

Plagiarism check - background and procedure¹

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Aims

Plagiarism means a violation of the principles of good scientific research as laid down in “The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Scientific Practice”. “Plagiarism is one of the ‘core’ instances of research misconduct, the other two being fabrication and falsification”.² This memorandum deals with the application of the plagiarism scan to dissertations or parts thereof within the faculty of Social Sciences of Vrije Universiteit.

The goal in using a tool such as plagiarism scanner of a dissertation is to develop increased awareness of scientific integrity among PhD candidates and to prevent plagiarism.³ To achieve this goal, training explains the use of the scan and its mandatory nature.⁴ Then parts of the thesis and the thesis as a whole are scanned.

Access to the tool

Vrije Universiteit has a license to use iThenticate (www.ithenticate.com). The extent of the university account is that each year each PhD candidate can scan a text. Because not every PhD candidate will have a product scanned each year, it seems to be possible in appropriate cases to scan a second or product without further notice.

A quick start guide and information on the first time login procedure can be found at <https://libguides.vu.nl/ithenticate>. Access to iThenticate is only possible with VUNetID. Virtually every PhD candidate has this and can perform the scan. If the PhD candidate does not have an active VUNetID, a supervisor performs the scan. However, with a VUNetID you do not yet have direct access; for that you also need a link to an iThenticate account. You can request this access by sending an email to ithenticate.fsw@vu.nl, mentioning your VUNetID (the GSSS program managers receive this email).

The agreement with iThenticate provides that documents scanned by VU users will not be stored in any database of or by iThenticate against which new documents are scanned, so that ownership of the documents is not compromised.

If the PhD candidate or supervisor have a question for the FSW key user iThenticate, a program manager from the GSSS can be contacted (preferable via ithenticate.fsw@vu.nl, otherwise graduate.school.fsw@vu.nl).

¹ The procedure has been approved by the Faculty Board and follows the VU Doctorate Regulations, articles 38 and 40.

² Helgesson, G., & Eriksson, S. (2015). Plagiarism in research. *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy*, 18, 91-101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11019-014-9583-8>. This phrase is from page 97. A definition of plagiarism and a discussion of variants such as self-plagiarism, text recycling, salami slicing, and copyright infringement are provided. There are many other sources of information on plagiarism such as <https://tressacademic.com/plagiarism/>.

³ In FSS, the tool is also used for retrospective detection. This is in line with article 38 paragraph 2 of the Doctorate Regulations.

⁴ This training is part of the Research Integrity and Responsible Scholarship course, but there is also the possibility to do the scan on your own. A demonstration of the program is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMzrnCqA8As.

Procedure after performing the iThenticate scan

The results of the test are shared with the supervisors and PhD candidate (i.e., within the project team). A plagiarism scan does not scan for plagiarism but for overlap. Thus, the results of the scan must be interpreted and discussed within the project team to assess whether there is reason to assume that plagiarism has been committed.

Processing the result of the iThenticate scan

When the iThenticate scan has been carried out and the result is evaluated by the project team as negative (i.e., there is no reason to assume that plagiarism has been committed), the procedure is closed by saving the results (see below).

When the result of the iThenticate scan is evaluated by the project team as positive (i.e., there is reason to assume that plagiarism has been committed), or there are different opinions within the project team, a member of the Research Assessment Board (RAB) is asked to review the results.⁵ When this person sees the result of the iThenticate scan as positive (i.e., there is reason to assume that plagiarism has been committed), one of the supervisors⁶ informs the Dean and the Director of the Graduate School.⁷ Advice is sought from one of the Scientific Integrity Confidential Advisors.⁸ The next step may be to file a formal complaint about the violation of integrity with the Executive Board of Vrije Universiteit.

Saving the results

There are two parts to this result. (1) The output of the iThenticate scan is stored by the PhD candidate and the supervisors in the folders managed by them, in a durable and accessible manner. (2) The report of the procedure (what was tested, when did the test take place, who performed the test, who from the PhD candidate and the supervisors contributed to the interpretation, what was the interpretation of the output of iThenticate i.e. what was the conclusion?) is sent to ithenticate.fsw@vu.nl and included in the GNG portfolio and PhD portfolio.⁹

When is the iThenticate scan performed?

The scan will be done at two times in the PhD trajectory. The first is the go / no go (GNG) assessment by submitting the GNG portfolio ('coversheet'). The second is (as part of the mandatory PhD portfolio) when the thesis is presented for review by the Doctorate Board. In the latter case, the iThenticate scan covers all the work being assessed.

Starting date

Access to the tool is possible from September 1, 2022. Results will be monitored by the Graduate School beginning January 1, 2023. Exemption from the GNG assessment is no longer possible (similar to earlier, an external review of the GNG product may not be conducted).

⁵ The selected member is independent from the supervisors and the PhD candidate, and has ius promovendi. The findings are reported to the supervisors and the PhD candidate. The RAB is listed at <https://vu.nl/en/employee/social-sciences-getting-started/research-committees-and-consultative-bodies-fss>. Please contact the secretary of the RAB.

⁶ Preferable the first supervisor when employed at FSS.

⁷ Through the go / no go assessment, the portfolio and/or email.

⁸ See <https://vu.nl/nl/medewerker/research-support/wetenschappelijke-integriteit> or <https://vu.nl/en/employee/research-support/confidential-counsellor-for-academic-integrity-issues>.

⁹ In the future, this may be possible to submit directly through Hora Finita.