Referencing, Plagiarism & Managing Sources
Interpreting your Turnitin Report

What is Turnitin?

- Text matching software
- Provides a similarity index
  - Shows how much of the text of your essay matches with sources on the Internet and with other essays in the Turnitin database
- Turnitin does not “detect” plagiarism and the similarity index is not a measure of “how much” you have plagiarised
- Whether you have committed plagiarism or not depends on how you have presented the matching text in your essay
- Turnitin can help your markers to identify plagiarism but it can also help you to avoid it

What is plagiarism?

Using in your work any information or ideas from any external source without giving credit to the original source by using an appropriate referencing system. This includes (but is not limited to):

- Quotation (copying the exact words), summarising or paraphrasing of the source – without citation
- Copying the exact words from the source, without quotation marks – even if you include the citation
- Use of statistics, figures, illustrations etc. – without citation
- Use of ideas – without citation
- Submission of work obtained from others (buying or copying essays)
- Submitting group work as your own

(Adapted from University of Bradford, 2010, p. 2-3)

There is no “acceptable limit for plagiarism”. The examples below demonstrate that you could be trouble for plagiarism with a similarity index of 5%, or have an index of 25% but no plagiarism – it depends on whether or not you have referenced the matching text appropriately.
Example 1: 16% similarity index – is this plagiarism?

In the very early embryo, the cells that will become the gonads are morphologically indifferent i.e. the same set of cells can develop into either testes or ovaries. This indifferent region is known as the genital ridge. The expression of SF1 and WT1 genes causes the ridge to develop into a gonad in the absence of either of these genes, no gonads develop (Luo et al., 1994). In males, the first primary sex determination factor is encoded by the Sry gene, located in the tip of the short arm of the Y chromosome. The gene product, SRY, is a transcription factor that initiates a cascade of other testis determining factors, including further expression of SF1. The gene product, steroidogenic factor 1, or SF1, has two further functions. Firstly, it acts as a co-factory with SRY to induce formation of the Sertoli and Leydig cells of the testis (an autosomal gene, Sox9, is also essential for development of the Sertoli cells). In addition, SF1 activates genes involved in steroid synthesis, including those for the testosterone pathway in the Leydig cells and the AMH pathway in the Sertoli cell (Shen et al., 1994). AMH, or anti-Müllerian hormone, as the name suggests, causes degeneration of the Müllerian duct, which would otherwise develop into the female reproductive tract. AMH is also involved in control of proliferation of the Leydig cells. Testosterone causes the Wolffian duct to differentiate into the epididymis, vas deferens and seminal vesicles.

The role of Sry in sex determination is well established. XY individuals with the Sry region deleted develop as females (Gubbay et al., 1990) and XX mice transgenic for the Sry gene develop into morphologically normal, if infertile, males (the presence of two X chromosomes inhibits sperm formation) (Koopman et al., 1991). Interestingly, although Sry is involved in sex determination in most mammalian species that have been studied, it seems to be a very rapidly evolving gene. Its structure is so little conserved that Sry genes from certain strains of mice (not specifically selected for Sry mutations) are unable to induce testis development in other strains (Washburn and Eicher, 1989).

Obviously, XX embryos do not express Sry. However, a gene on the X-chromosome, Dax1, is expressed in the genital ridge of both XX and XY embryos. This gene encodes a member of the nuclear hormone receptor super-family. In situ hybridisation experiments have shown that it is expressed in the same area, and at the same time, as Sry and Sox9 in both males and females (Swain et al., 1998). In XY individuals, Dax1 is rapidly down-regulated, while its expression continues in XX embryos, suggesting that prolonged presence of DAX1 protein is involved in the development of ovaries. Wnt10a is an autosomal gene, which appears to have similar distribution and effects to Dax1.

In example 1, each of the sections of matching text shows subject-specific vocabulary that would be difficult to phrase in any other way. In some cases the essay and the internet source are both paraphrasing the same original source, using common expressions in the discipline. THIS IS NOT PLAGIARISM and it often happens in scientific or technical subjects which use a lot of specific vocabulary.
Example 2: 25% similarity index - is this plagiarism?

Smith’s might be described as a typical example of middle to late Enlightenment historiography, particularly in its use of conjecture. The term "conjectural history" was coined by Smith’s former student, Dugald Stewart (1753-1828). This technique is seen in many histories emanating from Enlightenment Scotland, by writers such as Hume, Kames, Ferguson and Millar. It is based on the assertion that the psychology of the human mind has been the same at all times and in all places and that we can project our current knowledge of human nature onto situations in the past to interpret historical events. To quote David Hume, from his Treatise of Human Nature, ‘whether we consider mankind according to the difference of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education; the same uniformity and regular operation of natural principles are discernible. Like causes still produce like effects; in the same manner as in the mutual action of the elements and powers of nature’. In discussing Smith’s Dissertation on the Origin of Languages, Dugald Stewart, after commenting on the dearth of factual knowledge about many events in history, says, in this want of direct evidence, we are under a necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture; and when we are unable to ascertain how men have actually conducted themselves upon particular occasions, of considering in what manner they are likely to have proceeded, from the principles of their nature, and the circumstances of their external situation. We see here the concept of the universal mind, that is, that in their fundamental working, the minds of all men are alike, which is essential to Smith’s psychology and epistemology.

Conjectural history is important to the Enlightenment because the practice gives a check to that indolent philosophy, which refers to a miracle, whatever appearances, both in the natural and moral world, it is unable to explain. As we have seen, Enlightenment thinkers were vigorously opposed to any form of superstitious beliefs.

Example 3: 25% similarity index - is this plagiarism?

Smith’s might be described as a typical example of middle to late Enlightenment historiography, particularly in its use of conjecture. The term "conjectural history" was coined by Smith’s former student, Dugald Stewart (1753-1828) in his Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith, introducing the 1892 edition of Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments (Stewart, 1892). This technique is seen in many histories emanating from Enlightenment Scotland, by writers such as Hume, Kames, Ferguson and Millar. It is based on the assertion that the psychology of the human mind has been the same at all times and in all places and that we can project our current knowledge of human nature onto situations in the past to interpret historical events. To quote David Hume, from his Treatise of Human Nature (Hume, 1776, page 401), ‘whether we consider mankind according to the difference of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education; the same uniformity and regular operation of natural principles are discernible. Like causes still produce like effects; in the same manner as in the mutual action of the elements and powers of nature’. In discussing Smith’s Dissertation on the Origin of Languages, Dugald Stewart, after commenting on the dearth of factual knowledge about many events in history, says, in this want of direct evidence, we are under a necessity of supplying the place of fact by conjecture; and when we are unable to ascertain how men have actually conducted themselves upon particular occasions, of considering in what manner they are likely to have proceeded, from the principles of their nature, and the circumstances of their external situation’ (Stewart, 1892, page xxxv). We see here the concept of the universal mind, that is, that in their fundamental working, the minds of all men are alike, which is essential to Smith’s psychology and epistemology.

Conjectural history is important to the Enlightenment because, as Stewart also says, the practice "gives a check to that indolent philosophy, which refers to a miracle, whatever appearances, both in the natural and moral world, it is unable to explain". As we have seen, Enlightenment thinkers were vigorously opposed to any form of superstitious belief.
This is exactly the same essay as example 2 – the only difference is that here, the quotations have been marked with quotation marks and the proper citations have been included. Unlike example 2, THIS IS NOT PLAGIARISM because the matched text has been referenced properly.

Example 4: 5% similarity index – is this plagiarism?

Example 4 has word-for-word quotation from the source, with no acknowledgement, either direct or implied. THIS IS PLAGIARISM even though the similarity index is “only” 5%.
Further help with Turnitin and avoiding plagiarism

Online resources

- Blackboard
- Guide to referencing styles: http://www.brad.ac.uk/library/elecinfo/cite.php
- Academic Skills Advice service resources on Referencing, Plagiarism and Managing Sources: http://www.brad.ac.uk/academic-skills/resources/study-skills/reference/

For full details of workshops and clinics, on this and other subjects, and to book online, see: http://www.brad.ac.uk/iss/issworkshops/index.php?section=date

Personal advice

- Speak to your lecturers/ personal tutor
- Contact your subject librarian for advice: