
Notes-to-Draft Framework

Complete this before you begin the draft — not as an outline, but as a thinking tool. The draft begins when the argument is visible.

1 — THE SUBJECT

What is this piece about? Plain language, no angle yet.

2 — THE INITIAL RESPONSE

What do you already think about this subject? Write quickly and without self-editing. This is not the argument — it is the material the argument will be made from.

3 — THE COMPLICATIONS

This is where the useful thinking happens. Answer each question briefly.

What is harder about this subject than it first appears?

What does the obvious answer miss?

What would a strong objection to your initial response be?

Is it strong enough to require addressing in the piece?

4 — THE GAPS

What you do not know matters as much as what you do. Note gaps before drafting — not after.

Where is the research or thinking incomplete?

Where will the piece have to acknowledge uncertainty rather than assert confidence?

5 — THE ANGLE

Which direction will the piece take? State the central claim in one sentence. If you cannot, the thinking is not yet done.

6 — READY TO DRAFT?

Three checks before moving to the draft.

- The central argument is visible — I can state it in one sentence.
- The main complications have been surfaced — I know where the piece will be difficult.
- The gaps are identified — I know what I do not yet know.

If any of these is not true, return to the relevant section above.
