

Using Turnitin's AI Detection with Care

This guide supports faculty in using Turnitin's AI detection tool responsibly, helping you interpret results, understand their limits, and talk with students in a fair and educational way. As educators, we need to balance our commitment to academic integrity with the recognition that detection tools have limitations and can produce false positives. Our approach should prioritize student learning and growth while maintaining the high standards that define the Lone Star College System.

Understanding Turnitin's AI Detection



What It Does

Highlights sections detected as written by AI tools (like ChatGPT) and provides a percentage estimate of AI-generated content in submitted work.



Accuracy Limitations

Turnitin states they flag a human-written document as AI-written for one out of every 100 fully-human written documents.



Key Challenges

False positives and false negatives occur, especially with short papers (under 300 words), multilingual or ESL writers, and mixed AI and human writing.

- Critical Reminder:** The AI score is an **indicator**, not proof. It should not be used as sole evidence of academic misconduct. Always gather additional context before drawing conclusions.

Faculty Guidance: A Four-Step Approach

01

Review the Report Carefully

Read flagged sections in context. Ask yourself: Does this writing sound different from the student's past work? Could the AI detection be triggered by formulaic or repetitive language common in academic writing?

02

Gather Context

Compare with drafts, earlier assignments, or discussion posts. Check whether your assignment design may have encouraged AI use unintentionally or created conditions where students felt pressured to seek outside help.

03

Approach Students Gently

Use neutral, non-accusatory language. Focus on understanding intent, not assigning blame. Invite the student to show drafts, outlines, or notes that demonstrate their writing process.

04

When to Escalate

Only refer a case for formal review if there is clear evidence beyond the AI report or if the student refuses or cannot explain their process. Contact your Department Chair or supervisor before taking further steps.

Example Conversation Starter

"Turnitin flagged some areas of your paper as possibly written with AI. I'm not accusing you of misconduct, I'd just like to understand your process and how you completed this work. Can you walk me through how you approached this assignment?"

This approach creates a safe space for dialogue and allows students to explain their work without feeling defensive. Many students may not even realize they've used AI inappropriately, or the flagged content may be entirely their own writing that happens to match common patterns.

Reducing AI Misuse through Assignment Design

Process-Based Assignments

- Require multiple drafts with revision notes
- Include reflection prompts about the writing process
- Ask students to explain their research journey
- Schedule writing conferences or checkpoints

Personalized Prompts

- Use applied, local, or current examples
- Reference specific class discussions
- Ask for personal experience integration
- Create unique, timely prompts each semester

Clear AI Policies

- Discuss appropriate AI use early in the semester
- Provide specific examples of acceptable vs. unacceptable use
- Explain your assessment philosophy
- Model ethical technology use in your teaching

Well-designed assignments that emphasize process, personal connection, and specific contexts naturally reduce the temptation to rely on AI tools while also making AI-generated content easier to identify when it does occur.

Key Takeaways

Signal, Not Verdict

Turnitin's AI tool provides data points for consideration, not definitive proof of academic misconduct. Always investigate further before making decisions.

False Positives Happen

Use extra care with multilingual students, ESL writers, and students who may use formal or formulaic writing styles that can trigger false positives.

Lead with Curiosity

Approach conversations with genuine interest in understanding the student's process rather than assuming misconduct from the outset.

Seek Support

Involve your Department Chair, or your supervisor if uncertainty remains or if you need guidance on next steps.

Resources and Support

The following resources provide additional guidance on AI detection tools and academic integrity best practices:

Turnitin Help Center: Comprehensive documentation on AI detection features and limitations

<https://help.turnitin.com>

University of Kansas CTE: How should we use AI detectors with student writing?

<https://cte.ku.edu/how-should-we-use-ai-detectors-student-writing>