

Interpreting the Similarity Index

i This article explains how an instructor can use the Turnitin Similarity Index Score to determine a paper's originality.

Turnitin's similarity index matches content from a student submission to material that appears on the web and in the Turnitin database.

It is not a **plagiarism detector** itself, but can be reviewed by an instructor to determine if there is an originality concern.

Turnitin Similarity Colour Coding

Turnitin will automatically review a student submission against the similarity index, providing a similarity index score. The score will be color-coded according to the percent of text in the paper that is found to be similar to other sources.

TITLE	SIMILARITY
Submission	0% 
Submission	6% 
Submission	43% 
Submission	58% 
Submission	80% 

Not all text identified as similar is an originality concern. Instructor interpretation will determine if the highlighted material is a "false flag" or a genuine originality concern.

False Flags	Originality Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Quoted material (setting dependent)Improperly formatted quoted materialBibliographiesFormulasAssignment instructionsAssignments in which the answers are intended to be the same across students (maths, etc)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Material copied from a websiteExact or similar responses from another studentParaphrasing that is too similar to the originalText that matches submissions to the Turnitin database

False Flags	Originality Concerns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely common phrasing (According to [author name], ...) 	

Example 1: Instructions + Similar Responses

Here, the similarity index recognizes the instructions as other students have submitted the same assignment. Additionally, the responses will be relatively similar from student to student.

The screenshot shows a Turnitin assignment interface. On the left is a table with instructions and character analysis data. On the right is a 'Match Overview' sidebar showing a 41% similarity score.

Character	Neutral Facts	Critical Lens	Sympathetic Lens	Your Interpretation
1 Betty Parris	- The daughter of Reverend Parris Dancing in the forest	- lying/faking coma Which leads to killing people	- scared kid	She is just a scared kid but doesn't realize that her lies can affect other people
2 John Proctor	- married to Elizabeth, Farmer	- having an affair with Abigail	- felt guilty with his actions	A good person that felt guilty for cheating with his wife

Example 2: Improperly Formatted Quoted Material

In this example, the quotation marks are facing the wrong direction, resulting in this quoted material flagged by Turnitin in the Similarity Index.

The screenshot shows a Turnitin match overview for a document titled 'Submitted to Liberty U...'. The similarity score is 41%. A list of matches is shown on the right, with the top match highlighted in red.

George yells at Beneatha and exclaims, "Because this is stupid! I don't go out with you to discuss the nature of "quiet desperation" or to hear all about your thoughts--because the world will go on thinking what it thinks regardless-" (Hansberry 96-97). George isn't the type of man to

Example 3: Improper Paraphrasing

In this case, a student has insufficiently paraphrased material. This results in sporadic highlighting from the same source. An instructor can determine to what extent this is considered plagiarism or consider revision as an option.

release. As a result of Jackie paving the way for African American MLB players, african americans were drafted into the MLB and given equal opportunities as their white counterparts to some extent. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, made the federal government offer its immense power to all people of the American Society. The act didn't reach all of the goals of the civil rights activists only some. It took judicial precedent and legislative action to guarantee civil rights for African Americans. Although the movement has left its everlasting mark on the



Allowing for multiple submissions can help students see highlighted similar material and allow them to revise and resubmit.

Example 4: Plagiarism

This is an example in which Turnitin is useful for identifying plagiarism, as large sections of text are highlighted as similar to other sources. Further indicating plagiarism, the only non-highlighted sections of text are quoted material.

The screenshot displays a Turnitin submission interface. On the left, a document titled 'Chapter 10: Learning Style' is shown with several paragraphs of text. Some text is highlighted in red, indicating similarity to other sources. On the right, a 'Match Overview' sidebar is visible, showing a total similarity score of 54%. Below the score, a list of matches is provided:

Match Number	Source	Similarity Percentage
1	Submitted to La Quinta... Student Paper	20%
2	articles.chicagotribune... Internet Source	16%
3	Submitted to Ingraham... Student Paper	9%
4	healthline.com Internet Source	9%



For more details on the use of Turnitin and the Similarity Index, for staff and students, visit Turnitin documentation available at:

- [Turnitin Support](#)