

What this is

The *Innovative Instructor* is an article series (<https://ctei.jhu.edu/ii>) and a blog (<https://ii.library.jhu.edu>) related to teaching excellence at Johns Hopkins

Article categories

Best Practice

How to use technologies and apply innovative instructional methods

Pedagogy

Hopkins professors share successful strategies for teaching excellence

Technology

Information about emerging technologies, who is using them, and why you should know

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About the CTEI

The Center for Teaching Excellence and Innovation partners with faculty, postdocs, and graduate students to extend instructional impact by connecting innovative teaching strategies and instructional technologies

CENTER for
TEACHING
EXCELLENCE &
INNOVATION



Turnitin

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What it is

Turnitin is a web-based service for detecting plagiarism and improper citations in student-submitted work. Johns Hopkins University has a multi-year subscription to Turnitin. All instructors in the Whiting School of Engineering and the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences are covered by this subscription. There are no limits on the number of classes or number of student papers checked. Over 450 JHU faculty are registered Turnitin users, and in the past year, over 12,000 papers have been submitted to Turnitin to check for originality.



learned in a single session. Turnitin's value as a tool goes beyond simply identifying plagiarism in student papers. The reports produced (see below) allow instructors to flag misunderstandings as to proper usage of borrowed content and direct students to remedial resources. Turnitin is an excellent teaching tool.

Why it was made

Turnitin has gained popularity and subscribers in the higher education community easily available online source material was proliferated. Students now have unparalleled access to online content. Often they do not have a good understanding of proper quotation and paraphrasing techniques or when and how to cite borrowed material. It is cumbersome for instructors to check submitted papers for originality against online sources. At a certain point, particularly in courses with large enrollments, the process of checking suspect papers using a Google search becomes unmanageable, and some content will not show up using standard search engines. That's where Turnitin can help. Moreover, knowing that their papers will be checked sends the message to your students that they need to be mindful of proper citation practices.

Turnitin's value as a tool goes beyond identifying plagiarism. The reports allow faculty to address students' misunderstandings of proper paraphrasing, quotation, and citation practices.

How it can be used

The process of checking a paper in Turnitin is straightforward and efficient. Once you have created an account using one of the methods below, you define an assignment. Note that if you are not using Canvas, you will first have to define a class. When you define an assignment, you set a due date, provide a description, and select the sources against which you would like to check the assignment for plagiarism. You can choose from three categories:

- The Internet (current and archived web sites)
- Previous student submissions (from JHU and schools using Turnitin)
- Periodical and Journals

Turnitin also checks paper mills and many pay-for-essay sites. It checks some, but not all, academic journals.

Why does it matter

Integrity is a core value for the academic community, and Johns Hopkins begins training students on ethical behavior, including plagiarism, at freshman orientation. However, the importance of proper citation and use of paraphrasing and quotations are not

After an assignment has been created and released, students can submit their papers in any common format (Word, PDF, plain text file, etc.). Once the papers are submitted, the instructor has access to an Originality Report, which shows any matches to the selected sources, and provides a link to

Screenshot of Turnitin's Originality Report

The Originality Report does not judge whether a student has plagiarized. Rather, it shows what percentage of a paper's text matches a source and what source it matches. It is then up to the instructor to decide whether the matches are acceptable, whether they are the result of improper citations, or if they constitute inappropriate use of others' works.

Instructors can decide on many variables for each assignment, such as whether students can see the Originality Report and resubmit papers. Writing classes often use these options to teach proper citation.

Because student submissions are saved year-to-year, it is also possible to detect paper "recycling," by which students try to save time by adapting papers submitted to the same class in previous years.

If you don't wish to define a class and an assignment, Turnitin can also be used to check individual papers, though this method

may be considered less fair as all students are not subject to the same scrutiny.

JHU's Turnitin subscription also includes GradeMark, is a paperless grading system that permits instructors to add comments (including voice comments) and corrections to assignments submitted electronically. It provides flexibility in marking up assignments, increased consistency in grading, and clear feedback that replaces scribing in the margins. Students can be pointed to resources with clickable links. With its drag and drop functionality, GradeMark has the potential to save instructors a great deal of time when grading online assignments. There is no need to download assignments – everything is web-based and stored online. It is also easily integrated with Canvas. If the instructor is using Canvas, when the assignment is graded, the grade is automatically transferred and recorded into the Canvas Gradebook.

Where it is going

Turnitin has released an iPad app, which supports viewing paper submissions and Originality Reports and grading on the tablet, even in offline mode.

How to get started

To get started, you need a Turnitin account. If you use Canvas and wish to use Turnitin within the context of Canvas, this step is easy. You won't need a separate account or login. Follow the instructions linked at the end of this document to connect your Canvas account to a Turnitin account. Turnitin can also be used outside of Canvas – simply email a request for an account to turnitin@jhu.edu. Instructors from the Whiting School Engineering and the Krieger School of Arts & Sciences can request training on Turnitin from the Center for Educational Resources.

Other thoughts

There have been controversies surrounding the use of Turnitin in the past. Students have contended that it is illegal for the company to keep their papers in its database and accused Turnitin of improperly deriving profit from student submitted work. Turnitin has weathered these controversies and prevailed in court challenges, mainly because they do not publish the student submissions but only use them for matching.

Additional resources

- Enabling Turnitin in Canvas and Creating Assignments: <https://canvas.jhu.edu/faculty-resources/third-party-tools/turnitin/>
- Request an account outside Canvas: email turnitin@jhu.edu
- Instructor Training from Turnitin: http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/training/instructor-training

Author's background

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