An Overview of the Turnitin Originality Checking Software

The Sullivan University System has a subscription to the Turnitin online anti-plagiarism software available for faculty to use in their classes. This web service allows instructors to set up web pages in which students submit assignments that can be automatically checked for improper use of sources. Turnitin is in a constant state of revision, making the software easier to use and more powerful. Turnitin can be found at http://www.turnitin.com.

Among the features that Turnitin offers are plagiarism detection, the ability to set custom parameters for accepting assignments, student collaboration tools, and a feature for marking up papers. We will briefly discuss the features and how to use Turnitin. If you prefer video instructions on the service, they are available online from Turnitin at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training.

Signing Up for a Turnitin Account

If you do not already have an instructor’s account through Turnitin, e-mail the librarian at your campus (our contact information is at the end of this guide), and we will create one for you. The enrollment process is quick and simple. Once we enroll you in the service, an e-mail will be sent to your Sullivan, Spencerian, or SCTD account requiring you to log in. Once you’ve logged in, you’ll be able to choose a password for the service.
Creating Classes and Assignments

Turnitin allows you to create class pages for each section of a class you teach as well as multiple assignments per class. Your students will have access only to the class pages for which you give them access credentials.

A view of the instructor’s homepage, with several classes available

To create a class, click the + Add Class button. To view a class you have already created, click the name of the class. If you wish to change the setting for a class, click the edit ( ) button. Finally, if you wish to delete a class, click the delete ( ) button. Please note that, if you delete a class, it is not retrievable.
Classes

Setting up classes is easy to do, and will not require much time. After you click the button on your homepage, you will see the following screen:

The class creation form

For the “Class type,” keep the default selection, “Standard class.” The other options are not currently in regular use in the Sullivan University System, and may cause errors.

The “Class name” should be easily identifiable for both you and your students. If you teach multiple sections of the same course, we would highly recommend including the section numbers in the name.

You will need to distribute the “Enrollment password” to your students, so we would recommend not making it too confusing for them. For example, difficult passwords that mix letters and numbers can cause less computer-savvy students to type the password in incorrectly, e.g., confusing the letter L for the number 1.

The “Subject area(s)” and “Student level(s)” are required, but the selection you make won’t affect the class in any way. Choose whatever makes sense to you.

The “Class end date” will determine when the class can no longer be changed in any way. You will still be able to view the class. We recommend setting the date a few weeks after the course ends.

Once you’ve set up a class, students can enroll with a class name and password that you assign and distribute to them. For further information on setting up a class, consult Turnitin’s guide located here.
After you press the **Submit** button on the class creation form, your class will be created. You will see the following screen:

![Class created](image)

*Confirmation that your course was created*

Write down the “Class ID” and “Enrollment password.” These two bits of information are what you will need to provide to your students in order for them to enroll in the class. After you click the **Continue** button, you will be returned to your Turnitin homepage. Congratulations — your first class has been created! To view the class and start creating assignments, click on the “Class name” on the homepage.
Assignments

Creating assignments in Turnitin can appear daunting at first, but you will find it to be quite easy once you’ve created one or two. There are many options you can set for each assignment. Turnitin has videos and reading materials available on creating assignments, which you can find at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training/creating-assignments.

The following image is what you will see when you click on a course. Note the button. You will click that button to create an assignment.

A view of the class page. No assignments have been created yet for this class

After you click the button, you will be taken to the “New Assignment” screen. The “New Assignment” screen is the most complicated part of creating a new assignment, but it is not difficult to work with once you understand all of the options available to you. We will discuss each of them in turn.
The New Assignment screen

This is the screen that will appear when you create a new assignment. The “Assignment title” is self-explanatory. The “Point value” is used if you create a grade book in Turnitin. We do not recommend doing so at this time; for the present, it is probably for the best to leave that section blank. The “Start date” is the date and time when students can first submit their papers. The “Due date” is when Turnitin will remove their ability to submit papers for that particular assignment. The “Post date” is when your grade for the assignment, if you choose to record grades in Turnitin, will appear to the student. Whether you choose to record grades or not, Turnitin requires that you choose a post date. Additionally, the post date MUST be after the due date. If you do not choose a post date after the due date, Turnitin will display an error message and will not create the assignment.

Note that Turnitin cannot check all file types for originality. We highly recommend that you check the “Allow only file types that Turnitin can check for originality” button instead of the “Allow any file type” one.

Note the Optional settings drop-down button at the bottom of the screen. Many of the more important options for assignments are stored within. When you click on the drop-down, you will see the following options:
Enter special instructions

Allow submissions after the due date?
- Yes
- No

Originality Report

Generate Originality Reports for submissions?
- Yes
- No

Generate Originality Reports for student submissions
- Immediately first report is final

Exclude bibliographic materials from Similarity Index for all papers in this assignment?
- Yes
- No

Exclude quoted materials from Similarity Index for all papers in this assignment?
- Yes
- No

Exclude small matches?
- Yes
- No

Allow students to see Originality Reports?
- Yes
- No

Submit papers to:
- No repository

Search options:
- Student paper repository
- Current and archived internet
- Periodicals, journals, & publications

GradeMark

Attach a rubric to this assignment
Note: students will be able to view attached rubrics and their content prior to submitting.

No rubric is attached to this assignment
- Show rubric list or Launch Rubric Manager
- Would you like to save these options as your defaults for future assignments?
Working from top to bottom of the screen, here are the options and their functions:

**Enter Special Instructions**
Here, you can type in instructions for the assignment for your students. Often, instructors paste the requirements for the assignment from their syllabi here.

**Allow submissions after the due date?**
This option simply allows you to decide whether to accept late papers or not.

**Generate Originality Reports for submissions?**
This option is used to determine whether the assignments are checked for plagiarism or not. We highly recommend that you select “Yes.” Otherwise, Turnitin will not prove itself very useful to you.

**Generate Originality Reports for student submissions**
This drop-down has three options. The first, “immediately first report is final” will cause plagiarism reports to be generated as soon as they are submitted, and the student cannot resubmit their work for a better plagiarism report. The second, “immediately (can overwrite reports until due date),” will allow students to turn in a paper, see their plagiarism percentage, correct their papers, then resubmit them for better percentages. The final, “on due date,” will caused all of your students’ papers to be evaluated for plagiarism at the same time, the date and time you selected when you set the assignment up.

**Exclude bibliographic materials from Similarity Index for all papers in this assignment?**
This will prevent the students’ reference pages from being evaluated for plagiarism. Since many schools use APA as their standard citation method, your students may have their citations flagged as plagiarism and count towards their overall plagiarism percentage if you do not select this.

**Exclude quoted materials from Similarity Index for all papers in this assignment?**
This option will cause text in quotation marks to be skipped when the plagiarism report is run. Using this option will result in lower plagiarism scores, but may cause “false negatives” if quotation marks are improperly used in a paper or the student uses citation incorrectly.

**Exclude small matches?**
This option allows short snippets of text, the length of which being determined by you, to be skipped during the plagiarism report. This is useful for preventing dozens of “false positives” in a report. For example, a student may use the words “into the sky” in his paper, which may appear in a hundred other papers, causing it to be marked as plagiarism. It is doubtful that anyone would consider that plagiarism. Excluding small matches will avoid this. However, not excluding small matches may also be useful to you in certain situations. For example, a student may have fifty small matches, all of which come from the same article. In this situation, a closer look at the paper is warranted!
**Allow students to see Originality Reports?**

Simply enough, this option gives you the option to decide whether or not students will be allowed to see their own plagiarism reports.

**Submit papers to:**

This is one of the more important features of Turnitin. You have two options to choose from. If you select “no repository,” the student’s paper will be evaluated for plagiarism, but Turnitin will not retain any of the student’s paper beyond it being stored on your class page. If you select “standard paper repository,” Turnitin will add the student’s paper to its own student paper database. In so doing, if other students plagiarize you student’s paper in the future, Turnitin will catch them. I recommend allowing Turnitin to add the paper to its database in most situations. However, there are situations where not allowing it to keep them is beneficial. For example, some instructors set up multiple Turnitin assignments for the same paper. They may have the student turn in a first draft to Turnitin, then submit a second draft as a different assignment later in the quarter. In this sort of situation, if the papers are added to Turnitin’s database, the student’s second draft would show up as being plagiarized from her first draft! In this situation, it would be best to only allow the final draft to be added to Turnitin’s database.

**Search options:**

These options tell Turnitin what materials to check papers against. The options are “Student paper repository,” “Current and archived internet,” and “Periodicals, journals, & publications.” We highly recommend selecting all three options.

**Attach a rubric to this assignment**

This option allows you to add a custom rubric to the assignment that you can use to grade papers in Turnitin. Rubrics are beyond the scope of this document, but more information can be found at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training/using-rubrics-for-grading-and-evaluating.

**Would you like to save these options as your defaults for future assignments?**

If you find yourself using the same options for all of your assignments, checking this box will save you from having to set the options for every assignment.

Once you have set the options for the assignment how you want them, click the **Submit** button. Congratulations — you have created your first assignment!
A view of the class page with an assignment created. Note that a paper has been submitted.

The view above is what you will see when the assignment is created. The name of the assignment; start, due, and post dates; and status are listed. The status will display the number of papers submitted and the total number of students in the class. The “View” button will take you to a page that lists the students’ papers and their plagiarism reports. Finally, the “More actions” button will allow you to edit the assignment settings, submit a paper for a student, or delete the assignment entirely. Please note that, if you delete an assignment, it is gone forever and cannot be retrieved.
An example of an assignment page.

If you click the “View” button for an assignment, you will see a page that looks like the one above, although your page will have many more students listed. The plagiarism report, in the form of a percentage, will appear in a minute or two. If it does not, press the refresh button on your browser.

If you click the name of a student, it will open a page listing all of the papers he has submitted for your class. If you click the title of a paper or the grade (✍️) button, it will open the GradeMark feature of Turnitin, which allows you to grade and mark on the paper. (The GradeMark feature is beyond the scope of this document, but more information on it can be found at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training/grademark-overview.) Clicking the “File” (📄) button will allow you to download a copy of the paper.

Arguably the most important part of Turnitin is the “Similarity Index,” or percentage of a paper that is plagiarized. It appears as a percentage and colored bar. Clicking on the bar will bring up a detailed plagiarism report. In the example above, the paper has a 98% rating. The higher the percentage, the more of the paper is plagiarized. A 0% is completely original, and a 100% is entirely plagiarized. Realistically, every paper will be listed as having at least some plagiarism simply because of the amount of materials in Turnitin’s database and the repetitiveness of the English language. Even the most innocent paper will have a phrase or two that appears in someone else’s work!
OriginalityCheck Plagiarism Prevention

Turnitin’s built-in plagiarism protection software is a powerful tool for checking the originality of a student’s assignment. Using the content of several databases, the Internet, and other student-authored papers, the software examines student assignments for text taken from other sources and identifies those sources. The following screenshot illustrates an OriginalityCheck report.

A plagiarism report
The student’s paper is presented on the left side of the screen. Text that is suspected to be plagiarized is color-coded and numbered to match the list of original documents to the right. Click on a source to see where in the paper it is plagiarized. Also, if you point your mouse at one of the sources on the right, a small arrow (➡️) will appear. If you click on the arrow, the section of the original text being plagiarized will appear for purpose of comparison. This might prove helpful in determining if the plagiarism is intentional.

The page has a few other useful features. If you click the printer button (🖨️) at the bottom left of the report, you will have the option to print or save a printer-friendly copy of the plagiarism report in PDF format. Also, at the bottom-right of the report is a button labeled “Text-Only Report,” which will show a simplified view of the report. You may find it easier to read, and it will work better than the standard view on less-powerful and slower computers.

For More Information and Assistance

Turnitin has an excellent series of illustrated manuals and videos available at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training. If you would like guides that will help your students to use the software, they may be found at http://turnitin.com/en_us/training/student-training. If you have any questions about Turnitin, you may find answers at Turnitin’s homepage; or, if you prefer, feel free to contact your library using the information below!

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