

Accepting the Unacceptable: Why Percentages are not your Friend

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How plagiarism systems can be your friends

If they are:

- Easy to use and easy to understand;
- Used consistently;
- Used correctly.

Used consistently & correctly

- Consistently

- Each and every time...
- ...at all levels of education.

- Correctly

- Teacher controlled;
- Only within schools, colleges and universities, rather than to ghost-writers and other undesirables who happen to have a credit card;
- With the results accurately interpreted...
- ...and then used properly.

Percentages and percentages

- Misleading people since the Classical Era.
- Take these three examples. How much has been plagiarised? What percentage?
 1. A block of text of four lines of original writing.
 2. The same block of text with last two lines swapped for something off Wikipedia, unaltered.
 3. The same block with the last two lines adjusted so that it is “in my own words” and showing a 50% match to the original.

Does it really matter? Surely the fact that it contains plagiarism is more important than whether it is 25% or 50% plagiarised?

L'erreur incroyable

“

Hi [abcde],

>

> Could you and your team members rework that file without making it longer, in order to comply with the anti-plagiarism rule? Your Urkund score is 11% similarity!

>

> As soon as possible, let's say Tuesday the latest...

>

> Regards,

> [fghij]

”



I am not making this up. Honestly.
It was in an email forwarded to me by a client.

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Devil *or* the deep blue sea

Change out your quotations to reduce the percentage.

- Ignore how it will lead to a break in the structure and how it reads.

Add more to your essay to increase its size and reduce its percentage.

- Ignore how adding waffle to a well-written essay is a terrible idea.
- (Ignoring how this was not an option given by the teacher...)

- Diluting the content of the essay, reducing the impact of the point made by the student and devaluing the subject.

Orwell, a king but not a King

Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* comes in at about 400 pages.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* is about 100 pages long.

Stephen King's *The Stand* is about 1,350 pages long.

If you were to put *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in *The Stand*, it would be "scored" at 29.63%.

If you were to put *Animal Farm* in the *The Stand*, it would be "scored" at 7.41%.

It is not ok. This cannot be seen as ok.

Twitter: @URKUND



In summary...

- Percentages are absolute, except when they are not.
- There is no magical percentage.
- There can be no magical percentage.
- Even if there were a magical percentage, its value cannot be decided by a computer or a plagiarism detection provider.
- Using arbitrary percentages to decide whether an essay is acceptable or not is itself unacceptable to the teacher, the student and the subject.
- Percentages are not your friend!



Thank you for listening!

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