

# Reflective Writing



*Batch XII*  
*Jan-Feb 2025*



Thinking Teacher

*Photographs: Courtesy Anjali Krishna*



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## MY JOURNEY SO FAR AS A TEACHER

**Kshitija Gupta**

I was a student when I first decided to become a teacher. Straight out of college, a naive 24-year-old started her first job, as a Math and Science teacher. Since the beginning, I have always looked very young for my age. It was oddly difficult for people to comprehend why I had chosen this field in the first place. The first two years of my career went by in taking online classes during the Covid period. When the day came to finally step into an actual classroom, I was very nervous.

My apprehensions did come true. I faced several challenges in the classroom. While it was still within my capacity to handle 8-9-year-olds, I had a hard time tackling teenagers. *How will they learn, if I'm having a hard time making them listen to me*, I wondered all the time.

*Be strict, they would say! You are not their friend! They need to fear you! You need to be louder in the classroom!* All these directives came screaming at me from everywhere. Justifying the term 'naïve' at the beginning of this story, I ended up believing them on some level. Surprisingly, I was one of those teachers who students could talk to freely, and confide in, but it didn't seem to matter back then. So, I set out with an agenda: I wanted to learn the knacks and tactics of every teacher that students feared and apply them in my class. Little did I know that I was so wrong!

There comes a point in everyone's life when you realize that there is a difference between 'hearing' and 'listening' to what people around are telling you.

Rigid rules only diminish the spirit of learning. While this may work for some teachers, it sure does not work in a science class, where learning requires trust and freedom for both the teacher and students.

If a student must learn, (s)he need not fear a teacher, (s)he needs to feel the care and love of the teacher!

If a student must learn, (s)he needs to awaken the curious inquirer that's hiding within.

If a student must learn, (s)he needs to be nurtured by the teacher.

And this is what I should have done in the first place!

I sometimes wish I had found a mentor who could have guided me when I digressed from my path. Nevertheless, our mistakes are our biggest teachers.

I didn't need students to listen to me, I just needed to create an atmosphere where *learning was self-driven*. Where students were challenged every day, had fun and explored something new almost every day! I understood that no number of stringent rules could help me if students did not have an internal urge to learn from me. Fast-forwarding to my classroom, I'm not saying that students learn 100 per cent or have fun all the time now.

But it's safe to say that I'm mindful of what goes well and what needs to be improved in my classroom. I understand the cues when students are learning and when something is not working out for them. I try to teach or preach less and ensure students have the freedom to take charge of their learning. This is sometimes a risk, knowing that they need to face an examination in a few months, but it's what makes my students (and me) happy.

Circling back to the chapter on repetitive correction from John Holt's book HOW SCHOOLS FAIL, I felt nostalgic while reading it. At the start of my career, I tried to do a lot of things that other teachers were doing, not realizing that no strategy fits all classrooms. Five years down the line, I have learnt that students will not always learn in my classroom. But it's important that they always feel confident and independent. Learning will find its course.

Also, I sometimes still struggle to create a fine boundary between being a friend and being friendly with the kids, but I hope to always be their 'go-to teacher' when they need a listening ear!



*I visualise Reflective Writing to be like standing in front of a mirror tracing the outlines of my reflection, subtle details like the contours of my face, the sparkle in my eyes, or the curve of my smile ... then explore the nuances of my thoughts, emotions and actions whether of love or loss, but with the strength to begin again.*

*Rajneesh Lama*

*Reflective Writing is a practice that allows me to quiet my mind, carefully analyse my thoughts, and achieve a more profound understanding of myself. Through this process, I can make sense of my experiences and emotions, gaining clarity and insight along the way.*

*Sneha Wadhwa*



### **Letter to an Aspiring Teacher By SNEHA WADHWA**

Dear Aspiring Teacher,

Becoming a teacher is more than just a profession; it is a calling, a journey, and a privilege that will shape not only the future of your students but also the future of society.

You are stepping into a role that is challenging, demanding, and, at times, exhausting—but it is also a role that holds immense power to influence the nation, one child at a time.

Teaching is not for the faint of heart; it's a noble labour of love. And to survive the rough patches, you must always believe in your purpose.

As you begin this journey, remember that purpose should always take precedence over process. The structure of your classroom, the lesson plans, and the tests—all of that will follow, but the heart of teaching is about people.

There will be a natural divide between you and your students, as there must be for the sake of discipline and respect. But don't forget that your true mission is to bridge that gap when necessary. Sometimes, you'll have to reach out, to pull that child closer, and to show them that they are seen, valued, and heard. The ability to connect with them—truly connect—is what will make all the difference.

Your classroom will be a microcosm of the world—diverse, chaotic, beautiful, and challenging. Some students will race ahead, others will need a little extra time, and some will be completely off the radar, floating in their own world. You won't always get the chance to speak to every child individually, but that doesn't mean you can't get to know them.

Watch them in the hallways, in the playground, and at lunch. Pay attention to who they talk to, who they avoid, what they laugh about, and what makes them quiet. These seemingly small observations will give you the clues you need to understand what's happening beneath the surface.

It's only when you truly see them that you can reach them.

The logistics of teaching can feel like trying to keep a dozen plates spinning at once. You'll teach multiple classes, often with over 40 students in each, and while you may have grand plans to nurture each child, reality will impose its own constraints. With an average of 240 students a year, your time will be stretched thin. But to sustain your passion, you must feed it. Passion isn't something you can simply turn on like a switch; it's a spark that must be tended, nurtured, and occasionally stoked with fresh knowledge and new experiences.

If you allow yourself to burn out—if you forget to keep learning, reading, and reflecting—you'll find it harder to inspire that same fire in your students.

It's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of tasks — like grading, meetings, the lesson plans. The weight of the work can sometimes make you feel like you're running in one place, and when that enthusiasm fades, it can be hard to rekindle. But remember: a teacher who stops learning becomes a hollow shell, and students will sense that.

Your classroom should be a place where curiosity is contagious, where the energy that you bring is matched by the thirst for knowledge that you inspire in others.

Over the years, you will wear many hats: teacher, mentor, counselor, even surrogate parent. Your students will bring their emotional baggage with them, and it will often feel heavy. You may not have the answers to all their struggles, but you can always provide a steady hand, a listening ear, and the space to grow. And as the years pass, the repetition of teaching the same subjects might feel like you're painting the same picture over and over again. But trust that in those strokes, you are still creating something important. Don't mistake repetition for monotony. Every year, you will shape a new group of minds, and while the content may stay the same, the journey will always be unique.

The rewards of teaching often do not come in the form of accolades or financial compensation. Rather, they come in the quiet moments: the spark of understanding in a student's eyes, the gradual shift in attitude, the growth you see in their lives both academically and emotionally. These small, everyday victories are the true measure of success. It's a long, sometimes winding road, but the view from the top—when you see your students thriving—is worth every step.

Teaching is not a solitary endeavor. To sustain yourself and remain effective, you will need a community. This is not a job to do alone. Your peers, your colleagues, your support system—these people will be your lifeline. They will offer different perspectives, help shoulder the emotional weight, and remind you why you chose this path.

And outside of work, ensure that you have something—some hobby, some passion—that feeds your soul.

Whether it's painting, hiking, reading, or simply being with loved ones, make space for something that brings you joy and recharges your spirit. When the weight of the classroom starts to feel too heavy, you'll need these moments to restore yourself.

And remember: don't rush the process. Change takes time, and the real impact you make in your students' lives may not be immediately visible. Be patient. It's easy to want quick results, but some of the most important lessons are the ones that take root slowly, over time. Trust the process and know that your efforts are always making a difference, even when it feels like the fruits of your labour haven't ripened yet.

In this journey, take care of yourself. Stay curious. Keep reading. Build your community. Remember why you started, and allow that purpose to guide you through the inevitable challenges. Because in the end, this profession is not measured by the number of lessons you teach, but by the number of hearts you touch.

Welcome aboard, teacher! The road ahead may be long and at times, challenging, but it is the most meaningful road that you will ever walk.

Best wishes from  
A resilient teacher,  
Sneha Wadhwa

*Reflective writing helped me to go within. I realised my attitude and actions in response to something are more important than the situation itself."*

*Neha Agarwal*



## **A LETTER FROM A GRANDMOTHER.**

**N MADHURI ANAND**

Date: 11th February, 2025

Dear grandchild (yet to be born),

When you are old enough, your mother will be reading this letter from me to you. Come, let's go down memory lane when I was imparted enriching life lessons. Watching the empty alleyway in front of my house as I pen this letter, I am reminded of a dreadful year - 2020, when the entire world's lanes and roads were deserted; and mankind was rendered helpless by an invincible virus—Covid 19!



Humanity encountered a new challenge - Worldwide Lockdown!

It was March 14th, 2020. At that time, I was serving as a teacher at Rajghat Besant School in Varanasi. Lockdown was to be implemented soon, nationwide. A slew of emails followed, and the school decided to send students home the very next day. As they left the campus, my colleagues and I got busy confronting our next challenge - online mode of teaching! Summer months whizzed by, full of several brainstorming sessions. The admin and IT team had their hands full, arranging and upgrading the school's internet facilities.

Another concern was your mother's education at a residential school in Pune. How was she to be brought home to Varanasi? Public transport would soon close, but somehow she managed to reach us. She was midway through her class 10 Board Exam and the rest of the examinations were postponed by 2 or 3 months.

But the lockdown seemed indefinite.....

Though the RBS campus was relatively a safe place, it was agonizing to see the classrooms, hostels, dining hall, and sports field empty. It wasn't unfamiliar to see these spaces vacant when children left for vacation but somehow, this time, it was different.

I entered the library one day, and was so overwhelmed by its silence and solitude that I penned a poem.

Here it is:

*The classes are empty again!  
I long awaited their return,  
To be part of their giggles, gossip and tiffs.  
I yearned to speak and share,  
And show them my concern and care  
The warmth just got us together.  
(Not because of the cold weather.. Ha ha..).*

*The blooms seemed to come alive,  
The greenery was lush.  
The mornings with rush and hurry,  
Evenings filled with rhythm yet scurry.  
The children would gather around,  
Chanting the 'Di' 'Di' sound.*

*Approach me with their requests,  
Some try to impress their best.  
I miss their faces brightening at my sight,  
Spark in their eyes, and spring in their gait.*

*I could see their eyes moist behind their smiles.  
'Oh! Come on it is only for a while'  
(I heard them say).  
Not just for others but also for the self-  
this consolation.*

*Hmm! The classes are empty again!*

Social distancing, wearing masks, quarantine and online mode of teaching-learning was the new normal. The world was soon turning virtual. My students and my own children desperately missed their peers. As I interacted with my students online, I yearned for their bubbly personal presence.

Many shared how difficult it was for them to be confined to their homes and how they longed for the open school grounds; several were in agony as some of their family members were afflicted by the virus and a cure was missing. As a helpless teacher available to them only online - listening or consoling was the only way out. The screen of my computer was their sole window to their world. The lockdown taught us to be more self-reliant, cooperate and reach out to others in the school community and empathize with them. Teachers on campus would meet online for staff meetings, class reviews, assemblies or organising activities - to meaningfully engage the students who were now far away from us.

Despite following the standard protocols of safety, the fear of uncertainty persisted. Many would never step out of their homes, almost everyone juggled household chores with online teaching, with no domestic help at hand. Our campus was full of various animals- stray dogs, peacocks, nilgais, jackals and birds. Somehow as the human activity stopped, the jungle within the campus came alive. Unfamiliar birds were spotted. Swarms of fireflies fluttered when the night fell. It was a ghastly sight to witness stray dogs hunting the nilgais, but one cannot intervene with what is natural. On the other side of the Ganges, funeral pyres were incessantly burning. Frailties of life began to unfold and I realized the supremacy of Nature.

One invisible virus had derailed humanity and robbed it of its rhythm. Mother Earth had pressed the reset button, to break the chain of activities by self-possessed humans who were asphyxiating Her. Your grandfather left for Hyderabad around August 2020, to be with his parents who contracted the malicious virus. It seemed as if the world would never normalize.

Now that the harrowing phase of the pandemic has passed, its long-lasting effects are still looming. I must admit, that it is a challenge to dispel the stupor of the gadgets that entrap children. As a teacher and a mother, I learnt how to use a computer fairly well and navigate the zone of the internet. I learned to partake moments of joy that the classroom offers instead of fretting. I found my calling in the library and the library activities with the children when the opportunity opened up, during the pandemic.

I conclude that whenever you'll be with me, I will read the pandemic stories for you - stories of myriad people and perspectives. After all, isn't life itself a chapter-filled book?

Yours lovingly,  
Grandmother Madhuri.



## Letter to a Teacher Rajneesh Lama

To my teacher,

I still recall the day you told me, "Rajneesh, you're a smart guy, but your biggest problem is you don't know how to say 'no'." Those words left an indelible mark on my psyche. At first, I took them as criticism, but over the years, they've unfurled into a profound exploration of the power, complexity, and duality of life.

The word 'no' is often seen as negative, a refusal or a barrier. Yet, it's paradoxically an affirmation. To say 'no' to one thing is to say 'yes' to another. Every 'no' that is uttered implicitly chooses a different path, defines priorities, and asserts boundaries. Perhaps the greatest power of 'no' lies not in shutting doors but in opening new ones.

However, wielding this power is not easy. Saying 'no' requires clarity – a deep understanding of one's values, desires, and limits. Clarity is rare, and we live in a world where ambiguity rules. Decisions thrive in the greys, making it difficult to discern right from wrong. Should one deny opportunities in favour of stability? Should one disappoint another to preserve the self? The weight of 'no' is borne from its duality; it is both liberating and limiting, constructive and destructive. And the paradox is undeniable: every 'no' to something is a 'yes' to something else. And yet, the 'yes' is seldom as clear as the 'no'.

I often wonder if your words were meant to warn me of my tendency to people-please or if they were a gentle nudge to embrace self-reflection. Whatever the intention, your statement planted a seed for a lifetime of questioning. Am I saying 'yes' for the right reasons, or is it fear of conflict or rejection? Am I too hesitant to say 'no' because I fear its finality?

Life is full of contradictions. We long for freedom, but we fear its cost. We crave belonging, but we resent the compromises it demands. To say 'no' is to invite ambiguity, to live with the knowledge that you

may never know if your choice was right. The weight of 'no' isn't in the act itself, but in the questions it leaves behind. Maybe you meant that there's a mirror in every 'no'. In it, we glimpse ourselves – our insecurities, hopes, and contradictions. To reflect on a 'no' is to reflect on one's life, to confront the things we don't want to face.

As I stand today, I still grapple with your words. Perhaps the perfectionist in me longs to understand 'no' as a formula, a technique to be mastered. But the answer, if there is one, might lie in embracing the ambiguity. Life is a balance of contradictions. The complexity of 'no' is a reflection of the complexity of existence itself.

Every 'no' shapes your path, narrowing your choices but sharpening your identity. So, I conclude where I began: in uncertainty. And that may be the most honest conclusion of all. Perhaps the perfect meaning of 'no' is that we will never fully know. Its power lies not in its resolution but in its ability to challenge us, to force us into self-reflection, and to remind us of the intricate, messy duality of being human.

To say 'no' is to make peace with uncertainty, to step into the unknown with courage, and to trust that clarity comes not from the absence of doubt but from the willingness to face it. And yet, it lingers just an inch beyond our grasp – close enough to touch but forever out of reach.

Still, I never surrender to the distance. Perhaps that's the beauty of it: the chase reminds me I am alive, and in that longing, I discover pieces of me I never knew were missing.

So, thank you Mr. Shastri, for this delicate uncertainty, this endless tip-toe that keeps me alive with possibility.

Yours sincerely,  
Rajneesh.

*Reflective writing is like sitting with my alter-ego near a lake, under a tree, at dusk or dawn - reminding my alter-ego of his north star.*

*Aman Arora*



## Letter to a friend about the RW course      MADHU MANJU

Hey Tannu,

Hope you're doing great!

I couldn't wait to write a letter to you to share my experience with the course I am attending "Reflective Writing for Teachers" as it's been such a game-changer.

At first, I wasn't sure what to expect. The term reflective writing didn't seem like a big deal—I mean, we naturally reflect on our day through thinking, but not necessarily by writing down our reflections or sharing our thoughts. However, when the management reached out and recommended this course, I knew it had to be something valuable. So, I decided to give it a shot.

It was an online session, and on the very first day, Neeraja Akka—our course mentor—made quite an entrance. She came in with the presence of a fierce storm—strong, commanding, setting clear expectations, and making it clear that late submissions or latecomers would not be encouraged and impossible to ignore. I remember thinking, Why on earth would a trainer start off this way? It felt like I was back in school, facing a strict teacher.

After that session, I couldn't help but wonder if I'd even be able to speak up in her class. But I reminded myself that my focus was on learning, so I decided to wait and see what this journey had in store for me.

You know what? I actually enjoyed being a student again—waiting for my teacher's corrections and acknowledgments. We've had about eight sessions so far, and after each one, Neeraja Akka would assign us work with strict deadlines. Just like a student, after my submission, I would eagerly wait for her feedback. And the moment she wrote "Lovely! Please read this in the next class," I felt like a proper student again, realizing that the learner in me is still very much alive.

I have to say, Neeraja Akka has incredible patience—reading everything we write and giving such precise feedback. Every session was deeply reflective, making us rethink our perspectives and step

into others' shoes without even realizing the transition. It always amazed me how we could challenge our own thinking while staying true to our emotions and beliefs.

She shared powerful videos that truly helped us visualize how reflection can transform our lives. You know how much of a visual learner I am—so whenever she asked, "Did you read this article or book?" I would stay silent because, well, I'm not much of a reader. But I took it as a challenge and started going through the extra reading materials she shared.

With around ten participants from different backgrounds and mindsets, every time someone read their assignment, I was amazed. Hearing deeper thoughts and perspectives from others was an extraordinary experience. We reflected, appreciated each other's work, and sometimes even debated. What stood out was how Neeraja Akka openly shared her real-life experiences, making it clear that it's okay to be vulnerable. She talked with such passion, that it created a space where we felt comfortable sharing our own stories too, and that, to me, was truly special.

On the first day, I had a single story in my mind about Neeraja Akka—strict, no-nonsense, and completely unapproachable. But as the sessions progressed, I realized that, just like a fierce storm that starts with intensity but eventually settles into a refreshing breeze, she had a nurturing side too. She gradually eased up, acknowledging our struggles and considering our delays and excuses with the patience of an empathetic teacher. Her firm approach never wavered, but it was always balanced with understanding and encouragement. What started as an intimidating presence soon became a guiding force, making the learning experience both challenging and deeply rewarding.

I've gained so much from this experience—not just knowledge, but also a deeper understanding of myself. The best part? It was never dull! Every session was engaging, and for once, learning actually felt exciting, which, let's be honest, isn't always the case.

And, along the way, I've met some incredible people who made the journey even more special.

I have to thank Neeraja Akka for bringing out the best in me and to all the participants who supported and listened to me.

Can't wait to catch up soon and share more in person. After all, for us, it's never just chit-chat—it's about chai and real conversations.

Our chai awaits 😊

Yours Lovingly,

Mannu (Manju)



*Reflecting writing to me is slowing down and peeking into the moments that I've missed. It sometimes feels like an easing cup of coffee. And other times, it's an 'uncomfort' zone making me confront my fears and inhibitions.*

*Kshitija Gupta*

## **LETTER TO AN ASPIRING TEACHER AMAN ARORA**

Dear Ansh,

I heard from a mutual acquaintance that you're planning to leave your job and become a teacher. It's a great step, great in every sense of the word. I hope you've thought it through because there's nothing more challenging in this world than teaching or parenting.

I know you're curious and spontaneous and love to explore new paths. But teaching is an art, like parenting, that you must master before embarking on the journey. And since it cannot be mastered beforehand, try to undergo a fair bit of training before teaching. (surgery). This is similar to a doctor undergoing years and years of study and then working as an apprentice.



I implore you not to take this profession lightly or spontaneously. Only if you're more than 100% sure, consider this subtle art of teaching.

I also know that you think you're selfish and you are taking up teaching as a means to better yourself. But I hope you're aware that there are innocent and promising lives at stake that could shape the world's future.

I am also aware that you tried 'teaching' (not conventionally) your colleagues, friends, and family to change their world-view, but failed. Then you thought of teaching impressionable children like some fresh clay that you can mould in a noble way. But how will you be sure your 'ways' are noble and beneficial? Do you have any relevant experience or expertise?

I know you are of the opinion that anything can be learned from books and watching some videos online. But don't you think you should have temporary hands-on experience before deciding you can be a good teacher, like working as an apprentice under a 'master-cum-teacher'? That would help you – maybe even assure you that teaching is for you, or whether your thirst for knowledge and wisdom can be quenched elsewhere in a better manner.

But I don't want to discourage you by asking so many questions. If you are getting this call strong and long, go for it! Don't second-guess your intuition or sixth sense. Trust your gut sometimes, especially if it's been behaving a certain way for a long time.

In the end, I will leave you with just one question:

Most beautiful things and activities in life are best done for their own sake, not for any purpose no matter how 'noble' the purpose is, because as soon as the mind interferes in your sacred playfulness with a reason, it gets corrupted. Similarly, consider whether you wish to teach just for the sake of it, the joy of it, or to 'get' something or somewhere in life?

Or it could be both, one primary and the other, a secondary reason.

You'll know if you should become a teacher when you get the answer to the above question from beyond!

Even if you don't get the answer don't get disheartened, know that you can contribute to the development of a soul from anywhere in the world.

Your friend,

Aman



*Reflective writing is a path to self-awareness, much like the first light of dawn—awakening the soul to deeper understanding. It nurtures curiosity and self-worth, forging meaningful connections between our inner world and the truths that we seek.*

*Madhu Manju*

## **LETTER TO A TEACHER SHIVANI GIRI**

Dear Ms. Wattal,

It has been a long time since I have thought about my distant past. I have a tendency to block out things – good or bad – as cluttering my memory and not needing to be there in my chaotic, cluttered and compartmentalised mind. As I pry into the deep recesses of my mind today about the teacher that influenced me most, I can remember quite a few negative influencers but when has that ever stopped me! I choose to focus on a teacher that has influenced me in ways that I recognise today as indelible; and that teacher is YOU. I dress like you, act like you and teach like you. Funny, now that I think about it, you are the positive influence that has shaped me into the person that I am today. An independent, self-assured, confident and strong woman and I thank you for being there as this female Goddess that we all looked up to and worshipped.

My most favourite play in the world is 'Macbeth' by William Shakespeare that you taught us, the Literature batch of First Year honours students. I have consistently chosen to teach it in my IB classes and sometimes had to choose to teach it only in my class, going against the other teacher's choices solely because it is imprinted in my consciousness like a brand. You made the classes come alive when you said in a booming, cackling witch's voice,

*"When shall we three meet again  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?  
When the hurly-burly's done,  
When the battle's lost and won."*

The hair on my arms would rise, and eagerly, wide-eyed, I would look at you and wonder if I could ever replicate this rendition of Macbeth. Lady Macbeth seemed like a vamp because you made her so, Macbeth became the tragic hero we loved because you brought the stars in our eyes while creating his character, Banquo's death made us weep as you made him seem like unsuspecting collateral damage in the tragic plot.

Bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, I hung onto every word that you uttered, dreaming of a day when I could be like you.

Any amount of information that I could gather about you was inadequate. I found out that you were the daughter of a Naval Captain who went down with his submarine in the Indo Pak war. My glee (ironically) - as my father was also a naval officer - made me feel closer to you than ever. I found out that you married an Army officer at a young age and lo and presto, I married an Air Force officer many years later.

Your education included a Theatre course in London School of Drama, which explains the drama that you created in class. However, that is something I could not do, regrettably. I wanted to be you, look like you, talk like you and teach like you. Your heavy silk saris, big red bindi and flawless skin that shone like a beacon of light in the classroom.

I managed the first two but I guess the last one is genetic.

Your sarcasm and wit attracted me even more. I remember you telling me as I walked into the class, dishevelled, in denim shorts and a disreputable shirt, "Shivani, did you even brush your teeth before coming to school?" This did not make me feel bad: I was preening as I had finally got your attention!

Ma'am, I am where I am today because of you. The only class that I had almost 100% attendance in was yours. You made the class come alive, short stories by Dalit female Indian authors, R.K. Narayan, Edgar Allan Poe, Ismat Chughtai - these authors shaped my mind with your teaching and guidance. Literary theory was not a chore, it was a pleasure with your nuances and anecdotes.

Many years later, as I attended an online session on NEP chaired by you, I was so excited to see you online - as the Principal of a highly prestigious school in Delhi. I wish I could reach out to you and show you what I have become. Without your knowledge, you crept into my subconscious, making me the woman and teacher that I am today.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for being YOU. I wish I could tell you all this face to face, as this letter does not convey the gratitude that I have for a teacher who made me who I am.

I wish you all the best and hope to meet you sometime.

Yours sincerely,  
Shivani Giri  
(erstwhile Batch of 1995, St Francis College,  
Hyderabad)

*There are many unanswered life-questions that are left unperturbed. Reflective writing caused a flutter and provoked me to unravel the truths deep within.*

**N Madhuri Anand**



## LETTER TO A FRIEND      NEHA AGARWAL

Dear Shalini Di,

I did a course on reflective writing. I joined the two month course thinking I will learn to write and express topics of my subjects in different ways.

Don't we always have students in our class who understand the same topics in different ways and with different perspectives? So I was sure that I would learn to reach out to different students in various ways after the course.

What I didn't know was that my teacher had other plans!

When we started, our first assignment was about writing a report for a student. I thought: "It's a good assignment, because only after I know how to assess my students can I learn to teach them in different ways."

Our second assignment was on perspective. I was happy! I thought: "Okay, it is nice to reflect upon perspectives, because that is an important element for a teacher." Though I did not learn about my perspective *as a teacher*, I did learn how I generally perceived things in life.

By the time we came to the third assignment, I was pleased that we were now dealing with actual difficulties that a teacher faces. But, as I was relating to an experience shared by John Holt in his book, 'How Schools Fail', I found that I could only connect to it as a student and not as a teacher! Not surprisingly, by the end of this assignment, I was sure that I was still a student who is working as a teacher - only to become a better student.

Lo and behold, our fourth assignment was to write a letter to a teacher who impacted us the most! Now THAT opened up a Pandora's Box for me. We did assignments on conflicts, relationships, educators, education and vulnerabilities of teachers, stages of writing and so much more.

Our teacher nudged us to reflect as a person, a student, a teacher, and as an individual who is more than all these roles that we play in our daily lives. She didn't teach, she just shared and let us be.

Almost nine years ago at the radio station, when we attended a talk by our favourite author and teacher, I asked him about my difficulty during meditation. He assured me nothing will happen and I need not fear.

You gave me the same assurance every time I needed it and you always said, "Just be". I didn't know how, and you said *don't worry, just be!* Well, I learnt how to 'Just Be' with my mentor in these last few months.

My inward journey towards my Home started years ago, now I am sure I am walking the right path. Teaching is my calling and being a student is my life. I am grateful to the Almighty for the fellow travellers and blessing this journey with His grace.

Love,  
*Neha*

*Reflective writing is a path to self-awareness, much like the first light of dawn—awakening the soul to deeper understanding. It nurtures curiosity and self-worth, forging meaningful connections between our inner world and the truths that we seek.*

***Madhu Manju***

*Reflective writing means expressing my feelings while listening to raindrops at night. It fosters sharing, openness, and empathy as I process the day's emotions.*

***Shivani Giri***



## LETTER TO A TEACHER

ANUSHA CHETTRI

Dear Sir,

I hope this letter finds you in good spirits.

I'm not sure if you remember me, but I was your student between 2006 and 2008. I realize that was 15 years ago, and I don't expect you to remember each of your students so well, especially someone who wasn't particularly popular or infamous in a way that would leave a lasting impression.

However, you remain in my memories, largely because of an incident that refuses to fade. It has secured a somewhat permanent place in the corners of my mind, resurfacing whenever conversations about teachers or my alma mater arise. And there you are- the teacher who turned a few of my school days into a living hell.

The reason? My friend was caught playing a game on my cell phone, which I had surreptitiously brought to school for just that one day. Call it bad luck, but all I remember is that I was fast asleep, dreaming about the soft marshmallows I was looking forward to at Christmas, while my friend pulled the phone out of my bag and started playing one of the few games Nokia phones offered back then- Bounce.

There she was, blissfully bouncing away during the free block you had announced for reasons I still don't know. But soon enough, I was jolted awake by her terrified voice, announcing the consequences of her actions. Apparently, you had confiscated the phone and left the room without saying much.

What followed was a brief argument between my friend and me, where I expressed my frustration at her for daring to use the phone in your presence without even informing me.

For the next few days, I was too scared to approach you to ask for the phone back. I wasn't sure how you would react or what consequences awaited me. After much deliberation, I finally mustered the courage to come to you and apologize for both my behaviour and my friend's. I needed my phone. I hadn't spoken to my parents in three days, and I could imagine my mother worried sick over my sudden silence.

I looked everywhere for you and eventually found you in the computer lab, teaching a class that wasn't mine. As soon as you saw me, you waved dismissively, gesturing for me to leave. But I had to speak with you, I was there to apologize.

When I didn't leave after your initial dismissal, you decided to shout at me and humiliate me in front of an entire class that wasn't even mine. You didn't give me a chance to explain my situation or defend myself.

To my utter disbelief, I learned you had gone through my phone over the past few days, scrutinizing every detail to establish and judge my private life. You used this to further humiliate me, scolding me for receiving messages from male friends at night, something you deemed inappropriate and blasphemous based on your limited understanding.

You threatened to report me to the school principal and made me believe I had committed a heinous crime with no escape. I stood there, stunned, shaken, and petrified, as the others silently watched the spectacle unfold.

It took me a while to gather my senses and muster the courage to say "Sorry," though I was still completely unaware of why I was reprimanded so harshly. I left the room, trembling with fear, and the following days were some of the worst I've ever experienced. The thought of coming to school filled me with dread, not just because of the crowd that had witnessed my humiliation but also because of you, whom I feared encountering the most.

You eventually returned the phone after a day or two. I accepted it with as much grace and positivity as I could muster and apologized profusely for my supposedly blasphemous behaviour. You stood there, proud and tall, basking in the authority you held over a young girl who was just beginning to understand the world and its ways.



This, apparently, was my first big lesson: **Never** let anyone suppress your voice, especially when you know that you've *done no wrong*.

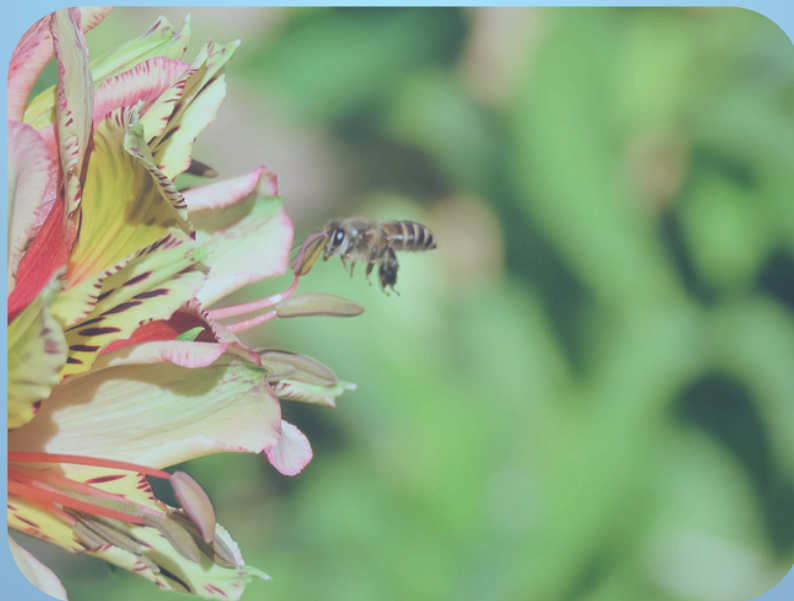
I am a teacher myself now, and I make it a point to teach my students to stand up for themselves, to demand justification for reprimands, and to never let their voices go unheard. Thanks to you, sir, for imparting this deeply felt lesson, albeit unintentionally, which has made me a better listener and a more empathetic teacher.

Best,

Anusha.

*Reflective writing is like sitting quietly with a warm cup of tea, thinking about your day. It's like watching the sunset and remembering everything that happened, or holding a soft breeze of memories and turning them into a story for yourself.*

***Pranali***



*Reflective writing, to me, is sitting in my room on a black winter evening, with only the rhythmic click-clack of my laptop keys breaking the silence, as I revisit my past, contemplate my present, and ponder the possibilities of my future.*

***Anusha Chettri***

## LETTER TO A FRIEND

B PRANALI

Dear Nitu,  
I hope you're doing well.

I've been meaning to share something with you that's been on my mind and in my heart. I took a reflective writing course recently, and I can't even begin to explain how much it has changed me. It's like I've unlocked a part of myself I never really paid attention to before. I just had to tell you about it.

Honestly, when I first considered taking the course, I was unsure. I kept thinking, *Do I really have time for this? Will it even make a difference?* But something inside me told me to just go for it. And now, looking back, I feel like it was one of the best decisions I've made for myself.

One of the biggest things I've learned is how important it is to reflect, not just on others, but on myself. In the past, I believed I was always right, I was quick to judge situations and people without really understanding why I felt the way that I did. But this course taught me to pause - to dig deeper, to ask myself, why did I react like that? What does this say about me? It made me realize that sometimes, I need to take responsibility for my emotions instead of blaming others.

More than anything, I learned how to put my thoughts into words, how to be clear about what I truly feel. Before, my mind was full of scattered emotions, but now, writing helps me make sense of them. And you know what? My teammates and mentors played such a huge role in this. Their stories, their reflections, it was like looking into a mirror that made me see myself differently. Their words made me stop and think, *Wait, have I ever felt this way?* And suddenly, I was reflecting not just on their experiences, but on my own life too. It was deep, emotional, and something I never expected to feel so strongly about.

This course also made me look back at moments I had buried,

times when I wasn't my best self, times when I could have been kinder, more patient, more understanding. But instead of feeling guilty, I've learned to be more forgiving toward myself.

To see those moments as lessons, not failures. I even thought about the people in my life that I had taken for granted, especially a teacher who had always been there for me. I never truly appreciated their support until I reflected on how much they had done to shape me.

And suddenly, I felt this overwhelming sense of gratitude for them, for all the people who have stood by me, even when I didn't notice. Another thing that hit me hard was realizing how little I used to think about my emotions. I would just feel, without questioning why. But now, I pause and ask myself, *Where is this feeling coming from?* And it's changed the way I react, the way I see myself. I've started being kinder to myself, celebrating the small things instead of only noticing what's wrong. And somehow, that has made all the difference!

This journey of self-reflection has been unexpectedly beautiful. I feel lighter, more aware, more **'me'** than I have in a long time. It's like I've finally slowed down enough to listen to myself. And in doing that, I feel like I've grown, not just in my mind, but in my heart.

I just wanted to share this with you because I know you'll understand. And maybe, in some way, it'll make you reflect too. I'd love to hear how you're doing, and I hope we can catch up soon.

Sending you lots of love,

*Pranali*



I initiated the twelfth batch of *Reflective Writing For Teachers* after a gap of almost a year.

I always find this to be an exciting phase. Ten people will soon become intertwined with my life: ten *total strangers as of now*. Out there, in the unknown space, are potential registrants and we will be engaging with each other every week after they make that decision. [In the past, many such 'strangers' have found a lasting place in my life and heart.] What's more, by its very design, this course allows strangers to bond at a very deep level within a short time span. [Especially for those who – like me – are in the twilight of their lives – here is a 'fast forward' method of making new friends!]

In no time, I got ten registrants. Almost all were practising teachers: all save one. This was a query from a Government Officer stationed in Geneva: *I am currently working in the Ministry of External Affairs but in a year or two I will be quitting my job to become a full-time teacher. And I love writing also, I have a few blogs online as well, where I share my musings on the human condition. So, coming across this course is like a Godsend for me at the right time. Could he register?*

*Why not?* Was my immediate response.

And so it turned out that the twelfth run of this online course was launched at the end of November 2024, with participants from Sikkim, Hyderabad, Sadum, Chandigarh and Geneva. The latter being in a different time zone, Aman Arora often had to rush through his lunch hour while attending our session. Occasionally, he missed our session because it was not always possible to work around the lunch hour. It speaks of his commitment, though, that he seldom missed turning in the assignment of that week.

Another participant touched me with her commitment by ensuring attendance from her hospital bed: after a big surgery. Keeping her

camera off, she attended the class! How could I **not** feel more and more motivated with such a committed batch?

In fact, my burning question with this batch is: *Did they really need such a course?* For I found them all to be reflective, from the word GO. Some more, some less, but definitely reflection had been ingrained in each of these participants since long.

I thoroughly enjoyed going through each and every assignment as it allowed me a peep into these very vibrant minds. Some writings were poetry, rather than prose. Others were poignant in their raw honesty. But always, always, they left me asking: *Do they really need such a course?*

I am – as often happens – left with a few questions at the end of this run of the course. As one participant gently pointed out, the assignments often took them into very personal spaces. My usual policy is to emphasise that it is absolutely unnecessary to divulge personal details to me, all I ask for is deep reflection. And reflection often demands stepping into zones of discomfort.

And so, I now wonder: How can we *invite deep reflection without intruding into personal spaces?* I would love to learn how to do that.

I invite thoughts on this – so that I can design a course that is less intrusive and yet deeply reflective.

My sincere thanks to each and every participant of this batch. My Tuesday evenings will be empty without you!

