Associate Professor Rebecca Albury says…

I’m from the Faculty of Arts where I teach Social Science. I have many years of experience teaching first year students and also of reminding more advanced students of some of the hints and tips that will make their assignments good.

I’m going to talk a little bit about what sounds like a very ugly word, plagiarism. A better way to think about it is the ethical use of the information that you collect. Plagiarism means copying and using someone else’s words as if they are your own.

Academic work is built by acknowledging the work of others. It demonstrates to the person who’s reading your work that you’ve done research that you’ve found good sources and you’ve thought about which ones to use, that you’ve used the information in a way that builds the argument that you’re trying to make. So it shows that you understand what a researcher does and what a scholar does.

The second thing, of course, that ethical citation, which is what we call putting those references in, does is it treats authors with respect. You like their words well enough to use them, you should acknowledge them. Respect them for the research and the thinking and the writing that they’ve done already.

The third thing about ethical use of information is what it tells the marker about you. It tells the marker of your essay more than you just know how to reference. It tells the marker how to separate your ideas from the ideas you raid. If you are very diligent about indicating who are the source of the ideas, who wrote some of the words that you quote and where you got the main parts of the argument or the evidence for your argument, then your originality and your critical skills, your ability to analyse, to ask questions, to come to new conclusions, really shines out and shows the brilliance of your work.

Now all of this takes time of course, which means you need to start early doing your research and writing it down. It means you need to be systematic about writing down where you found the information that you want to use.

I’ll end with a reminder that if you can find a source using the Internet, Googling or some other search engine so can your teacher. I’ve found when I’m suspicious of where did this come from, putting into Google about four words in a row allows the source of that copied material to come up on the first page or even within the first five hits. That’s pretty impressive. Search engines work both ways, for you and against you. So I would say cite your sources, use them ethically and let the search engines work for you.