

How to interpret the word-count in TurnItIn

Introduction

It is important to note that the formula used by TurnItIn to calculate the word-count will vary depending on the type of file which has been submitted. This means that TurnItIn will not present a consistent or reliable word-count number across a group of students who have submitted documents in a variety of formats. It is recommended to use your own judgement rather than the word-count figure presented by TurnItIn to tell whether a student has exceeded the word-count limit for an assignment.

How to view the word-count

The word-count of an individual submitted assignment to TurnItIn is displayed in the bottom left-hand corner of the TurnItIn Document Viewer.

The screenshot shows the TurnItIn Document Viewer interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with 'feedback studio', '86037 Anonymous', and the file name '133625.2016-09-23.101041.docx'. The main content area displays an essay titled 'Explain the Euro gang paradox. How strong is the evidence for, or against, the existence of US style 'street gangs' in the UK.' The bottom status bar shows 'Page: 1 of 5' and 'Word Count: 2210', with the word count circled in red. A 'Return to Turnitin Classic' link is visible on the right side of the status bar.

How to identify the file type of a submitted document

You can identify the file type of a submitted assignment to TurnItIn by checking the file extension (e.g. .docx, .pdf) at the end of the submission title which is displayed at the top of the TurnItIn Document Viewer. For example, in the above screenshot; the file name 'Test_Student_210514_171940.doc' will tell us that we are looking at a Microsoft Word '.doc' formatted file.

TurnItIn word-count for the majority of file types

- Microsoft Word™ (DOC and DOCX)
- Corel WordPerfect®
- Plain text (TXT)
- Rich Text Format (RTF)
- Hangul (HWP)

TurnItIn uses a formula which is comparable to the formula used by Microsoft Word to calculate the word-count for documents which have been saved and submitted to TurnItIn. In this system, any text which has been entered into textboxes, footnotes, and endnotes will be excluded from the word count.

TurnItIn word-count for submitted PDFs

For documents which have been submitted to TurnItIn in the Portable Document Format (PDF), TurnItIn has a different way of calculating the word count. It counts the number of words, where a word is a continuous string of alphanumeric characters, with the possibility of having a '-' in the middle. This would include headers, footer and footnotes, but will exclude numbers that look like they might be footnote references of the form '[123]'.

Submitted PDF file types are likely to have a higher word-count as interpreted by TurnItIn than a Microsoft equivalent due to the potential for inclusion of additional text.