

## Turnitin.com: Best Practices

1. Set realistic expectations: Turnitin is what it is and does what it does. Nothing more, nothing less. It's a tool, not a miracle. It is not a substitute for good teaching or good assignments.
2. Don't look at Turnitin as an easy way out: Turnitin, like any teaching tool, is only effective if the teacher is paying attention. Don't think of it as a way to keep from having to devote time to the issue of plagiarism in student writing. Just see it as one way to raise flags of possible problems.
3. Look for opportunities to teach, not punish: Most students who plagiarize do so because they don't know how to avoid it. Use the Turnitin reports to help them understand.
4. Be clear to students about how you use the tool: Make sure students know their work is being submitted to Turnitin. Make sure they know what that means and how their grades might be affected if plagiarism is detected.
5. Make reports available to students: They can only improve if they see what they are doing wrong. Students should never be denied access to the originality reports on their own writing.
6. Don't wait for final drafts: Again, students deserve fair warning, and the best teaching opportunities come with rough drafts.
7. Understand that percentages are meaningless: The only way to know if a student has plagiarized is to open the report and look line by line at the sentences marked. Sometimes a student with a 20% match has not plagiarized when a student with a 5% match has.
8. Recognize that not every originality-challenged sentence is an act of plagiarism: Students do indulge in clichés and common generalizations. They internalize things they hear and read and spit them back out as if they are their own. These instances are not plagiarism and should not be treated as such.
9. Take time to explain confusing aspects of reports: Why does Turnitin show matches to articles and other student papers they've never read? Does it automatically mean it is plagiarized if it is marked? Is there a percentage of "plagiarism" that is acceptable? These questions are common, and students should be told the answers up front.
10. Give specific feedback to students on instances of plagiarism: Don't just put a big a minus on the paper for plagiarism and leave it at that. Remember that most plagiarism is difficult to understand and prevent. If points are deducted for plagiarism, explain why.

Summary: Best practices for use of Turnitin are—like anything else—all in the attitude. If used as an opportunity to teach rather than as simply a means of catching and punishing wrongdoing, Turnitin can be quite helpful. One of the biggest complaints against Turnitin is that it establishes the mindset that students are assumed to be guilty until proven otherwise. Turnitin is an electronic device. It doesn't establish any sort of mindset; instructors do that. Accusatory attitudes are counterproductive and can lead to unethical uses of this product. Lazy attitudes are equally problematic. On the other hand, instructors who view Turnitin as only one aspect of the overall process of guiding students through the difficult task of understanding and avoiding plagiarism can put it to good use.

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This handout is available to download at [www.teacherlytech.net](http://www.teacherlytech.net).