# Answers to Questions Students Ask About Turnitin

## Q: What is Turnitin?

Turnitin is the leading originality checking and plagiarism prevention service used by millions of students and faculty, and thousands of institutions worldwide. Turnitin encourages best practices for using and citing other people's written material. The service offers a complete web-based service to manage the process of submitting and tracking papers electronically, providing better—and faster—feedback to students.

## Q: How does Turnitin work?

Institutions license Turnitin on an annual basis. The institutions are encouraged to communicate with students about their use of Turnitin and how their academic integrity policies work. An instructor sets up a class and an assignment in the Turnitin service. Students or instructors then submit papers to Turnitin via file upload or cut and paste. Turnitin's proprietary software then compares the paper's text to a vast database of 12+ billion pages of digital content (including archived internet content that is no longer available on the live web) as well as over 110 million papers in the student paper archive, and 80,000+ professional, academic and commercial journals and publications. We're adding new content through new partnerships all the time. For example, our partner CrossRef boasts 500-plus members that include publishers such as Elsevier and the IEEE, and has already added hundreds of millions of pages of new content to our database. Turnitin offers institutions a wide variety of flexible options for handling students' submissions including options that let students choose to keep their papers in an institution-only private zone.

## Q: What if Turnitin finds text matches in my paper?

Turnitin determines if text in a paper matches text in any of the Turnitin databases. By itself, Turnitin does not detect or determine plagiarism—it just detects matching text to help instructors determine if plagiarism has occurred. Indeed, the text in the student's paper that is found to match a source may be properly cited and attributed. It is recommended that instructors carefully review the Originality Report and all matches before making any determination of plagiarism. Such determinations of plagiarism require human judgment, and instructors and students alike should understand their institution's academic integrity policies before turning in written assignments.

## Q: Who can see a paper?

Only the course instructor, and possibly a TA (teaching assistant) assigned to the course, can see a student's paper. If a match is found between the student's paper and another student's paper, the instructor can request the matching paper from the other student's instructor. The instructors decide whether to share the matching paper depending on the circumstances.

The only exception to this rule is in the case of peer review assignments. Students using PeerMark will be allowed to view the text of the papers they are assigned to review as part of the peer review assignment, though the instructor can choose to distribute the papers anonymously or not.

## Q: Does Turnitin infringe students' copyrights?

In March 2008, Judge Claude Hilton dismissed a lawsuit that was filed against iParadigms by students. Judge Hilton stated in his summary judgment that Turnitin does not violate the copyrights of students whose papers are stored in the Turnitin database. Judge Hilton upheld a school's "right to decide how to monitor and address plagiarism in their schools," and their right to, "employ companies like iParadigms to help do so." The judge further stated that, "iParadigms' use protects the creativity and originality of student works by detecting any effort at plagiarism by other students," and that the service, "provides a substantial public benefit through the network of educational institutions using Turnitin." The case was appealed and in April of 2009, four judges issued a published opinion reaffirming Judge Hilton's decision that Turnitin's use of student papers is a "fair use." The outcome of this case establishes a clear legal precedent and settles the legal question regarding Turnitin's "fair use" of student work.