

Principles and workflow for plagiarism detection in dissertations at VU - VUmc

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The following *principles* apply to the detection of plagiarism in dissertations:

- a) The aim of using a plagiarism detection tool for dissertations is to raise awareness of academic integrity among PhD candidates and to prevent plagiarism. To achieve this goal, the faculty will ensure that the purpose and mandatory status of plagiarism detection is explained in their course about academic integrity or another meeting for PhD candidates. The faculty will also include the obligation to check for plagiarism in its Training and Supervision Plan.
- b) The plagiarism check consists of a scan using iThenticate software and an assessment of the results following an interview by the supervisor with the PhD candidate.
- c) Because of the educational purpose, the plagiarism check is carried out jointly by the supervisor and the PhD candidate. This means that the supervisor and PhD candidate analyse the iThenticate scan together. If preferable, the faculty can assign the task of running the iThenticate scan to the key user iThenticate (see workflow point III). As the number of PhD candidates and the resulting workload varies per faculty, the faculty is best suited to decide upon this.
- d) The supervisor may delegate the plagiarism check to a co-supervisor.
- e) The plagiarism check is carried out within the first two years on a suitable product (e.g. article, draft chapter). If no suitable product is available by the end of this period, the supervisor and the PhD candidate will make a separate agreement on when the plagiarism check will be carried out. The faculty can also set a later standard date for this check if PhD candidates in a particular discipline are not expected to come up with a suitable product within the first two years.
- f) The plagiarism check is mandatory for PhD candidates starting on or after 1 September 2022 and is freely available for PhD candidates who started before 1 September 2022. The licence that VU Amsterdam has agreed with iThenticate is based on (and allows for) a maximum of one scan per year for each PhD candidate, regardless of whether they started before or after 1 September 2022.
- g) In cases where a plagiarism check detects evidence of plagiarism, a second plagiarism check of the entire doctoral thesis at the end of the PhD programme is mandatory. In cases where no plagiarism is detected, a second plagiarism check is not mandatory but is permitted.
- h) The key user iThenticate will see to it that all PhD candidates who started on or after 1 September 2022, carry out the mandatory plagiarism check.
- i) The faculty may decide to use the tool for the purposes of retrospective detection, in addition to prevention and/or education. Any faculty which makes this decision is required to include a statement to this effect in its faculty regulations. This is in line with Article 38, paragraph 2 of the Doctorate Regulations: 'The dean may impose additional rules with regard to the PhD programme, after consulting the full professors at the faculty. Any such rules must be approved by the College of Deans.'
- j) Plagiarism is the use of another person's ideas, working methods, results or texts without giving them appropriate recognition. In some cases, however, the scale of the plagiarism is so small and of such little significance that it would be inappropriately severe to qualify it as a 'violation of academic integrity'. The [Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#) contains assessment criteria for determining whether such a qualification is appropriate or whether, for example, the problems detected can be explained as carelessness. These assessment criteria include the scale of the plagiarism, degree of intentionality, and the standards applied within the relevant discipline(s).

- k) The University Library makes operational management capacity available for iThenticate and provides all faculties at VU Amsterdam with clear instructions on the use of iThenticate on an ongoing basis. The faculties appoint at least one key user iThenticate to serve as a point of contact for PhD candidates, supervisors and the dean. The key user answers questions and coordinates the process as described in the workflow below. This person also serves as the point of contact for the Key user Hora Finita (if that role is fulfilled by someone else) and for Operational Management.

The proposed workflow drawn up based on these principles, can be outlined as follows:

- I. The compulsory course on academic integrity or another meeting for PhD candidates of the choice of the faculty, covers the educational aspects of plagiarism checks and the joint arrangements that need to be made by the supervisor and the PhD candidate.
- II. The timing of the plagiarism scan is jointly determined by the supervisor and the PhD candidate. The Training and Supervision Plan and the annual review are key elements in this procedure. In addition, the faculty may opt for monitoring by the key user iThenticate, for example, in the form of a signal list.
- III. The PhD candidate ensures that the plagiarism scan in iThenticate is carried out on the text selected in advance by the candidate in consultation with the supervisor. In principle, the PhD candidate is responsible for carrying out the scan. If the PhD candidate does not have a VUnet ID and the supervisor does, the supervisor will carry out the scan and share the results with the PhD candidate. The faculty may also give the supervisor and the PhD candidate the option of inviting the key user iThenticate to carry out the scan. In this case, only the scan itself is carried out by the key user iThenticate; the other steps below remain unchanged.
- IV. The results of the scan are discussed by the PhD candidate and the supervisor as part of the ongoing process to foster awareness of academic integrity. If, for step III of the workflow, it has been decided that the key user iThenticate should carry out the scan, the analysis also must be done in the key user's account. This practically entails that the key user iThenticate must be present at the interview, though any substantive issues raised will be discussed solely between the PhD candidate and the supervisor.
- V. The supervisor issues a standard summary report for all plagiarism checks carried out. The format must at least state whether evidence of plagiarism was or was not found. The key user iThenticate ensures that the report is uploaded in Hora Finita (through the Key user Hora Finita).
- VI. If, in the view of the supervisor and in accordance with the generally applicable principles of the relevant discipline, no plagiarism has been detected, the key user iThenticate ensures that this is registered in Hora Finita. This is done by requesting the Key user Hora Finita to tick the appropriate field. If the supervisor judges the PhD candidate has shown instances of carelessness but finds no evidence of plagiarism, the candidate may be asked to correct their work, after which a second plagiarism scan is advised.
- VII. In cases where plagiarism is detected, a compulsory second plagiarism check is later carried out on the entire dissertation. The plagiarism check consists of a scan and an assessment of the results. The assessment is carried out by a member of staff at the university who has sufficient knowledge of the field and the authority to act as a supervisor, but with no previous knowledge of the doctoral thesis under scrutiny. The dean appoints this assessor in consultation with the supervisor.
- VIII. The assessor draws up a report containing the results of the scan and a well-considered assessment as to whether there is evidence of plagiarism in the dissertation and, if so, the

scale and significance of this plagiarism. This report is then shared with the dean, the supervisor and the PhD candidate. On the basis of the report, the dean evaluates whether the dissertation contains instances of plagiarism.

- IX. If no plagiarism has been detected in the second plagiarism check, the key user iThenticate coordinates that this is registered in Hora Finita. This means ensuring that the key user Hora Finita ticks the appropriate field and that the relevant report and the dean's decision are uploaded. . This means ensuring that the Hora Finita key user ticks the appropriate field and that the relevant report and the dean's decision are uploaded.
- X. Submission of the dissertation to the doctorate committee in Hora Finita is only possible if the two relevant fields are ticked.
- XI. For the purpose of central monitoring, the dean will be asked to provide annual feedback to the College of Deans in a concise and anonymised report on the number of cases requiring a second plagiarism check, the outcome of the second plagiarism check, and a brief description of the case. The report also gives an impression of the discussions between the supervisor and the PhD candidate. Any relevant signals are reported to the dean by an official designated by the dean to fulfil this role (e.g. a PhD candidate advisor or a key user iThenticate). Based on this report, the dean may recommend additional internal policies aimed at education and prevention.

When evidence of plagiarism is found in a dissertation, the following workflow comes into play:

- XII. In response to the report on a second plagiarism check, the dean may only determine that plagiarism has occurred in the dissertation after the PhD candidate has been given the opportunity to respond to the report in writing. It is not possible for the dean to delegate this task. The procedure is described in the Doctorate Regulations. To protect the position of the PhD candidate, it is essential for the dean to act on the basis of the Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (specifically Standards 34 and 40 from Chapter 3, and Section A1 from Chapter 5.2) when determining whether plagiarism has been committed.