



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-prevention software iThenticate as part of the [thesis review process](#). Thesis processors and Graduate Writing Center coaches analyze 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, internet, and student-written sources; and 2) inadequately paraphrased text matches. iThenticate catches [about two-thirds](#) of unquoted text; it does not identify where you have borrowed others' ideas and failed to cite. You are responsible for any type of plagiarism in your Final Draft thesis.

This worksheet presents common feedback given in actual iThenticate reports. Applying these concepts will help you work with confidence and achieve a clean report.

Citations and Signal Phrases

- You must include a **citation** or a **source signal phrase** with every passage that uses a source's idea, statistic, or words. Be clear which pieces of information came from which sources so that your original thoughts and data stand out.
- Remember that one citation at the end of a string of sentences or a paragraph cannot "cover" the entire section. Cite the source completely the *first time* it is used in each paragraph. Cite the source again just before your focus moves to another source or your own input. Within the section, use signal phrases to indicate ongoing use of the source. Exception: insert a citation (rather than a signal phrase) anytime you quote material.
- Review the TPO's [citation](#) and [signal phrase](#) guidance for more information and examples specific to your style.

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.
- If source text *can* be put into your own words without changing the core meaning, then it should be paraphrased. Save quotations for unique, authoritative, or necessarily precise language.
- Review the TPO's [paraphrasing and quoting guidance](#).

Direct Quotes

- Use quotation marks when you copy approximately 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.
- "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, introduce the source with a signal phrase. Then include a traditional citation at the end of the block quote.
- Generally, not more than 10 percent of a standard 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 other 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 versus 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:
 - If you borrow language word-for-word, it must be quoted and cited.
 - 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 specific or precise wording used to describe common knowledge. In many technical fields, paraphrasing this language can be difficult or 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 the information *can* be put into your own words without changing the core meaning, then it should either be paraphrased, or directly quoted and cited.
- Check with your advisor to determine what constitutes common knowledge or common language in your field.

Bulleted/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 each passage of borrowed language.
- Bulleted or numbered lists taken directly from a source can function as block quotes, which don't need quotation marks around the text. In the paragraph text before the list, introduce the source with a [signal phrase](#). Then include a citation after the last list item. If the list ends with a period, place your citation after that period. If you change or add language within the list [do so in brackets].
- Review the TPO's guidance for [citing bulleted and numbered lists](#).

Borrowed 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:
 - verify that the content is not copyrighted *or* your use of the content meets fair use requirements, and
 - 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](#).

How to Read Your iThenticate Report

- iThenticate produces false positives that are not actually problems (for example, it may highlight proper names, standard thesis template wording, common terms or phrases, book and article titles, etc.). Your report analyzer uses Acrobat's "Comments" tab to leave notes next to problematic text and suggest the type of revision needed. **If there is no comment next to highlighted material, it is fine as is.**
- In the PDF, click on the Comments tab in the upper right and then click on each comment to jump to the page on which it appears.
- The iThenticate report color-codes strings of five words or more that match other sources and do not appear between quotation marks or where your version varies from the original by only a few words.
 - As soon as iThenticate identifies a match, it stops looking. Therefore, the source it lists is not necessarily the source for your passage.
 - Each highlighted passage uses both a color and number that correspond to a source listed at the end of the report.

