

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

Further Guidance on anti-plagiarism checks on Masters and PhD Theses

A number of queries have been received regarding plagiarism checks of theses which contain peer-reviewed and published journal papers by the candidate and which may contain sections in the body of the thesis text which originate in the published paper.

The reason for anti-plagiarism checks to be performed by the supervisor is to prevent plagiarism in finished theses and especially before they are submitted for external examination.

Normally, such checks use automatic programmes such as TurnItIn which typically give a percentage result of duplicate words.

However, there are no standard instructions and reliance only on this quantitative result is insufficient as the overlaps have to be considered in their appropriate context. Judgment should not be based on the percentage of overall matching. *

For example, there may be one piece of work with 15% matching, but all the matching is in the bibliography (and legitimate) while another may have 10% matching, but this is all plagiarized material. The only way to make a judgment is to go through the text and examine the matching parts to decide what kind of matching it is.*

In cases where the student has published papers it is highly likely that there will be a high percentage result from TurnItIn. The supervisor should examine this outcome from the qualitative and contextual basis.

Therefore, if the duplication results from duplication between published papers and the thesis then this is acceptable, with the proviso that duplication of text from published papers has to be in accord with the copyright constraints imposed by journal publishers who may own the copyright. In this case, please refer to the publisher's guidance which may require permission to be obtained for use in other publications, including theses. Please remember that there could be a high TurnItIn % which also includes real plagiarism as well as duplication from the student's own publications so care has to be taken.

Tony Mayer
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** Taken from communication with Dr Peter Looker (July 2013)*