

1. Read and annotate the article (at LEAST 2 thoughtful, mature responses per page)
2. Discuss the article with your family/friends during the week.
3. Bring the annotated article on due date to discuss/debate/compose a reflection about.

# Streaming Television Has Become Anxiety-Inducing Homework

*We should all strive to be the best viewers of the best of the best.*

**By Todd Van Luling** 09/18/2019

I have developed a stressful pre-streaming ritual, which takes multiple minutes and involves making various things just right for my viewing experience. The many steps include, but are not limited to, wiping my glasses with a microfiber cleaning cloth, adding a pillow-cushion to my couch for adequate back comfort, and trying to remember to take a deep breath.

Once I've completed this cursed cycle, I can finally find the appropriate app on my Roku, cross my fingers that it doesn't make me sign in again, and head to the search option to type in the show I want to stream, letter by letter. Then I start the show at the very beginning of the next chronological episode of the season I've been watching, because starting anywhere else would be madness.

Unlike the days of yore – when I could turn on the television willy-nilly and start watching a sitcom in which the plot barely signified – I now have to go into episodes knowing that every detail and every line can and likely will matter.

With this year's prestige, critically acclaimed television shows that attempt to offer detail-rich viewing experiences, like "Succession" or "Fleabag" or "Russian Doll," I have no hope of catching every little set design quirk or joke made in the background by clever use of extras unless I repeatedly pause and rewind.

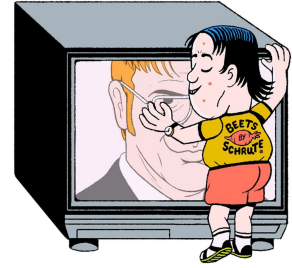
And of course, there's no time to spend the hours and hours it would take to truly absorb and understand these shows. Netflix, Amazon, HBO and Hulu alone have cranked out one prestige show after another for years. By the end of 2019, Disney and Apple will have new streaming platforms, too. Every second you spend with a show is a second you're not spending with those dozens of other shows your friends and family insist are great, all while implying they'll disown you if you don't agree and start watching with them. Oh, and all the critics are recommending a whole other batch of shows that are "must watches." Cool, yeah, sounds like a relaxing way to spend a weekend.

I increasingly feel like if I'm not watching with athletic prowess, then I am not doing these shows justice. I feel like giving anything less than 110% attention means I'm doing something wrong. And so now, streaming television feels like homework.

The Washington Post recently had a comedic feature called "The Ways We Watch," in which 11 made-up but relatable "types" of viewers got pairings with outlandish illustrations. The first type of viewer on the list is "The FOMO Rewinder." The illustration features a man on his knees, leaning his face close to the television as he hits a giant rewind button. The man is so transfixed by the screen that he doesn't realize his shirt has climbed up his back and exposed the skin around his pants. He may control the television buttons, but the television controls him.



Underneath the illustration, The Washington Post has a description of the FOMO Rewinder that includes this line: “You need to catch every last detail on the screen, and you will rewind, rewind, rewind until you’ve darn well absorbed them all.”



Yes, that is me. It goes on to heighten that absurdity with this paragraph: *Then you moved beyond dialogue, needing to take in everything on the screen. Did something move in the background? Rewind! Wait, the ma was reading a newspaper with breakfast, but you didn’t have a chance to read the fake headlines? Rewind! Didn’t catch the score of the football game they were watching in the show? Well, that must be a vital detail, so rewind!*

That description is intended to be a caricature, but I find it so relatable. In many shows, if the viewer looks away for even a couple of seconds, the whole artistic argument of the show could be lost.

Loving a prestige show is no longer a casual relationship. This love requires full devotion.

Earlier in September, the writer Kyle Chayka admitted in a piece for his newsletter, that he skipped the entire first season of HBO’s “Succession,” the prestige show du jour. He wrote that he enjoys just fast-forwarding and rewinding what he’s watching at random, to destroy the story and create a “messy abstraction” he finds less stressful: *I started talking to friends about my newfound “Succession” obsession, admitting that I hadn’t watched season one. “But Kyle!” they screamed in agony. “Then how would you know about XYZ subtle foreshadowing / precipitating event / great line?” The answer is I don’t, and I don’t care. Plot and suspense are stressful to me and to be avoided in any circumstance. Plot makes me squirm even while watching “Big Little Lies,” which, to many other viewers, might seem aimless and ambient. Plot apathy is why I love watching “Terrace House,” a very slow Japanese reality show about almost nothing.*

To me, this reads like blasphemy, but perhaps it’s a necessary blasphemy. It’s a reminder that we don’t have to be A-plus viewers – that maybe, just maybe, we’ll enjoy life more if we go for the passing grade instead.

Alas, I know I’m going to keep watching these shows and doing my pre-streaming routine. To me, it’d be a lot worse to watch a great show like “Tuca & Bertie” with a distracting smudge on my glasses than to strive to catch the impressive onslaught of visual jokes that show spews seemingly every second. But what I can do is bail on mediocre shows sooner and spend more time rewatching the true greats.

Just stop watching new things and watch these again and again until you’ve caught every last detail. In the meantime, I have deep breaths to remember to take.

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### Consider...

- What impacts do others’ Netflix/show recommendations have on you (actions/feelings)?
- Where does the author use sarcasm? What impact does it have/how does it make you feel?
- What is the author’s claim about “old school” television watching vs. Netflix?
- Which Netflix or other streaming show is a “true great” worth rewatching TO YOU? Why?
- What conceit (extended metaphor) does the author use to describe watching Netflix? Do you agree with any aspects of it?
- What is plot apathy? Under what circumstances do you prefer a show with plot apathy?
- What shows do you watch that have “artistic arguments?” What arguments do they make?