

**Reflective Essay**

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### Personal Narrative Essa

Today, I balance several roles that shape both who I am and how I approach my future. I am a husband, a father, a veteran, a full-time student, and a full-time employee, and each of these responsibilities has influenced my priorities and reinforced the importance of discipline, accountability, and long-term thinking. I am currently majoring in cybersecurity and will graduate in the Spring of 2026, and as I approach the end of my academic journey, my career goals have become more defined.

Long term, I want to work in security with a specialization in cybersecurity, with the broader goal of enhancing the safety of the general public. For me, cybersecurity represents a modern form of public service that protects people, organizations, and systems in an increasingly digital world. The values that matter most to me are integrity, stability, and fairness, especially in today's societal climate. Integrity ensures ethical decision-making, stability provides the foundation for long-term protection, and fairness reminds me that security decisions affect real people, not just technology.

Before college, I honestly did not know what I wanted to do. I was most interested in psychology and criminal justice, drawn to understanding how people think and the idea of justice and protection. While I enjoyed technology growing up as a 1990s kid, I never imagined myself being the one responsible for implementing or managing security systems. My interest in security came from personal experience, growing up in an environment where I did not always feel safe, which created a lasting urge to make things safer for myself and others as I matured.

When I first attempted college, I lacked the direction and understanding needed to choose a meaningful field of study, which ultimately led me to join the military. Serving in the United States Navy was a major turning point in my life. The environment was high-paced, loud, and demanding, yet structured and methodical, teaching me that hard times are temporary and that perseverance, honesty, and teamwork are essential to accomplishing difficult tasks. The Navy reinforced the importance of operating within clear standards, staying within the black and white, and relying on others to succeed. After completing my contract, I transitioned into the civilian workforce and began working for a government contractor in an IT role, where I gained experience in help desk support as well as aspects of information systems security engineering. It was during this time that my supervisor introduced me to cybersecurity concepts, and I quickly became hooked. I realized I enjoyed the work rather than feeling stressed by it, and I found myself reading about cybersecurity, listening to discussions, and watching lectures and talks on the subject in my free time. That genuine interest confirmed that cybersecurity was the right path for me.

When I returned to school, I chose Old Dominion University because it is military friendly, well respected in the area, and offers a wide variety of courses. My academic experience has been hectic but manageable, requiring discipline and strong time management skills to balance school, work, and family life. Courses such as Cyber Forensics opened my eyes to the depth of the field, especially learning about advanced data recovery methods I did not previously know were possible, and overall I have thoroughly enjoyed the technical coursework within the cybersecurity program. Interdisciplinary learning has changed how I approach problems by allowing me to

consider multiple perspectives rather than focusing on a single solution, which has been especially valuable in cybersecurity where technical, human, and ethical factors often intersect. One of the biggest challenges I have faced throughout this journey has been managing time and maintaining mental stability, particularly during periods when major assignments or exams overlap with important responsibilities at home or work. To cope with these challenges, I have learned to pause, breathe, talk things through with my wife, and occasionally take time off work to reset. These experiences have taught me that I am productive, persistent, and resilient, but also that I am human and must take care of myself to sustain long-term success.

Looking ahead five to ten years, I see myself running a business in the security space, possibly pursuing a master's degree, and reaching a place of personal peace and balance where professional success does not come at the expense of well-being or family. I also hope to create a foundation, program, or course that helps others learn about security and raises awareness for the general public. Ultimately, I hope readers understand that I am a hardworking individual guided by strong morals, committed to improving where I lack without sacrificing my integrity, my values, or myself.