

SafeAssign and Plagiarism Prevention

Katie Fuster

LFCC

What is SafeAssign?

SafeAssign is a plagiarism detection service and Blackboard tool that is centrally hosted by Blackboard and integrated with the VCCS's Blackboard Learning System; anyone in the VCCS can use it for free. SafeAssign uses text matching software to detect unoriginal passages of text and flags them as potential instances of plagiarism.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/About+SafeAssign>)

How does SafeAssign work?

SafeAssign compares student assignments to a variety of documents, including

- all documents publicly available on the Internet using Microsoft's Live Search engine
- all articles in the ProQuest ABI/Inform database (over 1,100 publication titles and about 2.6 million articles from '90s to present time, updated weekly)
- all papers submitted to SafeAssign at VCCS schools; this collection of papers is called the institutional database
- all of the documents voluntarily submitted to the database by students at all member schools; this collection is called the Global Reference Database.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/How+Does+SafeAssign+Work>;
<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Instructor+FAQs>)

Essay Mill Websites

The screenshot shows the homepage of CheatHouse.com, a website for students. The header features a cartoon character of a student in a red graduation cap and gown, with the text "essays & papers for students" and "CHEATHOUSE.COM" in large yellow letters. To the right of the header are three verification badges: "ControlScan REGISTERED MEMBER", "BUSINESS BACKGROUND REVIEWED", and "GeoTrust". Below the header is a navigation bar with links for "What is CheatHouse, and how do I join?", "SIGN UP", "BROWSE ESSAYS", and "CUSTOMER SUPPORT". The main content area is divided into a search sidebar and a central library section. The search sidebar includes a search bar with the text "essays", a "Search!" button, and a list of "Quick search results for essays" such as "Persuasive Essays Ar...", "4 descriptive essays", "A step by Step guide...", "Mixed Short Biology...", and "Montaigne's #39, a ess...". The central library section has the heading "Library of essays, research & term papers, book reports, case studies." and "Over 100,000 essays!". Below this is the text "SEE ESSAYS THAT WORK - AND ACE YOURS" and a paragraph describing the site's offerings: "Ever looked over the shoulder of a Straight-A-Student? Or overcome Writer's Block just by glancing at the structure of a term paper or case study? If so, you will understand the value of having access to over 100,000 categorized essays in over 190 different subjects with over 25,000 independent reviews." A second paragraph encourages users to "So get inspired, use other's research and bibliographies. Get comments on your drafts and ace your essay. Go ahead - give our search engine a spin, [browse the subject list](#) or [learn more about the site](#). Discover the CheatHouse secret: *when you cite, it isn't cheating.*" At the bottom of the central section, there is a call to action: "If you want full, totally unlimited access NOW, then: [Sign up and become a member](#)". A "LOGIN" button is visible in the bottom left corner of the search sidebar.

SafeAssign cannot reliably find documents posted on many essay mill websites. However, passages from papers in essay mill websites that have been copied and pasted into student papers may result in an essay-to-essay match.

Log in to Blackboard

You should be able to log into Blackboard at this time in order to access the [BLACKBOARD SAFE ASSIGN TRAINING \(LF298.BB.SA.TRAINING.WRKS\)](#) course using your VCCS username and password.

Using SafeAssign in Blackboard

- Two ways to use SafeAssign in your Blackboard course
 - create SafeAssignments that students may upload their papers to
 - use Direct Submit to copy and paste suspicious passages of text or upload individual essays or .zip files of up to 100 essays at a time yourself

SafeAssignments

- SafeAssignments: students submit their own papers (much like the regular Assignment feature) in Blackboard.
- After students submit their work, their papers are checked against the four databases listed above.

How to Create a SafeAssignment

1. Click the "Edit View" link in the upper right corner of any content area of the course.
2. Choose "SafeAssign" from the drop-down menu.
3. Click "Go"
4. Enter an assignment name and the total number of points possible for the assignment.
5. Adjust or accept the default options, then click "Submit."

Optional fields

- **Instructions:** Add directions here; you may use html tags in this window.
- **Available:** Select whether or not the SafeAssignment should be visible to students.
- **Availability Dates:** Use these controls to set a date range when students can submit SafeAssignments.
- **Drafts:** Allows students to check their papers for possible instances of plagiarism without storing their files in the Institutional Database.

Optional fields

- **Students Viewable:** Controls whether or not students can view the originality report that is generated when their papers are submitted.
- **Urgent Checking:** Sets papers to high priority in the queue. (No word on how much faster these puppies get checked).
- **Optional Announcement:** Click "Yes" to create an announcement about the SafeAssignment. Enter a subject and message for the announcement; you can use html tags here, too.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Create+a+SafeAssignment+for+Students+to+Upload+to+%28in+Blackboard+Enterprise%29;>

<http://www.blackboard.niu.edu/blackboard/resources/safeassign.shtml>)

What's missing here?

Assignment Files: You cannot attach files to SafeAssignments.

Where It Can Get Tricky

- Make sure your students know that SafeAssign will only accept .zip, .doc, .docx, .odt, .txt, .pdf, .rtf and .html files.
- Papers with images must not exceed 2MB or the submission may fail.

(<http://wiki.safeassign.com/display/SAFE/Create+a+SafeAssignment+for+Students+to+Upload+to+%28in+Blackboard+Enterprise%29>)

Headache Central: The VCCS Release Statement



Essay #1

I understand that my instructor has selected to have this assignment checked against several databases for original content. Furthermore, I understand that SafeAssign will create an originality report for my instructor which shows how my paper compares against documents available on the Internet, in many print journals, as well as a database of other papers submitted by VCCS students. I understand that my paper will be added to this institutional database for comparison of future papers against my work. I also understand that if I select Upload to Global Database below, I am agreeing to have my paper stored in a Global Database of work so that future work of all students using the SafeAssign system can be compared against my work. I understand that once I grant the right for this paper to be added to the SafeAssign Global Database that I may not retract that right. Once a paper is submitted to the database it cannot be retrieved from the database. I maintain ownership of the original intellectual property created, but this document must remain a part of the SafeAssign Global Database. I understand that submitting my paper to the Global Database is completely voluntary.

>> [View/Complete](#)



Nonfiction Book Evaluation

I understand that my instructor has selected to have this assignment checked against several databases for original content. Furthermore, I understand that SafeAssign will create an originality report for my instructor which shows how my paper compares against documents available on the Internet, in many print journals, as well as a database of other papers submitted by VCCS students. I understand that my paper will be added to this institutional database for comparison of future papers against my work. I also understand that if I select Upload to Global Database below, I am agreeing to have my paper stored in a Global Database of work so that future work of all students using the SafeAssign system can be compared against my work. I understand that once I grant the right for this paper to be added to the SafeAssign Global Database that I may not retract that right. Once a paper is submitted to the database it cannot be retrieved from the database. I maintain ownership of the original intellectual property created, but this document must remain a part of the SafeAssign Global Database. I understand that submitting my paper to the Global Database is completely voluntary.

>> [View/Complete](#)



Research Paper

I understand that my instructor has selected to have this assignment checked against several databases for original content. Furthermore, I understand that SafeAssign will create an originality report for my instructor which shows how my paper compares against documents available on the Internet, in many print journals, as well as a database of other papers submitted by VCCS students. I understand that my paper will be added to this institutional database for comparison of future papers against my work. I also understand that if I select Upload to Global Database below, I am agreeing to have my paper stored in a Global Database of work so that future work of all students using the SafeAssign system can be compared against my work. I understand that once I grant the right for this paper to be added to the SafeAssign Global Database that I may not retract that right. Once a paper is submitted to the database it cannot be retrieved from the database. I maintain ownership of the original intellectual property created, but this document must remain a part of the SafeAssign Global Database. I understand that submitting my paper to the Global Database is completely voluntary.

>> [View/Complete](#)

Tips

- Put important instructions elsewhere; use the SafeAssignment instructions field only to remind students of what they already know (due dates, etc.)
- Use simple html tags to make instructions stand out from the Release Statement
 - ``All text you type here will be **RED**``
 - ``All text you type here will be **BOLD**``
 - `` All text you type here will be **BOLD AND RED**``
- Use the “Availability Dates” controls to make each item unavailable after its due date so that you do not have a log jam of SafeAssignments

Direct Submit

- Use to perform a plagiarism check on a few suspicious papers or passages instead of the work of an entire class
- Papers uploaded through Direct Submit are added to the Institutional Database but cannot be added to the Global Reference Database
- There is no Gradebook integration with papers submitted through Direct Submit

How to directly submit individual student assignments

1. From the Control Panel, click “SafeAssign” under “Course Tools.”
2. The default screen is “SafeAssignments”; click the “Direct Submit” tab.
3. A list of folders and papers will appear. This list includes papers already uploaded through “Direct Submit.”
4. Navigate to the folder you want to upload the paper(s) to.
5. Click “Submit Papers.”

6. Under “Submission Options,” you have two choices:

a. If you click “Submit as Draft,” a SafeAssign originality report will be generated but the paper will not be added to the institutional database and will not be used to check other papers in the future.

b. If you click “Skip Plagiarism Checking,” SafeAssign will add the paper to the institutional database but will not generate a SafeAssign originality report. Pretty much the only time you would want to do this is if you are uploading papers from an earlier incarnation of the course to make sure that your current students are not reusing essays.

7. Under “File Upload,” you have two choices:

a. Browse for a file you have saved on your computer. As you can see, acceptable file formats are .zip, .doc, .docx, .odt, .txt, .pdf, .rtf and .html. This means that individual papers as well as papers of these file formats that are grouped in a .ZIP package are accepted. (Since this is fast and spiffy, this is the recommended Fuster method.)

b. Select “Copy/Paste Document,” type in the paper’s title, and then paste the document text in the “Paper text” field.

Viewing SafeAssignments and Direct Submissions

- View SafeAssignments and Direct Submissions, including originality reports, through the Control Panel
 - Click on “SafeAssign” under “Course Tools.”
 - Click “View” under any assignment to read the text of your students’ documents, download the files they have submitted, and view their SafeAssign originality reports.
 - You can also click “Clear Attempt” to remove a document submission from the database; this is useful if a student uploads the wrong file. This will not clear that file from the Institutional Database or, if the student has voluntarily submitted his or her work to it, from the Global Reference Database.

Viewing Originality Reports

It usually takes a few minutes for SafeAssign to process an originality report. Reports highlight any blocks of text in submitted documents that match reference sources from the four databases. Reports show similarity ratings, allow instructors to view line-by-line comparisons of papers vs. matching external documents, and link back to the matching documents on the Internet, student papers in databases, etc. Click under “SA Report” to access a student’s originality report.

The Best Way to Tackle Plagiarism? Prevent It!

Recommendations from 2006-7 Research Project:

- **Do not recycle essay topics and prompts from previous semesters.**
- **Make your assignments hard to plagiarize by giving specific and somewhat unusual requirements.**
- **Teach students correct bibliographic and in-text citation methods for your field, and instruct them on how to use and correctly cite direct quotations, paraphrases, and summaries in their assignments.**

- **Procrastinators often resort to plagiarism, so break major assignments down into smaller parts with staggered due dates as opposed to having the just final product (or worse, all major assignments) due at one time.**
- **Include a clear definition of plagiarism and your school's academic honesty policy in your course syllabus, and state the consequences for plagiarism in your syllabus, on assignment directions, etc.**

- **Decide what constitutes a failing grade for an assignment vs. what merits a failing grade for the class.**
- **Discuss academic dishonesty in class and/or on your class discussion board**