



GWC APPROACH TO Plagiarism Prevention & iThenticate

Source attribution is a tool for improving critical thinking and writing.

While responsibly attributing source material ensures that a writer is giving credit where credit is due and helps prevent plagiarism, it also gives writers the tools to engage with scholarly voices, validate their own arguments and claims, and gain credibility and competency in their field.

We encourage early learning and practice.

We encourage students to ask for iThenticate reports on early drafts of class papers, thesis proposals, and thesis chapters. These reports and the GWC's multifaceted guidance help students learn how to take notes and attribute sources properly before submission.

We approach source attribution holistically.

Rather than focusing on the results of an iThenticate report in isolation when we work with students at the GWC, we discuss [attribution concepts](#) such as citing, summarizing, paraphrasing, quoting, common knowledge and language, signal phrases, sentence flow, and engaging in academic debates. When reviewing iThenticate reports, we read critically—beyond the report results—with an eye for what does (and does not) need to be attributed and the best methods for clarity.

iThenticate reports are not safety blankets.

An iThenticate compares a document against billions of others. The report can be a useful guide, but cannot determine that a paper is free of plagiarism or source misuse. iThenticate finds only close text matches, and only about [two-thirds](#) of those. It does not identify:

- Unattributed information that has been paraphrased or summarized from a source
- Direct quotes that are improperly cited
- Inaccurately transcribed direct quotes
- Information or language attributed to the wrong source
- Some improperly paraphrased (heavily patchwritten) material
- Language from sources outside of the Turnitin database, such as undigitized books
- Fabricated or falsified information








Furthermore, the results of an iThenticate report are not always trustworthy. Reports should be analyzed for false positives and reviewed against the writer's sources.



UNDERSTANDING AN iThenticate Report

iThenticate (a [Turnitin](#) product) color-codes strings of 5 words or more in a document that do not appear between quotation marks and that match, or closely match, another source in its vast database. Each highlighted passage corresponds—with a color and number—to a source listed at the end of the report.

Be aware of the following limitations and idiosyncrasies when reviewing an iThenticate report.

<p>False positives</p>  <p>iThenticate flags many passages that are not genuine problems. For example, it may highlight proper names, standard form wording, common terms or phrases, source titles, and properly attributed direct quotes that span page breaks.</p> <p>Examine each highlighted passage to determine if it is truly problematic.</p>	<p>Source accuracy</p>  <p>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/information.</p>	<p>Quotation accuracy</p>  <p>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.</p> <p>A passage that looks like patchwriting, for example, may be a verbatim match to the source, or vice versa.</p>
<p>Common language</p>  <p>Common language is precise wording used to describe common knowledge—something that is broadly known in the field. A passage may be common language if it is impossible to paraphrase without changing the meaning (e.g., an equation). Common language does not need to be quoted. However, if it <i>can</i> be stated differently without changing the meaning, it should be paraphrased or quoted.</p>	<p>Patchwriting</p>  <p>Patchwriting occurs when a writer takes a passage from a source and makes superficial changes, such as substituting synonyms. Patchwriting should be avoided in the final draft of any document. When iThenticate identifies patchwriting, the revision should involve responsible paraphrasing or quoting.</p>	<p>Indirect sources</p>  <p>iThenticate may help show when a writer has borrowed language from one source that describes the work of yet <i>another</i> source. This is called using an <i>indirect source</i>. For revision considerations, consult our guidance for citing your sources' sources. Whenever possible, the writer should locate and examine the original material, and then cite the original.</p>
<p>Similarity index percentage</p>  <p>Because the similarity index includes false positives, it is seldom an indication of genuine concerns.</p>		

For more instruction on attribution concepts, plagiarism prevention, and iThenticate, see the Thesis Processing Office's [Citation Guides webpage](#) and the Graduate Writing Center's [iThenticate FAQ](#).