Identifying plagiarism in student work

Document layout and style
The very appearance of a student’s work can reveal many things. Changes in font size, style, indentation and even punctuation can indicate plagiarised sources. Unexplained random hyperlinks should also be investigated.

Changes in writing style
Every student has their own writing style which is developed over time. If this changes, it could indicate that the student has used text from another author. Similarly, varying registers of vocabulary are often a sign that work has been copied or plagiarised in some way.

Hard to find or out of date sources
If a student cites an obscure or out of date source, then this could indicate that they have used it to merely embellish a bibliography. Students should always be up to date with the latest research and reference it accordingly. Instructors should check that such a source is actually available and how the student may have accessed it.

Spelling and phraseology
The use of non-local spellings can reveal that they may have been copied from international websites. Words and meanings can slightly change from region or country within a language and so instructors should look for consistency in students’ work.

Detect plagiarism with Turnitin
Make use of the world’s leading plagiarism detection software by using Turnitin to check the originality of your student’s work against a vast database of student papers, online sources and archived content. The resulting Originality Report gives instructors a tool with which to start further discussions on the value of authentic content.

Failure to answer the question
This is surprisingly a very easy way of spotting plagiarism. The student’s work should always be consistent throughout and relevant to the question being asked. If a student is unable to talk about and justify their work, then alarm bells should ring.