The process of planning and writing an essay is rarely a linear one, but you don't have to write and plan on the fly. This document will explain, step by step, how to create a preliminary plan and fill in the blank page so that you can write a first draft with confidence. Use the template on p. 4 of this document to help you.

Preliminary planning

1. **Make sure that you understand the question. If you do not, ask your tutor.**
2. **If you have to create your own title, read over notes from class and lectures, and make new notes with the goal of drawing out two or three major themes from which to create a question.**
3. **Pick out the key terms in your essay question. Does it ask you to analyse, outline, demonstrate? How might these terms effect your writing style?**
4. **Go back to your notes. What lectures and classes best suit the essay? What other sources did your teachers recommend? Make a separate list of notes/fill out your IADT Mind Map Template (see Learning Support Services → *Student Learning Resources*).**

Once the above plan is complete, you can begin filling out your essay structure. You should refer to the Essay Visualisation Plan in the ***Student Learning Resources*** section of the website to visualise the structure (p. 4 of this document).

Filling in the blank page

1. **Force a thesis statement.**

   • The thesis statement is your principal argument. Though your introduction will be written last, you should create a suitable thesis statement to work around. This means that your essay will have a direction and sense of argument.

2. **Give your topic sections temporary subheadings.**

   • Temporary subheadings maintain that sense of argument introduced in your thesis statement. There may be several paragraphs in one topic section. Think of each topic section as a main point that, in conjunction with other topic sections, answers your thesis statement. The paragraphs within these sections are sub-points that answer the temporary subheading.

3. **Start filling in topic sections.**

   • The blank page is terrifying. Beat it by putting keywords, sentences, and relevant sources under your topic sections. It might look a little messy at first, but it means that you can worry about constructing sentences *after* your main points are down.

4. **Fill in your own knowledge gaps.**

   • At this stage, you will begin to notice gaps in your own knowledge. Make a separate note of what you are missing. You should then create a new document for the sources that you wish to use and write out the bibliographical information. Call this document your **Working Bibliography.**

5. Focus on the bibliography.

- Use active reading strategies to draw out the principal points that you need from other sources. Refer back to your thesis statement to make sure that you are reading these sources critically, not just passively.

- Once you have enough sources to back up your argument, look again at your topic sections and input the new data.

6. Fill in conclusion.

- Use bullet points to put in your main findings in the conclusion section. These findings should be a clear summary of each of the main topic sections of your essay. When you write your first draft, make sure you relate these findings to your updated thesis statement.

As you can see, the series of steps requires you to go back and forth between different sections and tasks. By carefully keeping notes and maintaining a structure and clear plan, you will make your writing process a lot easier.

Save and open a new document

Congratulations! You have a pre-first draft plan that you can refer back to. Save this document as "pre-draft plan," then re-save it as "first draft." Work off the first draft from now on.

For more information on this topic or to book a learning support session, email learningsupport@iadt.ie

Essay Layout Template

TITLE

KEYWORDS

INTRODUCTION

- AIM 1

- AIM 2

- AIM 3

SECTION I (PROVISIONAL TITLE + points)

SECTION II
(PROVISIONAL TITLE +
points)

SECTION III
(PROVISIONAL TITLE +
points)

CONCLUSION