First impressions are so important when it comes to your teaching. Specially if you’re teaching a challenging course, or course where students may come with negative preconceptions. Your first interactions with your students give you the opportunity to start to frame your students’ minds in a positive way.

And you can even start this before the first lecture. For example, in O-Week I send my students a welcoming e-mail, saying that I’m happy that they’ve enrolled in my tax law course and that I am looking forward to the upcoming semester. Then in the first lecture I start by asking the students some fundamental questions. Why have they enrolled in a tax law course? Why is tax law part, or actually a mandatory part, of a commerce degree? Also, how important is tax law in terms of their own personal, business or the economy of Australia in total?

In this way I start to contextualise tax law, even if you might hate it, how important it is to actually our society. Tax has actually been described as a price we pay for a civilised society. And it has important implications, not only personally and for business and in the economy, but also politically. Just ask Kevin Rudd how he lost in part his Prime Ministership to try and introduce the mining tax.

By having this discourse, it starts students thinking about tax law in a way which they may never have thought about it before. And hopefully I’ve sparked an interest, because that interest will be fundamental in them getting through the next 13 weeks.

Another thing I ask students in the first lecture is about their goals for the upcoming semester. What is their goal? We then have a conversation about what are some of the study techniques and study habits that they’ll need to do, to actually achieve those goals in terms of grades. This way I share past students’ experience about what they’ve done to be effective. Also I share with my students what my goals are for the upcoming semester, they being that I’m here to help them to start to understand the fundamentals about tax law. But also, I’m here to try to improve their research skills, because research skills are critical in knowing about what the current status of the tax law is.

Also, I want to start to open their minds to be able to be critical thinkers in terms of analysing tax policy, so they can actually assess about what politicians are saying, or lobby groups in terms of potential tax reforms. It is through this discourse and contextualisation, hopefully I’ve planted the seed for a fruitful and enjoyable semester. Good luck with your teaching.