Hong Kong Baptist University

Plagiarism Prevention Software: Academic Usage Guidelines for Student Work

1   Background

1.1   The University provides its academic staff with access to anti-plagiarism software (currently *Turnitin*). This software can compare submitted academic assignments against an extensive database of published and unpublished information, and provide a report on the degree of similarity between the assignment and material in that database. It is sophisticated enough to detect similarity even where superficial changes have been made to the word order of the original source.

1.2   The purpose of these guidelines is to help ensure that the usage of *Turnitin* is consistent across the University, as part of HKBU's ongoing efforts to maintain high levels of academic integrity among all students.

1.3   These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the information on "Avoiding Plagiarism" provided by the Academic Registry: http://ar.hkbu.edu.hk/curr/avoid_plagiarism/

2   Guidelines for Use

2.1   **The primary purpose for the use of any plagiarism prevention software at the University is educational**. Through *Turnitin*, the University is providing a means by which faculty can help students enhance their understanding of academic integrity and plagiarism. The adoption of the programme is intended to encourage honest work by making it essential for students to reflect on the authenticity of their assignments.

2.2   The use of software technology like *Turnitin* alone cannot prove that a student has committed plagiarism. Conversely, students cannot use *Turnitin* to prove that they have not plagiarized. Such judgments need to be made by individual faculty.

2.3   **The University's guidance is for the assignments of every course to be submitted to *Turnitin* whenever appropriate.**

2.4   In alignment with the principle of using *Turnitin* primarily as an educational tool, **students should be allowed to submit their assignments and review the similarity report** prior to the final submission of the assignment. This formative approach provides students with the opportunity to identify potential problems and seek advice as appropriate.

2.5 However, allowing students to repetitively submit the same assignment to *Turnitin* may lead to poor academic writing practice as it encourages instrumental approaches to paraphrasing (e.g. word substitution). The submission of one draft at the final stage of writing is normally enough, and two or more draft submissions should be avoided. Faculty members may make their own judgment as to the optimal number of submissions with reference to the nature of the assignment they have set.

2.6 The following statement should appear in the course outline for all courses:

The University staunchly upholds the principles of academic integrity. As one part of HKBU's effort to prevent plagiarism, the software Turnitin is used to compare all assignments against multiple sources whenever appropriate. A report on each assignment is generated that includes a percentage similarity and links to specific similar sources. Turnitin does not conclusively prove whether or not an assignment is plagiarized – the faculty will make this determination.

3 Review of Similarity Reports

3.1 The system will generate a similarity report for every submitted assignment. As *Turnitin* is essentially a text matching system, the report identifies those sections of the assignment text that match another text source in the *Turnitin* database.

3.2 The overall amount of text matched will be expressed as a percentage in each report. **This is for guidance only – the University does not define a "safe" level, nor is there a level that definitively signals that plagiarism has occurred**.

3.3 The reported percentage similarity therefore cannot be used as the sole basis for action. However, unusual percentage levels can be interpreted as a flag for further investigation. In such cases the full report should be viewed to identify the nature of the matching text.

4 Privacy and data protection

4.1 Normally, a copy of all assignments submitted to *Turnitin* will be retained on their servers and incorporated into their database. Although this is solely for the purpose of allowing future submissions to be checked against existing assignments, concerns about privacy and data protection may be raised. The following statement on this issue is provided by iParadigms (the company that produces *Turnitin*):

"As a US company with high standards for security and privacy, iParadigms has designed Turnitin to comply with many of the data protection requirements of other countries, including informed consent, access rights of submitting students, and technical and organizational measures to maintain the integrity and confidentiality of personal data."

(Source: http://turnitin.com/en_us/privacy-center/legal-faqs)

5 Academic integrity development and enhancement

5.1 When teaching faculty identify students that they feel would benefit from developing their knowledge and understanding of academic integrity, they are encouraged to refer them to the University Library.

5.2 Staff members that want to discuss matters of academic integrity can seek assistance and advice from both the Centre for Holistic Teaching and Learning (CHTL) and the Library.

6 Summary of Guidelines:

- Anti-plagiarism software (currently *Turnitin*) is to be used for the purpose of educating students about academic honesty and plagiarism
- All student assignments should be submitted to *Turnitin* whenever appropriate
- Students should be given one opportunity to review the *Turnitin* similarity report for their assignments prior to submitting the final draft
- Faculty should use the similarity reports generated for their course assignments to help identify potential instances of student plagiarism, and take appropriate follow-up action

These guidelines will still apply should the University decides to adopt an alternative anti-plagiarism software package other than Turnitin

Appendix – Points to note when reviewing *Turnitin* similarity reports (adapted from the Curtin University Guidelines)

The following are examples of considerations that should be taken into account when reviewing the reports generated by *Turnitin*:

- Certain aspects of an assignment will match, such as correctly formed references and correctly attributed quotations. These can be excluded from the analysis.
- It is unusual for assignments to have a similarity index of 0%, as matches with common phrases, references, and quotations are to be expected. Such low scores may indicate instances where the assignment has been repetitively submitted to *Turnitin* and matching portions edited out.
- High percentage matches may arise due to excessive use of quotations. If properly referenced, this is technically not plagiarism. However, it is poor assessment practice if very little of an assignment is the student's own work.

The above list is by no means exhaustive. Faculty are encouraged to contact the CHTL for guidance and assistance in the use of *Turnitin* as necessary.

References

The following documents informed the creation of the policy:

Texas Women's University. Turnitin Antiplagiarism Software, Academic Use Policy.

University of Glasgow. Policy for the use of the Plagiarism Prevention Software Turnitin.

Curtin University. Guidelines for the use of Turnitin at Curtin.

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