

Turnitin AI Writing Detection Tool

Turnitin is a text-matching software available through WCU's learning management system (D2L) that offers tools to support academic integrity. When an instructor enables Turnitin in a D2L course, student assignments are submitted to Turnitin which then matches text within the assignment to existing text in a database of previously submitted papers, internet sources, journal, and other publications. Turnitin generates a ['Similarity Report'](#) that provides a summary of text that has matched with another source. All submitted assignments are added to Turnitin's global database for text-matching with future submissions. It is important to note that Turnitin only checks for text similarity, and not for all forms of plagiarism. As Turnitin explains, it is more accurate to think of their tool as a ['text-matching' or 'similarity-checking' tool rather than a 'plagiarism-checking' tool](#). Text is flagged by the tool when it matches against other text in their database.

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Turnitin recently rolled out an 'AI Detector' tool to help faculty identify instances of academic dishonesty where students submit AI-generated material for course assignments. The 'AI Detector' tool tries to match submitted text against AI-generated text. Details on how Turnitin's AI Writing Detection works are provided on [the company's FAQs](#). The challenge is that it is difficult for this or any tool to reliably detect AI-generated text because AI language models are designed to mimic human-generated text.

There has been considerable concern expressed by faculty and institutions in the US and beyond about the potential impact of the AI Detector tool on courses, student learning, and the academic environment. Some institutions have made the decision to opt out of the tool because of these concerns. Here are a few examples:

- [Lancaster University \(UK\)](#)'s VP of Education released a statement calling on the university to turn off Turnitin AI Detection because of the impact they have observed with students being unjustly reported for academic misconduct based on the Turnitin Reports
- [University of Michigan-Dearborn](#) has opted out of the tool citing concerns about protecting students' digital rights.
- [Colorado State University](#) paused the rollout of Turnitin AI Writing Detection Tool because of the potential impact of the tool on teaching and learning.
- [University of Pittsburgh's Teaching Center](#) disabled the AI detection tool in Turnitin concluding that "use of the detection tool at this time is simply not supported by the data and does not represent a teaching practice that we can endorse or support."
- [UCLA](#) opted out of Turnitin's AI Writing Detection because of concerns and unanswered questions.

It is apparent from these examples that there are serious legal and academic ramifications associated with using Turnitin AI Writing Detector. It is risky to use the AI Detector Similarity Report as the sole basis for determining that a student has violated academic integrity because it is not wholly reliable.

Turnitin at WCU

The AI Writing Detection tool is currently enabled at WCU. The Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) and Information Systems & Technology (IS&T) urge faculty who may choose to use this tool to do so with caution. Consider the following recommendations for using the tool ethically and responsibly:

- Err on the side of caution because the [Turnitin report is not completely accurate.](#)
- Make comparisons to students' previously submitted work.
- Talk with the student about the work that you are questioning and give them an opportunity to share their process for completing the assignment.
- If you suspect that the student used AI, consider giving them a chance to re-do the assignment.
- Keep in mind that as AI continues to advance, differentiating between AI-generated and human-generated content will only become harder to detect over time.

Additional Reading

- [Turnitin's AI Detector: Higher-Than-Expected False Positives](#)
- [Can Turnitin Cure Higher Ed's AI Fever?](#)
- [How should we use AI detectors with student writing?](#)
- [WCU's Introduction to Plagiarism](#)
- [The endeavor to detect AI use can result in false positives.](#)