Frequently asked questions- The anti-plagiarism service Urkund

Administrative questions

1. **Why has Åbo Akademi acquired Urkund?**
   Plagiarism detection is an important element in quality management. The University depends upon maintaining the confidence of the surrounding world in the integrity of its activities. In case somebody questions our reliability, Åbo Akademi must be able to show that we have a comprehensive system for ensuring a high standard in the quality of our work. The anti-plagiarism software facilitates the teachers’ assessment, which results in a more efficient control. More efficient control, for its part, increases the credibility of the University. We can prove that plagiarism is not a problem in our activities.

   To reference correctly and to mention all the sources used have to be trained in class, it is a necessary part of university studies. Urkund is also a pedagogical tool; it reminds the teacher of the importance of teaching reference techniques.

   In our “electronic” society the opportunities for plagiarism have increased considerably. Within science, this kind of cheating is a particularly serious offence. News reports clearly show that plagiarism is an increasing problem. In order to nip the problem in the bud, Åbo Akademi has chosen to tighten its instructions for plagiarism handling, and decided to test Urkund. It is, in other words, intended to have a preventive effect.

2. **How does Urkund Work?**
   The students send their written assignments and theses by e-mail to Urkund. Urkund compares the assignment to sources on the internet, e-books, other publications and student material in the Urkund database. An analysis overview is generated and sent to the teacher. The system analyses the material and the similarity is graded between 0 and 100%. A total similarity doesn’t directly mean plagiarism, it can, for instance, mean that the student forgot the second quotation mark. It is always the teacher’s responsibility to check the plagiarism analysis and decide if a text might have been plagiarised or not.

3. **Who is entitled to use Urkund?**
   All Åbo Akademi employees have been given user rights to Urkund. The new employees send e-mail to urkund@abo.fi to get user rights.

4. **Do I have to use Urkund?**
   The Åbo Akademi senate has decided that theses should be controlled with the anti-plagiarism service Urkund. We also recommend usage of Urkund in all courses where students do written assignments and tasks. Urkund facilitates the teachers’ assessment, which results in a more efficient control.
5. **Do students have the right to choose whether their written work is controlled or not?**
   No, by accepting a study place at Åbo Akademi, all students have undertaken to follow the rules of the university.

   *Åbo Akademi University Examination Instructions 21 §*
   Theses are submitted to the teacher or the department responsible for the course, according to the curriculum, or by another manner previously agreed upon.

   The teachers have the right to decide on the assessment of an assignment. Naturally, the method used must fulfill the general requirements of equality and fairness. The use of Urkund is not unreasonably difficult or tiresome, and does not entail any new costs for students.

6. **Can Urkund create a confidence crisis between teachers and students?**
   Teachers and students should discuss why the use of Urkund has been introduced. The use of Urkund doesn’t change the judging of the assignments, students should always use correct references in their assignments if the teacher doesn’t specify otherwise.

7. **Can students use, for example, their Bachelor’s (kandidat) essay as part of their pro gradu thesis?**
   This practice varies between subjects. That is, some subjects regard a Bachelor’s essay as having the status of a source comparable to all other sources and thus should be referred to similarly, while others allow the continued editing of the essay for a pro gradu thesis. This is actually not a matter connected to Urkund or plagiarism detection. It is up to the teachers to inform students of the systems applicable within their subject, and up to the students to make sure they are familiar with the applicable systems.

8. **“I think there is risk for a student having used the same essay within several subjects - if Urkund is used within both my and the other subject, will Urkund discover that the same essay has been used for several courses (at Åbo Akademi)?”**
   With the present settings it can’t be detected if a student have sent the same document in a previous course. At the moment Urkund doesn’t compare two documents sent from the same e-mail with each other. This setting might be changed. If the setting is changed it can lead to problems in departments where you can use the bachelor’s theses as a part of the pro gradu thesis. When material from the bachelor’s thesis is used without citations, Urkund would consider it as plagiarism.

9. **We need to translate a scientific text into English in an English language course. I am translating a section of my Bachelor’s thesis that I’m currently working on. Within the English course the assignment is sent to Urkund; does it mean that I will have problems when my bachelor’s thesis is controled?**
   Urkund compares the thesis against already existing texts. In the current version of Urkund the program can’t recognize translations that the students have made themselves. However, we recommend that the student always mentions the sources that were used, also in this kind of assignments.

10. **I work as an expert examiner for presentations presented on a seminar. The seminar is not organised by Åbo Akademi. Can I use Urkund to control these presentations?**
    No, unfortunately you cannot use it. Åbo Akademi has a license that only concerns theses and assignments at our own university. If Prioinfo AB finds out that we violate the agreement we can be forced to pay damages. Who pays these damages is not yet clear, but it would probably be your department.
11. How many working hours does the compulsory plagiarism control take from the teacher?
When grading students, the main point is to ensure that no plagiarism or cheating in any form has occurred. The working hours devoted for plagiarism control has not been analyzed. From this point of view you could say that the anti-plagiarism program can save time. Åbo Akademi has tightened its instructions for plagiarism handling, and Urkund is the tool for it. The senate of Åbo Akademi has seen it necessary to use Urkund to improve plagiarism control.

Questions concerning copyright and legal protection

12. When can a work be regarded as being protected by the Copyright Act?
In brief, a work must meet the so-called threshold of originality. This means that the authors can prove that the work is their own original piece of creative work. Whether a work meets this requirement must be decided case by case, since many circumstances must be taken into consideration. The best thing is always to assume that another person’s work is protected.

13. Can you access written works in the Urkund archive?
Every teacher has a web inbox where the teacher can access documents submitted within his or her own courses and their Urkund reports. A teacher cannot search works that have not been submitted within a course taught by him or her. If Urkund finds a hit in a work in the reference archive, the entire work can be shown, but only if the author of the text has given permission for that.

14. A teacher can now access the written assignments of all Åbo Akademi students. Is this appropriate?
Urkund detects similar sequences in other written works. Through the sequence, teachers can access other individual works. There is nothing to prevent a teacher from consulting another teacher for the assessment of a written assignment. Teachers are not, however, allowed to distribute or use the material of students without their permission. Also, teachers must not in any other ways refer to the performances of an individual student.

15. How is the legal protection of students guaranteed in the use of Urkund?
Teachers must follow the general equality requirements; that is, if Urkund is used, all works must be analysed within it.

The software never decides whether a student is guilty of plagiarism or not, as a teacher must always go through the analysis generated by the Urkund and make a judgement. Thus, no teacher has the right to assume that a student is guilty of plagiarism just because the Urkund analysis says that 75 per cent of his or her work has been found in other references. It is the duty of the Dean in a preliminary investigation to ensure that the teacher has not made such an assumption.

As in all assessment procedures, students have the right to ask for an amendment. In a case of suspected plagiarism, the teacher must always take the issue to an impartial investigating body, where the student has the right to answer the accusations made against him or her. Also in the case of careless use, the teacher will discuss the problematic passage of the text with the student. The student has the right to demand that the passage is assessed by another teacher.
16. How long are the assignments and theses stored in the Urkund database?
If a document is exempted it will be archived in the Urkund database until we cancel the subscription; a not exempted document is archived until 3 years have passed after we have cancelled the subscription.

17. Is my assignment indexed in the Urkund database?
With the current settings for Urkund the student can choose if their own document should be indexed in the database or not. The default setting is that the document is exempted and not indexed in the database. If the student choose that their document should not be indexed, their texts will not be compared with texts sent in later on.

We recommend that you choose that your document is indexed and thus shown in the database. If you choose the recommended setting your document gets plagiarism protection and thus makes it more difficult for other student to copy your work.

18. If my teacher uploads the document, is it indexed in the Urkund database? The default setting is that the document is not exempted. The teacher gets an e-mail after the document has been uploaded and can index the document if the student wish and gives permission for that. The teacher cannot make documents available without the student’s permission.

19. A part of my thesis is classified as confidential information, what should I do?
The part of the thesis containing the confidential information is not sent to Urkund. The parts not classified as confidential information has to be sent to Urkund. An adequate part of the thesis has to be submitted.

Technical questions

20. Is it possible for Urkund to handle assignments and thesis written in the Cyrillic alphabet?
No, the present situation is that Urkund only compares documents written in the Latin alphabet. Theses written in Russian has to be assessed as before.

21. What does it mean when the Urkund analyse references to https://secure.urkund.com?
If a piece of the document sent to Urkund is similar to a text it is marked with a record. In the analysis you see where the record was found. It can be an external source on the internet or a source in the Urkund archive. If the record was found on the internet, a Website is marked as the source; if the record was found in the Urkund database, the address https://secure.urkund.com is marked as the source.
If an assignment is exempted as a reference, the source is not found under https://secure.urkund.com

22. Why can’t Urkund recognize indented quotations as quotations?
Urkund compares pieces of the document against the reference material. The system removes all layouts and therefore cannot recognize indented quotations as quotations.

23. My pro gradu thesis is divided into several documents (title, abstract, table of contents, and content with list of sources and attachments) Do I have to send all the documents to Urkund?
Åbo Akademi has decided that all the documents should be submitted to the plagiarism control. It is not a problem that the document is divided into many files. You can attach many files to the same e-mail. The files shouldn’t exceed 5 MB=5000KB. If your thesis is bigger than that you have to divide it into separate messages.
24. **What will happen if I send in my assignment by accident two times?**
   It doesn’t matter, Urkund doesn’t compare documents sent from the same e-mail with each other. (However, if the teacher uploads the student’s documents two times they will be compared with each other. NB! The teacher should not upload student’s documents without the student’s permission).

25. **Does the trash-folder empty in the teacher’s Urkund inbox?**
   There is an archive folder where you can move documents you do not need. Documents which are removed to the trash folder are not deleted, they are just hidden. The trash folder cannot be emptied. If you want to remove documents permanently you need to contact the Urkund customer service.

26. **My file is too big for Urkund, what should I do?**
   Documents containing many pictures can be too big for Urkund. If that is the case, you can copy the text only into a new document and send that to Urkund.