I’m an Associate Professor in the School of Psychology in the Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences and I’m also the Undergraduate Coordinator for the School of Psychology, which means I oversee some of the undergraduate programs.

I’m going to talk about plagiarism. Plagiarism is the presentation of others’ ideas as your own in whatever context that might be. Now, of course, what we’re mostly interested in is the form of your assignments. When an academic marks your assignment you’re being marked on how well you understand the topic. So plagiarism is effectively relying on somebody else’s understanding to get you marks. Plagiarism is any time in which you present ideas or words that are not your own as if they are your own. So the important thing in doing assignments is to reference information sources that you’ve used, particularly any time you take the literal words that somebody else has used in the materials that you’ve read.

Proper referencing in the text demonstrates where you’ve got the information from and how you’ve been able to integrate information from different sources to form an argument or to provide a body of evidence that you’ve organised in a coherent way to support your arguments to make the points that you want to make. In doing that one of the best things that you need to do is to take your notes appropriately. If you’re reading materials and taking notes from them you need to make sure that you write down the sources of the information so that you can include those in your assignments in the appropriate way and you also need to make very sure that you are quoting appropriately.

When you’re writing notes from the references that you might be reading, when they’re books or journal articles, if you’re writing something down you need to make sure that you know whether you’re writing word for word from that reference or whether you’re paraphrasing it. If you’re going to quote something you need to be very clear and make sure exactly where that quote is coming from and indicate that in your written assignment. It’s very easy to take notes and then come back to them a few weeks later in order to write the assignment and in the meantime you’ve lost your memory of exactly what you were doing. So you can very easily make the mistake of copying stuff down and then thinking that you’ve just paraphrased what was in the journal article and so you can inadvertently end up plagiarizing by the taking the words that were actually written by somebody else.
Plagiarism’s taken very seriously by the university. As I said it’s the presenting of other people’s ideas as your own. University and academic work is all about demonstrating your capacity, your ability to understand and to link information and ideas. It’s very difficult for us to get any sense of that in marking if you are not presenting the sources from which you got the information or if you are presenting ideas as if they’re your own then we are getting an inaccurate representation of how much you know. The university has web sites related to plagiarism that give you accurate and detailed information about best practice and ways of avoiding possible plagiarism. You should work through this guide in order to learn how to use information ethically and to avoid having any problems in relation to plagiarism in your time at university.