INTERPRETING iThenticate

Tips for analyzing algorithm-based plagiarism reports

**False positives**
Plagiarism-detection algorithms flag language that is not truly problematic, such as proper names, common terms and phrases, and even properly attributed quotations.

**TIP:** Examine each highlighted passage to determine if the language is truly problematic.

**Source accuracy**
Once the algorithm finds a match, it stops. Because the language may appear in many places, including untrustworthy ones, the matched source may not be the original.

**TIP:** Check your source or with a subject matter expert about the origins of source material.

**Language accuracy**
Because of source accuracy issues, the words the algorithm highlights may not match the true source exactly.

**TIP:** Never place quotation marks around a flagged passage without checking the writer's original source.

**Common language**
Some information and language is used so often across so many sources that, over time, it becomes accepted as common language that does not need to be cited or quoted.

**TIP:** Quote or paraphrase (and cite!) only wording that is unique to a source.

**Patchwriting**
Patchwriting means making superficial changes to a sentence, such as substituting synonyms. This should be avoided in final documents.

**TIP:** To paraphrase properly, use your own descriptive language and sentence structure.

**Pesky percentages**
A report’s similarity index or “percent plagiarized” includes copious false positives.

**TIP:** Disregard this percentage; use human judgment.

**Indirect sources**
A writer may borrow language from one source that describes the work of another source. Both the original work and the source whose language is used must be credited.

**TIP:** Consult the original work. Then use your own description of, or a quotation from, the original work.

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The bottom line
Attribution has gray areas. Algorithms, while helpful, can’t replace the good judgment and common sense of careful human review.

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