Best Practices

SafeAssign as a Learning Tool
SafeAssignments can be used as an effective teaching tool, as many students are not aware that they may have plagiarized unintentionally. By providing a draft dropbox for your students, they can submit the assignment and then use the reports to improve the quality of their writing by addressing any identified issues. The reports produced by SafeAssign are available to you for review also.

A technique used by many instructors is to use a draft SafeAssignment for submission of the draft and then have either a regular assignment or a SafeAssignment for the submission of the final paper for grading. When the final paper is submitted through SafeAssign, the paper is added to the institution database and will be used to check other student work. The grading process with a SafeAssignment includes the SafeAssignment reports.

A Word of Caution
No program is perfect and this applies to SafeAssign. While you can be assured that if SafeAssign finds a match to a known source the match is definite, SafeAssign, like any plagiarism check tool, cannot find everything. These are some of the sources that are not matched well:

- Foreign language sources. A few common phrases will be flagged but most non-English sources are not included in the database. The way around this is to load documents to your institution database using DirectSubmit.

- Scientific Journals. We have discovered that many scientific journals are not included within the database and search resources. A request has been submitted to Blackboard to update SafeAssign to include scientific journals. If you suspect a sentence or two have been copied from a scientific journal, we suggest that you use Google or another search engine to find a matching source.

- Changes to copied text where a change is inserted at least once every five consecutive words. This we discovered by trial and error but it becomes a hole that students can exploit. There isn't a simple way to determine if this has been done. In some cases, Google will locate the original source, but not always.

Rather than relying on SafeAssign or any other plagiarism checking tool as the definitive answer, use your judgement. A student who submits a paper that is noticeably different from previous papers should raise a red flag. Students who work together often will have writing that contains the same quotations and ideas. Some students, foreign students in particular, may not understand expectations or standards and may need instruction in how to properly quote sources and effectively paraphrase.