

USE OF TURNITIN ON BENG ELECTRICAL PROGRAMMES

Lois Gray, North Highland College UHI

SUMMARY

A change has been made to how students receive feedback on BEng Electrical Engineering programmes.

CHALLENGE

To provide consistent, reliable and accurate mark allocation and feedback to students, in a timely manner.

HISTORY

Having been a lecturer for over 10 years, I have come across a variety of methods for allocating marks and delivering feedback to students, from hasty scrawls and finger in the air marking schemes, to feedback reports with extensive, multiple-column, rubrics. Students would often approach me, asking for marks to be justified, or illegible comments to be explained, and I felt that even my methods were a little too vague. So I was willing to try any method which could lead to improvements. Just over a year ago I started using Turnitin for both formative assessment and summative assessment. During my students' induction process I explained how Turnitin worked, how I intended to use it, and the benefits of a combined originality checking and electronic marking tool. I suppose I was lucky in that my students are all technologically minded, and, although one or two expressed some reluctance, the majority embraced the system fully, and had set up accounts by the end of induction day. I did still allow students to submit by email, but obtained agreement from these students that I would put their reports on Turnitin for them.

APPLICATION

4 years later all my students submit all their reports on Turnitin. I give them deadlines for drafts, draft feedback, final submission, final submission feedback and final submission marks, using Turnitin's due and post date/time settings, and we all adhere closely to these deadlines, which, where appropriate, agree with UHI regulations. For formative feedback I don't assign marks, but use the Quick Mark, Bubble Comment and General Comments extensively. For summative marking I do the same, but I have also created rubrics on Turnitin, which I use to assign marks, and I use the General Voice Comment facility to give more directly personal feedback to remote students.

BENEFITS

We (my students and I) have all adapted well to using Turnitin and I find that using the marking tools has cut down my marking time by over 50%, meaning I can now give detailed feedback on formative submissions. The students like the ability to submit and access fully legible feedback anywhere. They also like getting feedback in a timely manner, on a pre-agreed date. Most of them use the Turnitin mobile application for this. They also really appreciate the rubrics, which



fully define why they have received their particular marks. I have had no arguments about mark allocations since I started using Turnitin rubrics. Giving detailed feedback on draft reports, via Turnitin, has greatly improved my students' technical reporting ability, in particular they are all fully aware of when and why to include citations and references, and the correct format for these. Initially there was some concern over the originality checking tool, especially when students were getting amber ratings, but this has been fully resolved by my reassuring the students that correctly cited, relevant quotations are acceptable (provided not extensively used) and that common formulas and calculations are exempt from the check. I am still learning how to use the originality checking tool, in particular how to assign exemptions, but it has not held back our use of Turnitin at all. The system is also very reliable – we have had very few problems accessing the Turnitin webpage, and information has never been lost. Furthermore, since students at other academic partners have started to study my modules, the rubrics have ensured consistency of marking across the UHI partnership, which I do not believe would be possible by any other marking method. Our external examiner has also commented on the consistency of marking, since we started using Turnitin, and he appreciates the convenience of being able to access all the students' work electronically, in a common format.

DISADVANTAGES

I have to admit that setting up the rubrics is very time consuming, but, once done, they can be used over and over again. I believe Turnitin provide some public rubrics now, but I have not yet investigated whether or not these would be suitable for my modules. Another disadvantage is being unable to export rubrics in a readable format. Some lecturers are reluctant to use Turnitin without formal training, and thus need to be able to access the rubrics outside the system, which is not currently possible. Another disadvantage is the limitation that only one report can be submitted for each coursework, since some of my students' assignments require submission of software programmes in addition to their formal reports. Associated with this disadvantage is the Turnitin limitation on submission file types, although this has recently been improved, with most common file types now being allowed. However, I strongly believe the advantages greatly outweigh the disadvantages, and I would find it very difficult, if not impossible, to give timely, consistent and reliable feedback and marks to my students now, without using Turnitin.

FUTURE WORK

I would like to explore the Peer Marking capabilities and the public rubrics now provided by Turnitin. I also need to spend some time to fully appreciate the capabilities of the Grademark tool. I intend to promote the use of Turnitin across the UHI partnership, and to advertise its benefits at all opportunities, as it has made my lecturing role so much easier.

If you wish to submit your own case study, or have any questions about this resource please contact:

Dr Heather Fotheringham

Evidence-Based Enhancement Lead

heather.fotheringham@uhi.ac.uk, 01463 279237