Using the SafeAssign Tool in Blackboard

Overview

SafeAssign compares submitted assignments against a set of academic papers to identify areas of overlap between the submitted assignment and existing works. SafeAssign can be used to prevent plagiarism by creating opportunities to help students identify problems with source use in their writing.

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** with over 1,100 publication titles and about 2.6 million articles from 1990s to present time, updated weekly (exclusive access);
- **Institutional document archives** containing all papers submitted to SafeAssign by users in their respective institutions;
- **Global Reference Database** containing 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.

**NOTE:** A “Draft” assignment will not be loaded into Boise State’s institutional database, and therefore will not be available for future comparison.

- This is the option to use if you want your students to submit their papers for checking before submitting a final, revised version. *(This is recommended so that the experience can become a learning opportunity for students. This also minimizes the real checking the instructor has to do).*
- If you require a draft submission, or if you make it an option for your students, then you will need to create a separate assignment for the final version of that assignment (i.e., one “Draft” assignment and one “Final” assignment).

**SafeAssign Originality Reports**

Once a paper has been processed, a report is available that details the percentage of 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.

**SafeAssign reports are divided into three sections:**

- **Paper Information:** This section lists data about the paper, such as the author, percent Matching, and when it was submitted. This section also includes options for downloading the report, emailing the report, or viewing a printable version. Note that the printable version may be the most effective view of the report for those users that rely on assistive technologies to access the Blackboard Learning System.

**Matching percentage:** indicates the percentage of the submitted document that matches existing sources. You should use the index only as a guide, and review papers to see if sources are properly attributed.

**Share report options:** in the right-hand column, you have three options available to share the report in case you need help interpreting it:

- **Save report to disk:** review the report offline.
- **Print version:** print the report.
- **Direct link:** send a direct link to the report. Where you click here makes a difference:

  Clicking the **envelope icon** will launch your local email client with a message containing a web link for this report. This functionality will look for your
local email client (such as Outlook) and does not work with Internet-based email programs, such as webmail.

Clicking the Direct Link text updates the address in your browser address bar to the URL or address for this report. You can then copy and paste that link into an Internet-based email program.

Note: The link provided is only valid for seven (7) days, so if you need to review this information past the seven days, you will need to click the Direct Link envelope icon again to get a new link. It is also important to remember that if the report is for a draft SafeAssignment and if a subsequent document is submitted using this same draft SafeAssignment, the original report will be overwritten, making the first link invalid.

• Suspected Sources: This section lists the sources that have text that matches the text of the submitted paper. Users may select sources, exclude them from the review, and process the paper again. This is useful if a source is a previous work from the same student for the same assignment, or if there is some reason that lengthy sections of a particular source appear in the paper. Processing the paper again will generate a new value for the percent matching without using the excluded sources.

Clicking on a link displays the source document.

The green numbers to the left of the link correspond to the blocks of text in the Paper Text section.

Clicking a magnifying glass icon at the end of the URL (or clicking Highlight All), highlights the corresponding text in the Paper Text section.

Instructor View Only: Re-process the paper without the selected sources. If a source doesn't apply, check its box and click the Re-process icon.

• Document Text: This section shows the submitted paper. All matching blocks of text are identified. Clicking a matching block of text will display information about the original
source and the probability that the block or sentence was copied from the source.

Text in blue matches text identified in the Suspected Sources section. The green number preceding the block refers to the specific source from the Suspected Sources list.

Clicking on the blue text displays the matched text along with the matching percentage between the uploaded document and the Internet source. If the matching text is properly cited, or is perhaps just a commonly used phrase, this may not be an instance of plagiarism. It is always important to analyze the information that the report provides.

Here is another way to view the matching text: In the Suspected Sources section, click on the magnifying glass at the end of one of the sources. The URL is highlighted and the corresponding text in the Paper Text section will be highlighted with the same color. Scroll down to find the matching text in the Paper Text section. Once again, you can click the text to view the sentence comparison box. Close the Sentence Comparison box by clicking the X in the upper right corner.

**Interpreting SafeAssign Scores**

Sentence matching scores are the percentage probability that two sentences have the same meaning.

This number can also be interpreted as the reciprocal to the probability that these two sentences are similar by chance. *For example, a score of 90 percent means that there is a 90 percent probability that these two sentences are the same and a 10 percent probability that they are similar by chance and not because the submitted paper includes content from the existing source (whether or not it is appropriately attributed).*

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.

- **Scores below 15 percent**: These papers typically 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.