Reflection Essay: A Walk Through an Academic Journey

ePortfolio Project

Courtney Swink

IDS493 Electronic Portfolio Project, Old Dominion University

Dr. Gordan-Phan

December 9, 2025

# Abstract

This abstract provides a summary of the accompanying ePortfolio, which chronicles the academic and professional development of Courtney Swink, a graduating senior from Old Dominion University with a Bachelor of Science in Cybersecurity and a minor in Criminal Justice. The ePortfolio is presented as a digital narrative highlighting the culmination of a transformative college journey, highlighting the growth and mastery of key competencies: Critical Thinking, Communication, and Technical Skills. The collection curates' significant artifacts-including essays, presentations, projects, and a personal narrative-selected from various courses and experiences to demonstrate the application of complex principles in real-world situations.

## Reflection Essay: A Walk Through My Academic Journey

Welcome to my ePortfolio. My name is Courtney Swink, and I am a graduating senior at Old Dominion University majoring in Cybersecurity with a minor in Criminal Justice. My college journey has been a transformative experience, challenging my assumptions and deepening my knowledge. This collection serves as a comprehensive and digital narrative of growth in my academic and professional development throughout my college career. This site is a curated exhibit of the papers, projects, and experiences that highlights my proficiency in Critical Thinking, Communication, and Technical Skills.

## Portfolio Creation

The process of creating an ePortfolio is a multi-step process that goes beyond creating an online resume; it allows for the collection of works and content from courses, disciplines, and life experiences to be turned into a narrative of growth, learning, and meaning. The final process of the ePortfolio process, formatting the site and layout I was somewhat comfortable with, as I had previously taken a class that introduced the idea of ePortfolio. After exploring many of the themes, I decided on one I already liked. It was simple so as not to distract from the purpose of the project, and I felt it had a straightforward, user-friendly layout. It starts with the welcome tab, followed by the three tabs labeling each of the skills and relevant artifacts that support these skills. The next tab is the IDS493 tab, which features the writings of this class, including job ad analysis, midterm criminology essay, and reflection essay. The final two tabs offer my resume and the best way to contact me. Despite having some familiarity with the idea of the project it was the start of the ePortfolio process that was quite difficult for me, as I did not feel I had enough relative artifacts. As I migrated through electronic and paper files sorting through my completed works, it prompted memories of assignments and materials I had forgotten about.

REFLECTION ESSAY

After a lot of debate, I decided on a variety of works to present as artifacts that emphasize the Critical Thinking, Communication, and Technical Skills for my ePortfolio.

## Presentation of Artifacts

Sticking with the intent of easy maneuverability and logical order, my Welcome page is the first thing you see when accessing my site. It includes a picture with a brief introduction, followed by the first artifact, a personal narrative essay. "My Story" focuses on the series of events that not only shaped my life profoundly but also led me to begin my college journey after being in an industry for decades. Not only does this help the reader understand my back story, but it also gives insight into how "soft skills cannot be overstated when it comes to leading successful security teams and defending against cyberattacks." (University, 2022)

## Critical Thinking Skills

### Artifact 1

The first artifact is an essay where the requirement was to write a compare and contrast essay on how clinical and forensic psychology play such different roles in the same discipline. It demonstrates critical thinking through the analysis and interpretation of this complex topic by breaking down the fundamental differences between the two. I chose this assignment because the structure of the essay is done through direct comparison and contrast, usually associated with a high-level critical thinking skillset.

### Artifact 2

The second artifact is an essay where the assignment was to write about a career that relates to cybersecurity and the social sciences. I chose this artifact because it demonstrates critical thinking by applying abstract social science and ethical principles to a real-world technical field of a digital evidence and data recovery by a digital forensic investigator. This is

important in relation to digital forensics, because "interdisciplinary studies can spark innovation by combining ideas and methods from different fields, removing traditional disciplinary boundaries allowing for new insights and solutions," combining both my major and minor areas of study. (*What Is an Interdisciplinary Studies Degree?*, 2023)

**Artifact 3**

The last artifact for critical thinking is an essay where we had to write about an industry's cybersecurity strategy and policy. Through critical analysis of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), I point out the shortcomings and limitations of the policy, and explore the various facets of social, ethical, and political implications, as it relates to digital policies and how effective they are in protecting sensitive health information. Because "healthcare organizations store large amounts of high-value data and are often easy to attack, it makes them an attractive target for hackers." (Alder, 2022)

**Communication Skills**

**Artifact 1**

The first artifact that demonstrates communication is a paper where the requirement was to write about an entrepreneur in the field of cybersecurity. The paper on Catherine Hoke demonstrates communication skills through clear and organized structure of the essay, by keeping an objective tone, and using descriptives and concise language. I was able to present the narrative, who is both criticized for her leadership issues and revered for her entrepreneurial mindset and innovation in cybersecurity, by reporting all relevant information. Since "61% of small businesses reported at least one successful cyberattack in 2025," the entrepreneurship in cybersecurity class was detrimental for people who may want to integrate their cybersecurity skills in a new business venture. (Seitz, 2025)

**Artifact 2**

The second artifact is a presentation on Operation Security (OPSEC). By the structure of the complex security principles into a clear, logical sequence, it makes it easy for the viewer to understand and follow. This is done by translating technical information into understandable terms that an audience can relate to. The use of visuals such as diagrams and examples are used to illustrate the systematic process for protecting sensitive information that is imperative in the field of cybersecurity.

**Artifact 3**

The last artifact demonstrating communication is a blog entry where the assignment was to write about a specific cyber-attack or exploit and explain how it is done. With the Change Healthcare ransomware attack, I was able to provide context through statistics on the human impact of the breach and the relationship between the attacks and the financial consequences. This is important in the cybersecurity aspect, since "roughly 7 in 10 global cyberattacks were ransomware, with the healthcare industry facing the highest rate of ransomware attacks in 2024." (Fortinet, n.d.)I had never written a blog at this point, and did not know what to expect, although once I was done, I realized that the blog was just a long version of discussion topics done in almost every course taken.

<div align="center">

**Technical Skills**

</div>

**Artifact 1**

The first artifact I have included in regard to technical skills is the final map which demonstrates police allocation for schools in relation to crime statistics in the areas surrounding schools and significant change in youth population in Norfolk, Virginia. Crime mapping involves collecting, creating, and examining demographics and applying these parameters to geographic

information systems (GIS) in order to interpret and visualize social science and crime data. This was different than any other courses I have taken, and although it was difficult at times, I am glad I was able to learn this technical skill.

**Artifact 2**

The second artifact reflecting technical skills is a project sheet showing the completion of an end of module project for Excel. This report indicates that the project involving data formatting, workbook and worksheet management, cell formatting and styling, number formatting, and usability enhancements was completed, indicating the proficiency in Excel spreadsheets. This is important based on these tools being widely used across most industries and businesses for efficiency, productivity, collaboration, and data management and analysis.

**Artifact 3**

The last artifact illustrating technical skills are the results from an open-source intelligence (OSINT) investigation which involved the practice of collecting and analyzing information from publicly available sources to gain valuable insights for cybersecurity, business, law enforcement, or national security. The information gained is crucial for threat detection, risk assessment, and help aid in informed decision-making in many fields, including cybersecurity.

**Conclusion**

The development of the ePortfolio has been a deeply insightful and transformative journey, extending far beyond a simple academic requirement. This digital exhibit stands as a testament to the profound and transformative experience of my college journey. Far more than a collection of assignments, this narrative documents a period of significant academic and personal growth, where assumptions were challenged and knowledge deepened. The artifacts presented

REFLECTION ESSAY

demonstrate my refined proficiency in Critical Thinking, Communication, and Technical Skills,

which have given me the confidence to navigate future endeavors and opportunities ahead.

REFLECTION ESSAY

# References

Alder, S. (2022, October 14). *Editorial: Why Do Criminals Target Medical Records*. HIPAA

Journal. https://www.hipaajournal.com/why-do-criminals-target-medical-records/

Fortinet. (n.d.). *50 Ransomware Statistics and Latest Ransomware Trends for 2023*. Fortinet.

https://www.fortinet.com/resources/cyberglossary/ransomware-statistics

Seitz, L. (2025, December 3). *50 Essential Cyber Security Facts For Business Owners*.

BroadbandSearch.net. https://www.broadbandsearch.net/blog/business-cyber-security-

facts-statistics

University, E.-C. (2022, June 7). *Why Soft Skills Are Key to Success in Cybersecurity*. EC-

Council University. https://www.eccu.edu/blog/cybersecurity/soft-skills-cybersecurity-

professionals/

*What is an Interdisciplinary Studies Degree?* (2023, July 6). Mount Wachusett Community

College. https://mwcc.edu/blog/what-is-an-interdisciplinary-studies-degree/