Tips to Ace Your Thesis iThenticate Report:
Common Report Comments

The Thesis Processing Office (TPO) runs all publicly releasable Initial Draft theses through the plagiarism-detection software iThenticate as part of the thesis review process. A thesis processor or Graduate Writing Center coach analyzes each report to differentiate between genuine areas of concern and the software's numerous false positives.

iThenticate, a Turnitin product, scans documents for two types of plagiarism: 1) unquoted, verbatim text matches to other academic and web sources; and 2) inadequately paraphrased text matches. iThenticate catches about two-thirds of such text. iThenticate does not identify where you have borrowed others' ideas and failed to cite.

Ultimately, you are responsible for any type of plagiarism in your Final Draft thesis. We encourage you to review our Citation Guides page for more guidance.

This handout presents common feedback we give when reviewing iThenticate reports. Understanding and applying these concepts will help you work with confidence and achieve a clean report.

Citations and Signal Phrases

- Generally, include a **citation** or a **signal phrase** with every passage that uses a source's idea, statistic, or words. Bottom line: It should be clear which information came from a source, and which is your own contribution. This ensures that your original thoughts and data stand out, you are giving credit where credit is due, you are backing up your work with established literature, and you are leaving a path for other researchers to follow.

- Remember that one citation at the end of a string of sentences or a paragraph cannot "cover" the entire section. It should be clear when you begin borrowing information from a source, and when you continue to pull information from that source. We recommend citing the source completely the first time it is used in each paragraph. Within the section, use sentence flow and/or signal phrases to indicate ongoing use of the source. (Exception: insert a citation, rather than a signal phrase, if you quote language.)

- Note that we do not suggest *over-citing*, or including a citation at the end of each sentence. We do, however, want to clarify the distinction between your contribution as an author and the contributions of others. Without clarification, the reader is to assume the information is your own contribution rather than information pulled from another source.

- Review the TPO's citations and signal phrases guidance for more information.

Proper Paraphrasing

- Remember that paraphrasing involves more than simply substituting synonyms here and there and changing verb tense. When you paraphrase, you must synthesize the information completely using your own words, sentence structure, and writing style.

- Although proper nouns, key terms, and data often cannot be paraphrased, the language and sentence structure with which they are presented can be.

- As a rule of thumb, if source text *can* be put into your own words without changing the core meaning, then it should be paraphrased (or directly quoted). Use quotations for unique, authoritative, or necessarily precise language.

- Review the TPO's paraphrasing and quoting guidance.

Direct Quotations

- Generally, use quotation marks when you copy about five words or more verbatim from a source. If source text can be put into your own words without changing the core meaning, it should be quoted or paraphrased.

- Remember that source information needs to be cited, whether you quote, paraphrase, or summarize it.

- iThenticate's highlighting is not always accurate to the source you used. When incorporating a direct quote, check your original source to ensure you are quoting accurately.

- "For quotes within quotes, use 'single quotation marks' for the inside pair."

- Direct quotes of five lines or longer should be formatted as block quotes. Do not use quotation marks for properly formatted block quotes. In the paragraph text before a block quote, it is customary to introduce the source with a signal phrase. Then include a traditional citation at the end of the block quote.

- Generally, no more than 10 percent of a thesis is directly quoted material. We encourage you—in consultation with your advisors—to paraphrase and summarize (but still cite!), explain the borrowed concepts and data, and make your own contributions. This shows your ability to think critically and analyze research. When you feel a source's precise wording is essential, that is the optimal time to use a direct quotation rather than paraphrasing.

- Review the TPO's paraphrasing and quoting guidance.

Common Knowledge and Common Language

- Information can be considered common *knowledge* when it is broadly known in your field and is not contested. Common knowledge does not need to be cited when you have put it in your own words. However, there are two exceptions:
  1. If you borrow language word-for-word, it must be quoted and cited.
  2. If the paraphrased or summarized information is contested, even field-specific common knowledge needs to be cited. If you have doubts, check with your advisor.

- Common *language* is precise wording used to describe common knowledge. In technical fields, paraphrasing this language can be impossible to do without changing the meaning (for example, an equation or formula). In these cases, common language does *not* need to be quoted and cited. Generally, if common knowledge *can* be put into your own words without changing the meaning, then it should either be paraphrased, or quoted and cited.

- Check with your advisor to determine what constitutes common knowledge or common language in your field.

Bulleted and Numbered Lists

- Even when numbered or bulleted lists are cited, they must still be quoted or paraphrased properly—either choose to paraphrase completely, or format the list as a block quote pulled verbatim from the source. Alternatively, you can cite each bullet point separately, using quotation marks around borrowed language.

- Bulleted or numbered lists taken directly from a source can function as block quotes, which don't need quotation marks. In the paragraph before the list, introduce the source with a signal phrase. Then include a citation after the final period in the last list item. If you change or add language within the list [do so in brackets].

- Review the TPO's guidance for citing bulleted and numbered lists.

Images, Figures, and Tables

- When including an image or other potentially protected content in a thesis *without requesting reuse permission from the copyright owner*, always:
  1. verify that the content is not copyrighted *or* your use of the content meets fair use requirements, and
  2. cite the source where you found the item (citation goes at the end of your figure/table title).

- For more information, review the TPO's fair use guidance.

Interpreting an iThenticate Report: What to Know

False positives

iThenticate flags many passages that are not genuine problems. For example, it may highlight proper names, standard wording, common terms or phrases, source titles, and properly attributed direct quotes that span page breaks.

Examine each highlighted passage to determine if it is truly problematic.

Source accuracy

As soon as iThenticate finds a match, it stops checking other sources for the same language. Because the language may appear in many places—including untrustworthy web sources that do not properly credit the true original source—the source that iThenticate identifies is not necessarily the source the writer used or the authentic source of the language or information.

Quotation accuracy

When evaluating a flagged passage, always consult the source the writer used. Do not place quotation marks around a flagged passage or attempt to paraphrase without reviewing the original source for accuracy and meaning.

A passage that looks like patchwriting, for example, may be a verbatim match to the source, or vice versa.

Common language

Common language is precise wording used to describe common knowledge—something that is broadly known and uncontested in a given field. A passage may be common language if it is impossible to paraphrase without changing the meaning (e.g., an equation or formula). Common language does not need quotation marks. However, if the information *can* be described uniquely without changing the meaning, it should be paraphrased, or quoted and cited.

Patchwriting

Patchwriting occurs when a writer takes a passage from a source and, rather than paraphrasing meaningfully, makes superficial changes such as substituting synonyms or changing verb tenses. While patchwriting may help new writers get comfortable with academic style, it must be avoided in the final draft of any document. To revise patchwriting, the writer should paraphrase or quote responsibly.

Indirect sources

iThenticate may help show when a writer has borrowed language from one source that describes the work of yet *another* source. This is most apparent when iThenticate highlights an in-text citation or signal phrase that matches not the source of the citation itself, but another outside source. For guidance on use and proper attribution of indirect sources, consult our handout on citing your sources' sources.

Similarity index percentage

%

Because iThenticate's similarity index includes false positives and common language, we typically disregard this percentage when evaluating reports; it is seldom a useful indication of genuine concerns.

How to Navigate a TPO iThenticate Report

A thesis processor or Graduate Writing Center coach will email an iThenticate report to you as part of your Initial Review (publicly releasable drafts only). Here is how to interpret the report:

- The processor or coach will use the PDF's "Comment" function to flag problematic areas and suggest the type of revision needed.
    - In the PDF, click on the Comment tab and then click on a comment to jump to the page on which it appears.
    - **If there is <u>no</u> comment next to highlighted material, then we believe it does not need to be revised**. iThenticate flags false positives that are not actually problematic. For example, it may highlight proper names, thesis template wording, common terms or phrases, source titles, etc.
- Because the report's similarity index % includes false positives, we typically disregard this percentage when evaluating reports; it is seldom a useful indication of genuine concerns.
- iThenticate color-codes strings of 5 words or more that match—or closely match—other sources and do not appear between quotation marks.
    - Each highlighted passage uses a color and number that correspond to a source listed at the end of the report.
    - As soon as iThenticate identifies a match, it stops looking. Therefore, the source it identifies is not necessarily the source you used.