

My Journey So Far: Personal Narrative Essay

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IDS-493: Electronic Portfolio Project

September 13, 2025

Abstract

My name is Aiden Payne and I am currently a junior at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. I am enrolled in the undergraduate program for a Bachelors of Science in cybersecurity. Over the course of this paper I hope to share how my experiences have led me to choose cybersecurity as well as why I see myself as a good fit for the cybersecurity industry. I will talk about what I believe will allow me to achieve my dream of working in the cybersecurity field. I also hope to share what I have done to prepare myself for the industry and what I hope to accomplish to prepare myself for a career in cybersecurity.

My Journey So Far: Personal Narrative Essay

Before I dive deeper into where I am at in my career today I must show how I have arrived at this point in time. What has led me to make this career decision, what led me to fall in love with cybersecurity, and what life factors have played a key role in where I am at today. Cybersecurity was an idea that came up in recent years as ever since recently it has not been a very popular degree to get. In fact, I believe that most schools don't offer a cybersecurity major. I have known for a while ;however, that my future and my life were definitely going to be wrapped up in technology and networking ever since I was younger. I love how technology is ever-evolving and it stands at the pinnacle of what humankind has created. Technology has always seemed so beautifully complicated to me, I knew that I had to understand it. I made this career decision a few years ago when I was first thinking about college and what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing. I figured why not spend the rest of my life surrounded by the very thing I love. Seems like a no-brainer right? Actually no, Computer Science which was a more popular career path at the time didn't seem as interesting to me. I was more interested in other aspects of networking and technology rather than writing code. That's when I discovered cybersecurity. I remember first seeing it on Old Dominion's website and doing some research on exactly what "cybersecurity" was. The broadness of cybersecurity and the depth to which it goes sparked an interest inside of me. There are so many layers of cybersecurity. Networking, Criminology, Penetration testing, and many others. So many branches that I would never get bored. The flexibility and perplexity of cybersecurity is why I love it. So join me as I share key life events that have brought me to where I am and where I want to go.

Prelude

With such an interesting career decision people always ask me how I arrived at the decision of cybersecurity. It's not just as simple as "it pays well" or "job security". For me this has been a lifelong interest that has led me to where I am today. So let us start at the beginning. I have loved technology ever since I was around 5 years old, when my dad bought me my first gaming console which was the original Xbox. I loved playing video games and technology really sparked something inside of me. As I grew up I would always watch videos on the latest technologies and what every little detail meant. When I reached the age of 16, I was determined to get my first personal computer. I worked hard for an entire summer making seven dollars and twenty five cents an hour to be able to finally purchase the parts necessary to build my own PC. Once I bought all of my parts I took on the daunting task of building my PC. I believe because of my determination and my love for technology I made it happen. I believe that this one summer taught me so much at such a young age and laid out the foundation of the person I wanted to become. The discipline of saving my money, the attitude I had when I showed up to work everyday, and my competitive nature all contributed to helping me achieve a large goal. Throughout recent years I have challenged myself to learn more about cybersecurity by understanding the fundamentals. Through homelabs, projects, and collaborating with friends in the industry I have laid the foundation of my career in cyber. My most recent project was the creation of a NAS system. Troubleshooting and collaboration during these projects have brought me invaluable information and have taught me the mindset I must have to be successful. These events in my past have taught me that being perspicacious and relentless will allow me to achieve any goal I put my mind to. Converting this mentality into a lifestyle has helped me immensely with all aspects of my cybersecurity career so far.

Mindset

The next stepping stone of my essay takes a closer look at the mentality I believe has gotten me to where I am today and how I have derived it. I believe that “success” starts when we align our mindset with our goals. In my life the accumulation of events and relationships has allowed me to craft my mindset in such a way that I am currently working with efficiency towards my long term goals. This brings me to my next takeaway from cybersecurity. Cybersecurity is more than a career path, it is more than a job. The idea of cybersecurity has forced me into a mentality that is fueled by efficiency and passion. Cybersecurity is such a fast paced field and it requires these characteristics of people in order to survive. Cybersecurity forces us to think outside of the box, to problem solve, it also forces us to constantly learn. In my short career in cyber so far I have derived these very important lessons and I believe that if I apply these characteristics to my life in every aspect I will be successful. The biggest contributing factor to this mindset is trial and error. My career and time spent in cybersecurity has been far from perfect. My optimal routines, schedules, studying, and homelabs have all been through trial and error. Failing and yet continuing has allowed me to understand that never giving up is my greatest strength. Trial and error alongside finding myself in cybersecurity has allowed my mindset to evolve into what it is today.

Evolution

As I close out my essay I want to talk about where I am in my career right as well as where I want to be. A very important idea that encapsulates evolution is how something changes over time. Evolution isn't only about surviving but also thriving. It's safe to say that

cybersecurity is an ever evolving field. New threats are thrown at us almost daily and we must quickly solve issues and create solutions in order to keep life as we know it afloat. This idea of evolution is what makes cybersecurity so interesting to me. Cybersecurity is not only a career but a lifestyle. It reminds us that we must always stay sharp and never remain complacent otherwise our adversaries might best us. We must constantly evolve in order to keep the IoT safe. The take-away that I have gathered from this is that I must evolve as well. I must learn as much as I can and I must do it in a timely manner. This brings me to where I am in my career as well as where I want to go. This Junior year I want to really hone in on what exact part of cybersecurity I want to be a part of. I have a basic understanding of networking and other cybersecurity practices. I am currently working on becoming Security + and Network + certified. These two certifications are helping me understand cybersecurity in a deeper meaning. As my knowledge for cybersecurity evolves I want to be able to apply it as well. I hope to get an internship this spring where I can apply my knowledge in real time. With an internship I also hope to be able to find my niche and see what exactly I might want to do. I believe that it is important to create short-term goals that assist a longer term goal. Having weekly benchmarks for my classes as well as certifications is going to allow me to evolve in a timely manner to hopefully allow me to achieve an internship in the spring. Evolution doesn't happen over night, me reaching this point in my career is only the beginning. I know that every event has led me to this point and will help shape who I become in the field of cybersecurity.

Conclusion

This Essay elucidates exactly how I view my journey with cybersecurity so far. It shows how I believe passion, hard-work, and purpose will allow us to achieve anything even if we see it as impossible. As I wrap this essay up I want to say how this journey has not been easy and there have been many hiccups along the way. But as I look forward to my future, the past helps me understand exactly what I must do to become who I want to be. I want to continue my career in cybersecurity and I want to help people along the way. Through hard work I have achieved everything up until now and I know that through these same principles I will achieve the future I want for myself. Cybersecurity is of the utmost importance in today's society. Everything we do is online and cybersecurity is the very thing protecting that norm. I hope that through my career I will be able to contribute to the cybersecurity field. As the field of cybersecurity is ever changing, I also will evolve to achieve my goals and protect others. And this isn't the end, I know that I have a lot more to learn, and I feel that because of who I am I will be ready for what's to come.