

1. **How does Turnitin.com work?**

The text portion of a submitted paper is compared to documents on the freely available Internet and within the Turnitin.com database. This mechanical word matching process produces an originality report which identifies web sites with identical phrases.

**Comment:** Purely a linguistic comment:  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=mechanical>

2. **My professor has asked me to submit my paper to Turnitin.com, but in order to do that, I have to give Turnitin.com my email address. What if I do not want mail from Turnitin.com?**

Turnitin.com does not send email to you. In the future, should your work appear to have been the basis for plagiarism by another individual, your instructor may receive a request to confirm that this is the case. A request of this type does not go directly to you.

From Section 2d of [Legal Document](#) at Turnitin.com:

*If there is a match to another submitted student paper, only the e-mail address and name of the instructor whose student submitted the first paper will be given to the instructor of the matching paper, along with a paper ID #. Only the instructor of the originally submitted paper would be able to use this ID# to determine the student's personal information, and they already have access to such information.*

**Comment:** Not just web sites - it actually identifies web sites, previously submitted papers, and some published articles that are stored in their database.  
  
The current wording ignores all content other than websites, and it implies that all websites are covered – which is very obviously incorrect. Alternate wording: "... which identifies papers and web sites from the TurnItIn database that have identical phrases"

**Comment:** This link doesn't work.

Dalhousie University issues each student a Dalhousie email address. You should use that address instead of your personal email address for institutional purposes, such as submissions to Turnitin.com.

3. **When does it start? This is a great idea.**

Dalhousie instructors have been able to use Turnitin.com since it started several years ago and was available to instructors at departmental or personal expense. As of July 9, 2002, any instructor wishing to take advantage of this service is no longer required to cover the expense with departmental or personal funds.

**Comment:** I don't even know what to say here. This quotation is taken from the AMERICAN legal document, not the Canadian one. And it is taken from a section on FERPA, an AMERICAN law which has no equivalent in Canada. Citing a response to a US law to Canadian students is misleading, at the very least, and I leave it as an exercise for the reader to come up with adjectives to describe "at the very most".

**Comment:** Actually, when TurnItIn.com started, at Plagiarism.org, it was available as a free service:  
<http://web.archive.org/web/19991126095135/www.plagiarism.org/faq.html>

4. **Does Turnitin.com identify self-plagiarism?**

Yes, it can. Any text previously submitted by you or any other student will be identified by this computer program. Students sometimes use research done for one course to write a paper for another course. To avoid the suspicion of self-plagiarism, it is the student's responsibility to ask permission from both instructors, in advance of handing in the second paper. In general, the two papers need to be different enough to enable the instructors to give both works the credit they deserve. If the papers are exactly or substantially the same, this would be considered self-plagiarism, which constitutes an academic offence.

**Comment:** Identical text

5. **In some of my classes, the assignments I submit contain innovative, commercially-viable ideas which I plan to publish. I am worried about the possibility of a database such as that kept by Turnitin.com being hacked and my ideas stolen. What can I do?**

Dalhousie has subscribed to Turnitin.com to make it available to all instructors and the decision to use the tool resides with your professor. Should she/he wish to consider an alternative to allay your concern, every instructor is empowered, but not required, to make that decision.

**Comment:** I know you wanted only inaccuracies, but this answer is completely unsatisfying. "Yes, that might be a problem, but it is up to your professor to be reasonable"? I have a patent application. It is on work I submitted for academic credit. I find this horrifying.

6. **If my professor submits my work to Turnitin.com, can they use my "originality score" in grading my paper?**

It is up to your instructor to determine how your paper is marked but the "originality report" is unlikely to be used as a part of the grade. The report merely indicates if your paper appears in other sources. In a case where you have correctly quoted and cited your material as the evidence to support your own original thought, there is no cause for concern.

7. **What training will my professor receive on how Turnitin.com works?**

Many professors can use Turnitin.com with no training at all. It is not very complicated. However, Turnitin.com offers online tutorials that anyone can access, and Dalhousie's Integrated Learning Online (ILO) group of Academic Computing Services offers periodic workshops for faculty. In addition, faculty may access the ILO for one-on-one assistance as required.

8. **I never agreed to anything like this when I enrolled at Dalhousie. You can't do this!**

When you submit any assignment for credit from Dalhousie, you are implicitly claiming that the work is yours. At any time during the grading of your work, your instructor may take steps to verify that is so. That verification can take many forms, and has included the ability to submit your work to computer-based originality checks. In June 2002, the Dalhousie Senate decided to subscribe the University to a **plagiarism-checking service**, so that it would be available to individual instructors at no cost.

**Comment:** It's actually an "identical text matching" service.

9. **Can I use Turnitin.com to check my own work for originality before I submit it in a class?**

**Yes**, but you do not need to do so if you have carefully cited all your sources, and not copied another's work without citing it appropriately. If you choose to "pre-submit" your work, you should check with your professor first. There is a danger that if you "pre-submit" your work, and then it is later submitted for a course, your course submission will appear to have been plagiarized from your earlier submission.

**Comment:** Notable in its absence is the fact that you can submit your paper for an originality report once every 24 hours.

10. **Is it ethical to store copies of student papers after a course has ended?**

Student papers are the intellectual property of the student who wrote them, regardless of how many years have passed. As long as the ownership is not separated from the content, then **storage of papers submitted for academic credit is an acceptable practice**.

**Comment:** This says Dalhousie can store them, but does not address the issue of them being stored and used by a third party.

11. **Are there acceptable alternatives to submitting a paper to Turnitin.com? Can I include something with my paper to convince my instructor that the work is mine, and not plagiarized?**

Talk to your instructor, who may be willing to consider an alternative. For example, your instructor may feel that your research paper should demonstrate your ability to find and incorporate current thoughts and ideas. As an alternative to Turnitin.com, your instructor might suggest that your research skills can be demonstrated by submitting an annotated bibliography along with a copy of the first page of every article listed in your references. It is up to your instructor to determine the form your assignment must take.

There is a list of alternative assignment designs on the Dalhousie Library web site at <http://plagiarism.dal.ca/faculty/assignment.html>.

**Comment:** I am deviating from the topic here, but I want to say that this is fantastic- I wish we could convince more professors to do this.

12. **If someone else's work matches my paper that is already submitted to Turnitin.com, will I ever know?**

The person who will be contacted for additional information in this case is the instructor of the course for which your paper was submitted. To protect your privacy, Turnitin.com recommends that you adopt a practice of excluding identifying information from both the title and body of the documents you submit. Although others do not have direct access to the contents of the Turnitin.com database, there may be occasions when a visual comparison of the other work with what you submitted in the past is requested.

**Comment:** This should start by saying "No". Explanation is great, but explanation without a straight answer leaves the reader feeling somehow misled.

13. **What is to prevent hackers from breaking into the database of student papers stored at Turnitin.com and stealing papers?**

Turnitin.com maintains an active security program to prevent that from happening. There is no evidence that the security system has been breached in the past. Security is an on-going issue with all our on-campus systems and we are satisfied that Turnitin.com is applying the same industry-standard methods as we use at Dalhousie.

**Comment:** This should explicitly state that there are no guarantees – the TurnItIn.com policy specifically states that they cannot guarantee security, and so to not include it here is a bit misleading.

14. **By submitting my paper to Turnitin.com, am I not losing my copyright to that paper?**

No, submitting your paper to Turnitin.com does not affect any existing copyright that you have in your paper.

**Comment:** Another comment – perhaps we should move this one up on the list, since this is the most common misconception.

15. **What is the University doing to ensure that these papers are not used for profit?**

The [Privacy Pledge](#) and other documents posted on the Turnitin.com web site give us reasonable grounds to believe that previously submitted papers are used for the sole purpose of comparing them with current submissions. The firm's existence depends on adhering to that principle. Retention of papers is a benefit for the original author, in that their work is protected against plagiarism by others.

**Comment:** This link also doesn't work.

**Comment:** This might be the sole purpose, but they are profiting from it. Shouldn't the answer to the question then be "Yes, your papers are used for profit, but only in a limited manner."

16. **I do not want to plagiarize through ignorance. Where can I get more information on plagiarism?**

There are many sources of information about plagiarism and how to avoid it. Your instructors are a source. Information is also available at the Dalhousie Library web page (<http://plagiarism.dal.ca/>).

**Comment:** "others copying their work word for word." The document by calling it a mechanical word matching process; we can't graduate it to a 'plagiarism detector' by the third page.

17. **Using Turnitin.com to curb plagiarism is a great idea, as long as they cannot reprint or issue the papers to others. Can they?**

Turnitin.com will only provide contact information for the instructor under which your work was submitted. They do not provide copies of papers to anyone.

**Comment:** False. TurnItIn.com will, at any instructor's request, send an email (with the requesting instructor as the Reply-to) containing the full text of the paper to the instructor who received the original paper. That instructor may then choose to reply to this email, and in so doing provide a copy of the paper. To say TurnItIn.com is not providing that copy of the paper is disingenuous.

18. **If I have more questions about Turnitin.com, whom can I ask on campus?**

Students with questions not addressed on the web site should contact their professor in courses which make use of this service.

I see no reason why this answer can't relate the entire process in a factual manner.

**Comment:** FYI, many professors tell students to contact ILO or ACS.

## COPYRIGHT ©

Any document you submit at Turnitin.com is your intellectual property, provided it is original work, and requires your consent to be released to others. Should you receive a request for a copy of your work from a professor (either at Dalhousie or elsewhere) it is because they have an originality report that indicates someone has submitted your work and represented it as their own.

**Comment:** False. It does NOT require my consent. It requires the consent of the professor who taught me a month ago, a year ago, or 5 years ago.

This whole paragraph implies the student still has control of their paper, which they unequivocally do not.