwork. It took me a couple of weeks to adjust to my new life, there was a time where in wanted to just give up and leave everything behind because I felt like I don't fit, and i felt like i made a biggest mistaken for choosing to further my studies.



### 3.7.2 Match Breakdown

This breakdown will reveal all sources used by the student as shown below:

Match Breakdown		
1	Submitted to University... Student Paper	99%
Match 1 of 1		
•	Submitted to University... Student Paper	99%
•	www.coursehero.com Internet Source - 12 urls	6%
•	Submitted to University... Student Paper	5%
•	Submitted to University... Student Paper	5%
•	Submitted to Avado Le... Student Paper	5%
•	Submitted to MacKillop... Student Paper	5%
•	Submitted to Malta Col... Student Paper	5%
•	Submitted to Simmons... Student Paper	5%

### 3.7.3 Acceptable matching text

Turnitin performs text-matching rather than plagiarism detection, so the highlighted text does not always indicate an issue.

Acceptable matching text (University of Adelaide, 2023) includes:

- Quotations which are followed by a reference.
- References and bibliography
- Matches to assignment templates or cover sheets.
- Table and charts which show copied data, followed by an appropriate reference.
- Technical terms specific to the discipline that must not be changed.

- Assessment topic related terms and phrases that must be retained, such as the wording of the question.
- Paraphrasing, if the marker judges that the paraphrase is sufficiently different from the original, and the paraphrase is followed by an appropriate reference.

### 3.7.4 Highlighted quotations

Turnitin may highlight text which is in quotation marks and includes a full reference, as below example extracted from (Turnitin, 2023) .

subconsciously' (Folkvord 2020, p.5). Although older children and adolescents may be able to identify some of these marketing tactics, 'recognition of persuasive intent is necessary, but not sufficient, to defend against the influence of junk food marketing' (Harris et al. 2020, p.21). As

This is acceptable matching text. Although the sentence is long, the discipline-specific preference for quotation or paraphrasing should be discussed with students.

If students include the assessment question as their title, this will match with other submissions. Cover sheets will also contribute to Turnitin similarity matches.

2	TABLE OF CONTENTS
1.	Cover Page
2.	Table Of Contents
3.	Essay (Introduction, Body, Conclusion)
4.	Pictures

### 4. References

This has been taken from one of the first-year students in the university and references are highlighted based on Turnitin database sources. Again, this requires a discretion of the marker.

Cummings Graduate Institute. (2023, October 18). *Canvas students*. Retrieved from Cummings Graduate Institute for Behavioral Health Studies:

<https://cumplingsinstitute.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360039459091-Why-is-Turnitin-flagging-items-like-quotations-and-references->

Eiffelcorp. (2023). *Turnitin training for Wits*. Johannesburg.

Turnitin. (2023, November 8). *Interpreting the Similarity Report*. Retrieved from Turnitin.com: <https://help.turnitin.com/feedback-studio/turnitin-website/student/the-similarity-report/interpreting-the-similarity-report.htm>

University of Adelaide. (2023, November 1). Retrieved from Avoiding Plagiarism | Writing Centre | University of Adelaide:  
[https://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/system/files/media/documents/2021-11/UoA%20Guide%20to%20Using%20Turnitin%20Similarity%20Reports\\_0.pdf](https://www.adelaide.edu.au/learning/system/files/media/documents/2021-11/UoA%20Guide%20to%20Using%20Turnitin%20Similarity%20Reports_0.pdf)

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### Tags:

Turnitin, Similarity Reports, Interpreting

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