



Key Questions Students Ask About Turnitin

What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is the leading Originality Checking and plagiarism prevention service used by millions of students and faculty, and thousands of institutions worldwide. Turnitin encourages best practices for using and citing other people's written material. The service offers a complete web-based service to manage the process of submitting and tracking papers electronically, providing better – and faster – feedback to students.

How does Turnitin work?

Institutions license Turnitin on an annual basis. The institutions are encouraged to communicate with students about their use of Turnitin and how their academic integrity policies work. An instructor sets up a class and an assignment in the Turnitin service. Students or instructors then submit papers to Turnitin via file upload or cut and paste.

Turnitin's proprietary software then compares the paper's text to a vast database of 12+ billion pages of digital content (including archived internet content that is no longer available on the live web) as well as 90+ million papers in the student paper archive, and 80,000+ professional, academic and commercial journals and publications. We're adding new content through new partnerships all the time. For example, our partner CrossRef boasts 500-plus members that include publishers such as Elsevier and the IEEE, and has already added well over 100 million pages of new content to our database. The comparison may be against any or all of these repositories, as set for a specific assignment by the instructor of the class.

Turnitin offers institutions a wide variety of flexible options for handling students' submissions including options that let students choose to keep their papers in an institution-only private zone.

What if Turnitin finds text matches in my paper?

Turnitin determines if text in a paper matches text in any of the Turnitin databases. The service does not detect or determine plagiarism – it just detects matching text. Indeed, the text in the student’s paper that is found to match a source may be properly cited and attributed. It is recommended that instructors carefully review the Originality Report and all matches before making any determination of plagiarism. Such determinations of plagiarism require human judgment, and instructors and students alike should understand their institution’s academic integrity policies before turning in written assignments.

Who can see my paper?

Only the course instructor, and possibly a TA assigned to the course, can see a student’s paper. If a match is found between the student’s paper and another student’s paper, the instructor can request the matching paper from the other student’s instructor. The instructors decide whether to share the matching paper depending on the circumstances.

The only exception to this rule is in the case of peer review assignments. Students in peer review assignments will be allowed to view the text of the papers they are assigned to review from within the context of the peer review assignment, though the instructor can choose to distribute the papers anonymously.

Does Turnitin violate student copyrights?

No, Turnitin does not violate student copyrights. A student work and its copyright are the property of the student. iParadigms, LLC (the parent company of Turnitin) makes no claim of copyright ownership to any of the student papers submitted to the Turnitin system.

A closely-watched lawsuit against iParadigms that alleged student copyright infringement was dismissed by U.S. District Court in March of 2008. In that dismissal, U.S. District Court Judge Claude M. Hilton ruled that Turnitin’s use of students’ papers falls under the doctrine of fair use, and stated that, “though iParadigms makes a profit in providing this service to educational institutions, its use of student works adds ‘a further purpose or different character’ to the works.” Such ‘transformative’ works are considered fair use. Further, because student works become part of the database against which other students’ work is compared, Turnitin helps protect the papers from being exploited by others who might profitably claim them as their own work, or sell them to other students. On April 16, 2009, the US Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit issued a published decision that unanimously affirmed the lower court’s finding of fair use for iParadigms, LLC.