

FINAL COMPILATION

Reflective Writing Course

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Letter to the teacher who influenced me the most

Aastha Kalra Bahl

Dear Ma'am,

I have often wondered why certain teachers remain in our memories long after we have forgotten the lessons they taught us. Today, I realised that perhaps it is not always the content that stays with us; it is the way a teacher makes us feel.

You are one of those teachers who I have carried with me for years. When I think of you, I do not remember every lesson, every notebook correction or every test. I remember the feeling of being seen. You had a way of making a child feel that her thoughts mattered. Even when my answer was not completely right, you never made me feel small for getting it wrong. Instead, you encouraged me to think again, try again and speak without being afraid of making a mistake.

As a student, I probably did not understand the importance of this. I simply thought you were a kind teacher. Today, being a teacher myself, I realise that kindness in a classroom is not a small quality. It can completely change the way a child learns.

There have been moments in my own classroom when I have stopped myself from reacting to a child's mistake or indiscipline. I have consciously asked myself, "*How would I want this child to remember me years from now?*" I think that question has its roots in what I experienced as your student.

You taught me something much bigger than a subject. You taught me that authority does not have to come from fear. A teacher can have control over a classroom and still be gentle. A teacher can correct a child without humiliating the child. A teacher can demand discipline while protecting a student's dignity.

I don't know whether you ever realised the impact you had on me. Perhaps you thought you were simply doing your job. But today, as I stand on the other side of the classroom, I understand that teachers leave behind parts of themselves in their students.

I hope that some part of the teacher I am today carries the warmth that I experienced from you.

Thank you for being a teacher I remember not because I was afraid of you, but because I felt safe enough to learn from you.

With gratitude,
A grateful student

Reflective writing helps me see situations from a different perspective and recognise the lessons hidden in everyday moments. **Aastha Kalra Bahl**



My single story of a student

Diksha Regmi

I remember one child from my initial days of teaching. He was always fidgeting, talking, distracting others and making jokes in class. Very quickly, (and without even realising) I created a story about him in my head.

He became “the distracting child”, the one who never paid attention, never took the class seriously and was probably not interested in learning. Once that story was created, I started seeing his behaviour through that lens. If he was talking, it confirmed my idea that he was not paying attention. If he was making others laugh, it became another example of how he was distracting the class.

I had unknowingly reduced a whole child to one particular behaviour.

Then one day, I gave the class a surprise test. Honestly, I did not expect much from him. When I checked the papers, however, he had scored the highest in the class.

I remember being genuinely surprised. More than being surprised by his marks, I was struck by my own assumptions.

How could the child I had already placed in the category of “the distracted student” understand the concepts so well? That moment made me realise that I had been telling myself a single story about him. I had mistaken what I could easily see (his fidgeting, talking, joking) for the whole picture of who he was as a learner.

I began to rewrite the story:

Maybe he was not the child who “didn't pay attention”. Maybe he was a child who did not always show learning in the way I expected. Maybe his constant movement and talking did not automatically mean that he was not listening or understanding but just someone who engaged with the classroom differently.

I also realised that his good performance in one test should not become another single story about him. He was not simply “the distracted child”, but he was also not suddenly “the brilliant child”. He was a child with many different sides that I was still getting to know and the sides that I will never know.

This experience reminded me that as a teacher I can very easily create stories about my students, based on what I see repeatedly. But what I see is only one part of their story. Sometimes these experiences make me ask myself “What else have I not seen yet?”

Now when I notice a student who is constantly talking, struggling, being quiet or behaving differently I try to remind myself that I may be seeing only one chapter of their story not the whole book.



To me, reflective writing means to think about my experiences, feelings and learning. **Diksha Regmi**

What I think education is – or who an educated person is

Shivika Dogra

In my view, an educated person is not someone who holds a lot of degrees, titles, or privileges. A degree may tell you about the subject that someone has studied, but it doesn't show whether or not they know how to listen, how to apologise, or how to admit that they could be wrong.

I believe that education manifests in the way that a person meets life, deals with other people, and handles criticism. An educated person is somebody who can accept criticism without being upset, think about it without becoming defensive, and possess a heart filled with humility, empathy, and open-mindedness. I have often regarded people who have experienced life and helped other people as being more educated. Their education is not necessarily shown on a certificate; it is revealed in their behaviour and in the lives that they affect.

A person like that in my life was my grandfather.

Although he was a graduate, he never regarded academic degrees or qualifications as a way of measuring a person's education. In his view, education had to be passed on, promoted and made available to other people. He placed a strong emphasis on the education of women in his family and made sure that my grandmother got an education. He took pains to teach her himself. Furthermore, when his sister-in-law became a widow at a very early age, he also supported her in receiving an education. What seems most important to me is that he didn't limit his concern to just his own generation.

He was very enthusiastic about the education of his grandchildren and wanted all of us to receive a good education, taking real pride in our academic careers. His enthusiasm was so great that when he was 90 years old, he still went to my brother's graduation ceremony in the USA. At ninety, an age when most people would be content to have someone else send them the photographs, he actually travelled to the event! That fact tells me a great deal about how much he valued education. He didn't just want us to obtain degrees; he wanted us to take advantage of the opportunities that education could provide.

I believe that education should make us humbler rather than more entitled, more curious than more certain, and more empathetic than more judgmental. A genuinely educated person should be capable of listening to different points of view and accepting that there is always more to learn. My grandfather taught me this by the example of his own life. His greatest legacy was not his degree but the value that he placed on educating others.



Reflective writing is a way to pause, introspect, and gather my thoughts about an experience. It's not simply about describing the event but about looking inwards at how I felt, what I learned and why it mattered to me.

Shivika Dogra

A letter to my most impactful teacher

Mariya Shalini

*You are the source of inspiration,
Sown the seeds of transformation,
Led the young minds to liberation,
Spread the aura to generation.*

Respected Jacintha ma'am,

Hope you are hale and healthy. I'm glad to pen this letter as a mark of gratitude to one of the modest souls who helped shape me into who I'm now. You knew my burning passion was to become a doctor, and it was you who helped me shift my stream from Mathematics to Science. I regret that I couldn't become a doctor. But I'm glad, truly glad, that I ended up in the profession that makes doctors, engineers, and above all, responsible citizens of our country. I'm the chosen one who follows in your footsteps, and I don't say that lightly.

Your guidance shaped me in ways that I'm still discovering. It made me a responsible human being.... A loving wife..... A compassionate mother.....And now, a teacher, one still learning to become as thoughtful and reflective as you were. I'm glad I get to write this on a day that belongs to our profession; there's no better way to mark it than by putting these thoughts down for the best teacher I know.

I'd like to explain how it all started, back when I was in class X. You taught me English and Science. I sat in the last bench, being the tallest in class. I still remember the first long answer on Vernier Callipers, I don't think I'll ever forget that. I would wait for the moment you would begin teaching Science. You never used the textbook while explaining, and I still imitate that habit today. I admired how carefully you prepared for every class, and I watched closely, closely enough that your questions planted an idea in me.... That I would become a doctor.

One day, after you left the room following the period, I stayed back to clean the board. During break, once it was empty, I filled it again, with the exact words you had written, in the exact order you had explained them. I did this many times, quietly rebuilding your lessons in your own words, your own style, just to feel close to how you taught.

Now when I stand at a board explaining something to my own students, I sometimes notice a version of myself sitting in a corner of the room, listening the way I once did. That is what you gave me - not just a passion for this profession, but a way of holding it. I once dreamed of being Dr Mariya Shalini, MBBS., MD. I didn't get there. But I earned the right to place "Dr" before my name all the same, and I have you to thank for the zeal that carried me to it.

On this day, my heart is full of joy, and of gratitude, for the one who quietly moulded me into who I am. I try to repay that by passing on your lessons and your values to the next generation, in whatever small way I can. You have retired from the classroom, but not from the lives you shaped. Through me, your teaching continues. I owe you my success, respected madam.

Thank you so much, and have a very happy Teacher's Day.

Your student, *Mariya Shalini*



Reflective writing is the anchor of the inner self. It steadies our thoughts, lets us dive deeper into them, and gives us something firm to hold. When we pause to reflect, we steady the vessel, and it can weather any storm.

Mariya Shalini

My biggest obstacle to teaching well

Sathyavathi Yarlagadda

Blaming the messy, tangled web of bad structures as a blockade to good teaching is an excuse that helps me dust off my own responsibility. It's easier to continue thinking like that, but this reading made me realize that it's the micro that makes up the macro, not just the other way around. Lots of modern revolutions have gone bottom-up.

It's very empowering to read and recognize that, actually, because it made me realize I am not as helpless as I paint myself to be. I used to perceive systemic failure as the biggest obstacle to good teaching, but perhaps it's time to remember that I, as the teacher, am not the important person in the room.

This is something I am still working on, and at times fail to do so, maybe. At times, I get so caught up with how I would like to teach content and get excited about my own creativity in making that lesson plan. In this process, I isolate myself from the student. I do think of their benefits and learning outcomes, but the centre of my teaching universe is not the student or the process of learning.

It's very easy to pick up bad habits and very hard to build good ones. Many teachers, at least on the surface level that I've noticed, are focused on their teaching methodology, and the very word "teacher" itself is a self-limiting belief. I think we often associate the process of learning with the word "learner" for a student, but there is no teacher without a learner in them. If that thirst for the quest of curiosity is not present, one might as well stop wasting their breath in a classroom.

Trying to do things which I am bad at, I think, would help me remember this lesson the best: where I am humbled, where I fail, where I pick myself back up, and where I try. I will remember this process of learning and will be more sensitive to my students' needs and my own, and understand this maze probably just a bit better.



Reflective writing, to me, is like taking a pause, breathing and digging deep into oneself. It pushes me to not only think about the consequences of an action but also its causes and, more importantly, what I would change if such a scenario were to occur again.

Sathyavathi Yarlagadda

Letter to a friend about the reflective writing course

Jaishree Ashok Iyer

Dear Friend,

I hope you are doing well. Our memorable days together with endless conversations about teaching-learning practices and classroom stories are unforgettable.

Recently, I was given an opportunity by my Head of School to enroll for a course on reflective writing. You will be amazed to know how it helped me to upskill myself professionally and also personally. Dr. Neeraja Raghavan was our mentor. The meaningful anecdotes and classroom experiences shared by her as a teacher filled every session with valuable takeaways. The reading list shared by her was very interesting. After a long time, I got reasons to purchase many books and went on a reading binge that I thoroughly enjoyed.

I suggest you read the book 'Teaching Tales, Learning Trails' authored by Dr. Neeraja Raghavan, Ms. Vineeta Sood, Ms. Kamala Anilkumar which reveals the true side of the teaching profession by weaving together the different perspectives and experiences of the teachers, parents and the students. You will find yourself in those stories.

I am sure you will agree with me if I say that in the world of Artificial Intelligence, we as teachers need to revive teaching skills using reflective practices to engage our students. I have attended a lot of capacity-building and professional training programmes. But this course on reflective writing actually made me pause and reflect on how to implement effective teaching practices. I have also started the habit of journaling my thoughts and experiences. I learnt to reflect on my own experiences in the classroom and look beyond the classroom hustle bustle.

The assignments given during the course provided a different perspective to my classroom stories. When I started to work on the assignments, I realized that I need to work a lot to improve. At some point, I was wondering if it is possible for me to write in a way that will grab the attention of readers. When I submitted the sixth assignment with this self-doubt, I received a response from Neeraja Akka, who wrote: "Through practice, I know you will develop the skill of writing more concisely". Her encouraging words triggered self-confidence in me. I explored ways to improve myself. After all, teachers are learners, too and sometimes these encouraging words work like magic while we are trying new things.

Through my efforts, I finally found the writer in me! Now I am able to see beyond the single story of a student. As a reflective teacher, I could introspect my own beliefs and question my actions. The benevolent third-party assignment provided insights about how problems can be sorted out if I learn to witness the situation as a third party and view things differently. As a teacher, it gave me a space to evaluate my thought process openly without being hard on myself. I could now hear the unsaid words of my students and see through their hidden expressions.

Though teaching is a profession which demands investment of a great deal of effort with a deep sense of responsibility, the meaning of education often gets diluted for various reasons. During this course, the assignment on "what does it mean to be educated?" actually provided a deeper understanding of the term 'education'. The assignment on "Write a Letter to your Teacher" was heartwarming. Stepping into a student's shoes made me realize what my own students need from me. The interesting conversations with peers throughout the sessions kindled curiosity and exchange of ideas with new friends showed me many facets of self-reflection. The articles shared after every session were interesting reads and were so relatable.

As I explored reflective writing, some conversations initiated through a podcast called [Teacher Chatter](#) on the topic “Is AI rendering a teacher redundant?” prompted me to reflect on my teaching practices and pen down my experiences. It provided me a platform to share my voice as a teacher. You must tune into this channel to hear the thought-provoking conversations. Don’t be surprised if you can’t resist being a part of it. I must confess that, at some point, I felt I missed many lessons that my experiences were trying to teach me. As John Dewey rightly said, we don’t learn from experience alone, but from reflecting on it. Now I have started to jot down my professional and personal experiences to reflect on them, which is helping me become a better version of myself.

Overall, I enjoyed the course on reflective writing. It is like a soothing therapy to experience the joy of writing. I suggest you take a look at this course and go for it to up skill yourself. I am sure if you become a part of this course, you will learn and unlearn many things through reflecting on your experiences. All it takes is a bit of your time. You will be amazed to witness how your experiences become your best teachers! Do share your thoughts on reflective writing. I am eager to hear your take on it!

We will catch up soon for a good heart-to-heart conversation.

With love,

Jaishree

Reflective writing means rewinding the history of experiences to embrace the learnings from the ‘missed takes’ and the failures to become a better version of oneself.

Jaishree Ashok Iyer



My definition of education and an educated person

Mousumi Ghosh

I feel education is a life-long process and not limited to age, place and time. Education gives you choice, a chance to say no to an unwanted decision. It keeps you curious, active, filled with a purpose and gives you the courage to walk out of bad life situations. It gives you a fair chance to contribute in so many more ways than you ever thought.

On the other hand, the answer to the question: “Who is an educated person?” is not as simple as it may sound.

If I had asked my 20-year-old self, I would have directly connected education to a means to an end - that is, to earn a livelihood. I had not heard anyone give me any other reason to get educated. As I moved into my college years, experiences taught me to become wiser and less judgmental. This came from reading, observing, being with my mentors and so on. So an educated person is wiser than an uneducated one and also a fighter. One who can speak for themselves, one who can articulate their way out of different situations. Education also helps you in decision-making. If you are unable to decide things for yourself every time, then the very fact that you even went to school or college, read

books or made notes, is of no value. Being open to learning, being less rigid and more ready to unlearn, ready to change - all these are expected of a person who is educated.

I have read Tagore extensively and I agree with his idea that an educated person is in harmony with Nature and not just one who goes on accumulating facts. We are a country where mediocrity is the norm and excellence is not for all. This is the biggest crime an educated person can permit.

I can sum up with these famous words that for an educated person 'the mind is without fear and the head is held high,' not out of arrogance but curiosity.



We all have a little voice inside our heads which reminds us of all the things we could have done another way in certain situations. Reflecting on an experience can help to put this voice to use as we learn from what we have done and move forward.

Mousumi Ghosh

A letter to the teacher who influenced me the most

Rupa Verma

Dear Mrs. Robinson,

I do not know where you are today but whenever I think of a teacher who left a mark on my life, it is you.

It was 1984. A shy, introverted ten-year-old girl was promoted to Class IV A, and you were our class teacher - smart, dynamic and someone every girl in class wanted to impress. But that year did not start well for me. Just three months in, I fell seriously ill with jaundice and was advised bed rest for nearly two months. I was granted leave, but I missed all my classes, and when I returned, I was behind in every subject.

Back then, the school gave out monthly report cards, as you will recall. They were thin (tracing paper-like), colour-coded sheets handed out by calling names aloud in class, so everyone knew who got what. Gold meant excellent, pink meant good, blue meant average and white meant fail.

I was already an average student and those two months away made things worse. For three months in a row, I got the white card (fail). I dreaded hearing my name being called out. A petrified child would walk up to you to collect the white report card, and you would still hand it over with an encouraging smile and a pat on my back. (At that time, I would always wonder what that smile and pat was for!)

By year-end, I had improved a little, but I was still afraid I might not be promoted. Around the same time, there was talk among the girls that the teachers and Sisters were meeting to choose new House Captains and Vice Captains. I barely paid attention as all I wanted was to be promoted to Class V.

Then in the last assembly of the year, Sister Maria announced the names of the House Captains. Standing in line, I almost fainted when I heard my own name called out as Vice-Captain of Red House. I still remember that moment. And I cannot forget your calling me aside afterward, telling me you had recommended my name yourself because you saw something in me - maybe a spark, a promise that I could not see in myself...

Your words and actions stayed with me. Today, as a teacher myself, I often think of how you placed your faith in a little girl who had none in herself.

You will never know, Miss, how that one small gesture shaped the rest of my life.

With deepest regards from your student,

Rupa (Class IV A)

Reflective writing is exploring and diving deep into the experiences that have moulded me into who I am today. It is about being mindful of how my past thoughts and actions have shaped my present and also about how my present thoughts and actions can influence my future.

Rupa Verma



Letter to an Aspiring Teacher

Shweta Juneja

Dear Aspirant:

When I started my teaching career, I thought the primary duties of a teacher included delivering the information clearly, being able to complete the syllabus and help students get high grades. I still believe that these are essential aspects of a teacher's job because they form the basis of the teaching-learning process. However, I gradually realised that they were not the core of our profession. A competent teacher should be able to nurture children, help them develop the right attitude towards the world and themselves. Students might forget most of the things we taught them, but they will always remember how we made them feel.

I have also paused to ask who an educated person is, since that is what I am trying to nurture in my students.

I think that the best definition of an educated person can be drawn from the description of a person we admire. Such a person has the depth of soul that they express through their thoughts, spoken words and actions. They do not seek to demonstrate their knowledge to others, but others still feel that they can trust and listen to them. This ability stems from the fact that they know themselves well. This is one of the most valuable qualities an educator can develop. It allows them to see the world as it is, recognise their own feelings and understand others.

An educated person has the ability to look beyond their opinions, consider the world from others' point of view, and yet, always return to their heart. They can admit their mistakes and revise their conclusions if they realise that it is the right thing to do.

Throughout my teaching career, I have been trying to encourage my students to be open-minded and become active participants in the learning process. I still remember how annoyed I got when some of my ideas did not work and I had to admit that my opinion was not the only correct one. Teaching is not as easy as it may seem because we are faced with a number of challenges every day. We have to deal with the prescribed requirements, follow rules, meet deadlines and adapt to many other things that force us into a specific mould. All these things made me think about the meaning of our profession and my role in it, and I understand now that I should try to learn as much as I want to teach my students.

One important piece of advice that I can offer is this: Experience is valuable, but more so when we question it. It is necessary to take a step back and see what is going on in our classes (as objectively as possible) and understand what we can do to improve the situation. We should examine our actions, intentions and attitudes. We should also observe our colleagues and learn from their mistakes. We can never learn from the things that we do not notice, and this is why reflection is the key to improving teaching practice.

Another question that has been puzzling me is: What can we offer our students that they do not find in books? I think we can teach them to believe in themselves, to question the things they are interested in and to treat people around them with kindness. We can create an atmosphere of trust and support, encourage students to express their opinions and help them find their voices. They watch us all the time, they see if we are fair to our students, if we listen to them, if our actions are aligned with our words, and if we accept other people's viewpoints without judging them. Perhaps one of the most essential things that we can teach is an example of a constant learning process.

I have come to the realisation that the ideal of education is not to create a nation of perfect individuals who do not make mistakes, but to create people who can think critically and independently, who can judge their actions as much as they do the actions of others. They are not always confident in their knowledge as they are, but they have the tools to seek their answers in themselves and in the world around them.

If education can truly be defined as a process of making people self-aware, understanding, compassionate and free, then I think that we are doing our job properly. And if our work helps some children become better and kinder, then we are the best educators that we can imagine.

I see Reflective Writing as a process of seeking to be honest with myself as I learn from my experience. Through it, I can recognize my strengths and weaknesses and reach profound conclusions about who I am.

With warm regards,

Shweta Juneja

Shweta



What I think education is – or who an educated person is

Sumeetha A S

An educated person is an open person and true to themselves. They have an inquiring and curious mind. The person continuously learns and grows. They also reflect on their experiences and learn from them. They try to implement what they have learnt. The person critically analyses and questions wherever possible, and always in a respectful way. They listen carefully both within and outside. They handle their emotions well and continuously work on improving how they handle their emotions. They try to treat everyone with respect. They also try to be the person they envision their students to be and build/improve the atmosphere in the school in such a way.

A letter to the teacher who influenced me the most

Shamlie Jennifer

To Dr. Jayanthasri Balakrishnan

Dear JB ma'am,

During my first year of B.A. English Literature, on the first day that I saw you crossing the corridor, you smiled and wished me even before I could — "Good Morning, Kanna" — something I will never forget in my life. I thought you would be teaching me, but unfortunately you weren't teaching first-year students. Still, I would try to sneak into the second-year classes, and the students always rushed inside, looking ready and eager for class well before you entered — which made me wonder what you could possibly be teaching that had them so engrossed and so prepared.

I eagerly awaited the start of second year — not just to move up to the senior level, but to finally be part of your class. You will never know the happiness I felt the day you walked in to take African Literature, and we began with 'Cry, the Beloved Country' by Alan Paton. The first class went by simply in admiring you — how simple yet elegant you were. I still remember your neatly pressed and draped cotton saree, a watch and thick green and red glass bangles on both hands, along with a gold bangle

and another watch. You always entered the room with a broad smile, wishing us before we could wish you.

The classes, the references you drew, the comparisons between Tamil, English and African literature — they were mind-boggling. Your words still ring in my ears. You always held eye contact with me, and every time you spoke, the takeaways were never just takeaways — they settled heavily into my heart and soul, things I had to sit with, absorb, and learn to live with.

You always taught me: "Think with your heart, and feel with your mind."

You introduced me to the Tamil novels of Mr. Jayakanthan. I loved our discussions about the female characters and the turmoil they endured. My love for language and literature deepened even further under your guidance.

After your encouragement, I found the courage to write my own views in one of my papers, beyond what was simply written in the text. You motivated me in everything I did, and your door was always open to us. You taught me to look beyond books and marks — to lead a life with confidence and love. You taught me how a woman should carry herself, and most importantly, you made me understand that life is uncertain — that acceptance matters, and that one should never forsake one's values for anyone else. You understood me through the roughest times that I went through, and helped me find a true companion in books.

I have cried, laughed, and even been moved by your words, and I carry them with me still. Now, as a teacher myself, I understand just how much effort it must have taken you to hold the rapt attention of a class in the way that you did. Once, I didn't make it to class on time because I had to be at the admin office. I rushed over, but the door was already closed, so I sat on the stairs beside the classroom, next to a window, and listened to the entire class from there — something I would never have done for any other class. That day, I realized just how much you had taught me. It was my own mistake that I hadn't spoken up to say I had admin work to finish, but I was glad I hadn't wanted to disturb your class. If we truly wish to learn, we can be anywhere, and the learning will still happen.

When the class ended, you turned, gave a gentle smile, and left. I still remember how someone could be so understanding and yet so profound. I admire you still, ma'am.

You have gone on to become a renowned public speaker, and your videos continue to motivate me and guide my life to this day.

With Love,

Jenny

For me, reflective writing is an inward journey that allows me to pause, reflect and look at experiences from different perspectives. It gives me the time and space to organise my thoughts, understand my feelings and articulate my reflections in an honest and genuine way.

Shamlie Jennifer



My reflections

Neeraja Raghavan

It is with a deep sense of gratitude that I bring the fifteenth run of this course to a close.

Gratitude to this and all the preceding batches, for their feedback which I could partially incorporate this time round.

Each time this course is run, there are new learnings for me.

If there was a slightly greater degree of bonding between members of this group than others, I have an earlier group to thank. They pointed out to me that they had ended the course almost like the strangers they had been at the start. For the first time, we had breakout room sessions in this course (on the suggestion from one member) and that proved to be a positive step too.

Just like any teacher who teaches the same subject year after year to different classes and discovers newness in each class, I, too, have been fortunate to experience newness in what should be repetitive.

For each day the same sun rises, bringing in a new day, with new rays ... and I look forward to the next such shining batch as this ends.

I continue to struggle, though, with friendly ways of drawing out the more reticent amongst participants, as I agree with the feedback that it is usually the same people who articulate their views in each class. I welcome ideas from anyone on this ...

Thank you!

