



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?

An instructor sets up a class and an assignment in the Turnitin service (via file upload or cut-and-paste). Turnitin's proprietary software then compares the paper's text to a vast database of 11+ billion pages of digital content – along with archived internet content that is no longer available on the live web – as well as over 100 million papers in the student archive, 80,000+ professional, academic and commercial journals and publications.

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 – an instructor needs to make that call based on the matches shown in the Originality Report. 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 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 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. That instructor then decides 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 make reviews anonymous.

Does Turnitin violate student copyrights?

No - student works are the property of the student, and are copyrighted and protected. iParadigms, LLC (the parent company of Turnitin) makes no claim of copyright to any of the works submitted to the Turnitin system. A recent lawsuit that alleged copyright infringement was dismissed by U.S. District Judge Claude M. Hilton who determined that Turnitin's use of student papers falls under the doctrine of "fair use". He also stated that 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.