How do I interpret SafeAssign reports?

NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS

SafeAssign can be used to prevent plagiarism and to create opportunities to help students identify how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase. SafeAssign is effective as both a deterrent and an educational tool.

When SafeAssign receives a submission, it converts the submission from its original file format into text, and then “chunks” that text into phrase-level pieces to execute as queries against the indexes of the various sources. SafeAssign chunks the text according to punctuation (periods, commas, semicolons, new lines, etc.). Also, the edits that a student makes between a draft and final version of the paper can change the way that SafeAssign “chunks” the text, which, in turn, can result in different results.

A SafeAssign originality report provides detailed information about the matches found between a student’s submitted paper and existing sources. Both instructors and students can use the report to review assignment submissions for plagiarism potential and create opportunities to identify how to properly attribute sources rather than paraphrase. When instructors create an assignment and choose to use the SafeAssign service, they determine if students can see the results of the report.

The report identifies all matching blocks of text. Instructors and their students need to determine if the matching text is properly referenced. Investigating each match prevents detection errors due to differences in citing standards.

The originality report displays the list of potential sources, and each source is highlighted in a different color. The report can display up to 30 colors to represent 30 different sources.

ACCESS THE REPORT

When a SafeAssign report has finished processing, you can access it on the Grade Assignment page. Access the Grade Assignment page from the Grade Center or the Needs Grading page.

In the Grade Center, locate the assignment that you enabled the SafeAssign options for. When students have made their submissions, you see the needs grading icon—the exclamation mark. Access the cell's contextual menu and click the attempt.

On the Grade Assignment page, a SafeAssign section appears in the grading sidebar. While the report is processing, the following statement appears: Report in progress...

When the report is ready to view, a percentage appears in the grading sidebar. Expand the SafeAssign link and click View Originality Report to view the results in a new window.
REPORT LAYOUT

A SafeAssign originality report is divided into three areas:

- Report information
- Citations
- Manuscript text
If you need more space for viewing the paper's text, you can collapse the right panel with the right-pointing arrow. The highlighting colors remain in the collapsed view.

**Report information**

Report information appears in the right panel of the report. When you reduce the width of the viewing area, this information appears at the top. You can view data about the paper, such as the author, percent of matching text, word count, and when it was submitted. If students have included multiple attachments, they appear with the report information. You also have an option for viewing a printable version. This printable version is the most effective view of the report for users who rely on assistive technology to access Blackboard Learn. At the top of the page, click Print to view the printable version. Download the PDF to email to others.

**Citations**

The sources that include text that matches the submitted paper's text are listed in the right panel of the report. You can expand the section to select sources, exclude them from the review, and process the paper again. By default, all sources are included. Clear the check box for each source you want to exclude from the results and resubmit. This is useful if a source is a previous work from the same student for the same assignment. You might also exclude a source if there is a reason that lengthy sections from the source appear in the paper. Processing the paper again generates a new value for the percent matching without using the excluded sources.

**Manuscript text**

The submitted paper appears in the left panel of the report. All matching blocks of text are identified. Each source has a color specific to the source—up to 30 unique colors for 30 different sources. Text matching a source is highlighted in the source color and identified with a number. In the right panel, you can click **Show/Hide All Highlighting** to turn source highlighting off and on for all sources at one time. You can turn the highlighting off and on for only one citation. Click **Remove** or **Show Highlighting** next to a citation.
Click a matching block of text to display information about the original source and the probability that the block or sentence was copied from the source.

Use the pertinent findings in the report as you determine what grade to assign to the student on the Grade Assignment page.

MULTIPLE ATTACHMENTS AND ATTEMPTS
SafeAssign recognizes a student’s multiple attempts for an individual assignment as submitted by the same student for the same assignment. SafeAssign does not check the contents of the student’s current attempt against content from previous submissions.

If a student includes more than one attachment with an assignment, they are listed in the report. Click a file name link to view the file’s text in the left panel and view its word count in the right panel.

SafeAssign also checks the Institutional Database before it checks the Global Reference Database. If a paper is in both databases, SafeAssign will always return the one in the Institutional Database because it will encounter that match first. Once SafeAssign finds a match, it stops looking for further matches. If SafeAssign finds more than one match for a particular paper, there is a possibility of a different percentage each time if the paper is resubmitted. Not only is there the possibility of false positives (for example, SafeAssign may return a match for appropriately cited quotations, as it does not make determinations about citation accuracy).

The Internet is a dynamic place. To determine if there are matches on the web, SafeAssign executes web searches using Microsoft Bing. Web pages change and the rankings that search engines give to web pages can also change. When using the phrase-level “chunks” as the search query, it’s possible to get different results on different days as pages are added to the web and search engines (like Bing, which SafeAssign uses) adjust their rankings of search results that they return. Similarly, the Institutional Database and Global Reference Database grow by over a million papers a month.

SafeAssign is best approached not as a tool to “detect” plagiarism, but as a decision-support mechanism that provides instructors with more supplementary information for identifying areas of concern.

INTERPRETING MATCHING SCORES

The Overall Score is an indicator of what percentage of the submitted paper matches existing sources. This score is a warning indicator only and papers should be reviewed to see if the matches are properly attributed.

Sentence Matching Scores represent the percentage probability that two phrases have the same meaning. This number reflects the reciprocal to the probability that these two phrases are similar by chance. For example, a score of 90 percent means that there is a 90 percent probability that these two phrases are the same. There is a 10 percent probability that they are similar by chance and not because the submitted paper
includes content from the existing source—whether appropriately attributed or not.

**Scores below 15 percent:** These papers typical include some quotes and few common phrases or blocks of text that match other documents. These papers typically do not require further analysis, as there is no evidence of the possibility of plagiarism in these papers.

**Scores between 15 percent and 40 percent:** These papers include extensive quoted or paraphrased material or they may include plagiarism. These papers should be reviewed to determine if the matching content is properly attributed.

**Scores over 40 percent:** There is a very high probability that text in this paper was copied from other sources. These papers include quoted or paraphrased text in excess and should be reviewed for plagiarism.

**How SafeAssignments Work**

SafeAssign is based on a unique text matching algorithm capable of detecting exact and inexact matching between a paper and source material. SafeAssignments are compared against several different databases, including:

- **Internet** - comprehensive index of documents available for public access on the Internet
- **ProQuest ABI/Inform database** - more than 1,100 publication titles and about 2.6 million articles from 1990s to present time, updated weekly (exclusive access)
- **Institutional document archives** - contains all papers submitted to SafeAssign by users in their respective institutions
- **Global Reference Database** - contains papers that were volunteered by students from Blackboard client institutions to help prevent cross-institutional plagiarism

**Global Reference Database**

Blackboard's Global Reference Database is a separate database where students voluntarily donate copies of their papers to help prevent plagiarism. It is separated from each institution's internal database, where all papers are stored by each corresponding institution, and students are free to select the option to check their papers without submitting them to the Global Reference Database. Students submit their papers to the database voluntarily and agree not to remove papers in the future. Submissions to the Global Reference Database are extra copies that are given voluntarily for the purpose of helping with plagiarism prevention. Blackboard does not claim ownership of submitted papers.

**SafeAssign Originality Reports**

After a paper has been processed, a report will be available detailing the percentage of text in the submitted paper that matches existing sources. It also shows the suspected sources of each section of the submitted paper that returns a match. Instructors can remove matching sources from the report and process it again. This may be useful if the paper is a continuation of a previously submitted work by the same student.

Because SafeAssign identifies all matching blocks of text, it is important to read the report carefully and investigate whether or not the block of text is properly attributed.