

Why Netflix's 'skip intro' feature is bad news

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Here are six of the top ten most watched films of all time. Put them in order from 1 (most watched) to 6 (least watched).

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 1. _____ | a. <i>Star Wars: Episode IV</i> |
| 2. _____ | b. <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> |
| 3. _____ | c. <i>Titanic</i> |
| 4. _____ | d. <i>E.T.</i> |
| 5. _____ | e. <i>The Godfather</i> |
| 6. _____ | f. <i>The Wizard of Oz</i> |

2 Key words

Complete the sentences using these key words from the text.

blockbuster	trailer	skip	crew	drag
groundbreaking	shush	streaming	pop up	credits

- A _____ is an advertisement for a film or TV programme that shows a short part of that film or programme.
- The _____ is a list of the people involved in making a film or TV programme that is shown at the end or the beginning of it.
- If you _____ someone, you tell them to be quiet.
- _____ is a technology for getting sound or video to your computer through the internet so you can start to watch or listen before all the information has been received by your computer.
- If you _____ something, you don't do it but do the next thing instead.
- If things _____, they appear very quickly or suddenly.
- If something is described as a _____, it is boring or slightly annoying.
- The _____ are the people who work together to make a film.
- If something is described as _____, it uses new methods or achieves new results.
- A _____ is something that is very successful, especially a film, show or book.

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

- Who directed the film *Do the Right Thing*?
- When did Netflix begin offering the 'skip intro' feature for TV episodes?
- For how long does a feather drift on the wind at the beginning of the film *Forrest Gump*?
- In which decade was the film *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* made?
- How many films nominated for best picture at the 2017 Oscars had an opening credit sequence that lasted beyond the film's title?
- Which film starts with classical music played over images of nuclear fighter pilots?

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Why Netflix's 'skip intro' feature is bad news for classic films

The ability to avoid watching the opening credits of certain titles is a sign that the company lacks reverence for cinema history

Noah Gittell

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- For a certain type of person, turning up to the cinema a few minutes late is no big deal. You avoid a few trailers you've probably already seen online and, in the worst-case scenario, you miss the opening credits. Then, there are people who will shush you as soon as the studio logo comes onscreen. Maybe they learned it from Alvy Singer, Woody Allen's character in *Annie Hall*, who refuses to go into a foreign film when Annie arrives at the cinema two minutes late. "We'll only miss the titles," she points out. "They're in Swedish."
- For film-lovers like Alvy, the new feature that Netflix recently introduced will cause a severe anxiety attack. The streaming service now gives its viewers the option of skipping the title sequences of certain films. When you press "play", a small box labelled "skip intro" will pop up in the bottom right-hand corner. Even though you are not required to skip the credits, it's a tempting idea, as we could all save a few minutes.
- Netflix began offering this feature for TV episodes back in March. Nobody complained; when you're watching ten episodes of the same series over the course of a weekend, watching those opening titles can be a drag. Wisely, Netflix only applied this feature to its original TV programming. Perhaps out of respect for television history, older shows imported from other networks – such as *Star Trek* and *Friends* – remain unalterable.
- Netflix has no similar reverence for film. For example, you can now avoid watching a feather drift on the wind for three minutes at the beginning of *Forrest Gump*, skip the first thirty seconds of *Pirates of the Caribbean* or refrain from kicking off *E.T.* in the way that Spielberg intended. On the other hand, you are required to watch the slow riverboat ride that opens *The African Queen* and you are rightly required to listen to the Jewish prayer that accompanies the opening of *Schindler's List*. Is there method in the madness? Is Netflix only applying this feature to its most popular films? Perhaps, but we can only speculate.
- One thing is clear: when we lose title sequences, we are losing something of artistic value. The title sequence has a unique and colourful path through history and it deserves consideration as an art form itself. In the first half of the twentieth century, these sequences were like the opening pages of a book. They simply listed the actors and crew who worked on the film, without bothering to evoke any emotional, psychological or narrative qualities of the film that followed.
- In 1955, everything changed, when the graphic designer Saul Bass created the titles for *The Man with the Golden Arm*, a provocative drama about a jazz musician (Frank Sinatra) struggling with heroin addiction. Driven by his belief that "the audience's involvement with a film should really begin with the first frame", Bass showed the themes of addiction by depicting white lines shooting across a black screen while the opening credits rolled. In the end, the lines came together as a deformed human arm.
- Bass would go on to work with Alfred Hitchcock and Martin Scorsese, and influence many title designers who followed but, in the meantime, his vision was adopted by the Hollywood machine. By the mid-1960s, studio movies were paying vast amounts of money for elaborate, animated title sequences that added little of value to the film, such as those featured in the *Pink Panther* films. Such silly animated openings didn't survive the dark, cynical films of the 1970s but they had a brief comeback in the early '90s in comedies such as *City Slickers*, *Honeymoon in Vegas* and *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids*.
- These days, the spirit of Bass can be felt in some of Steven Spielberg's more playful films, such as *Catch Me If You Can* and *The Adventures of Tintin*, both of which have colourful, narratively complex openings. Of today's new masters, only David Fincher in *Seven* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* is continuing the tradition.
- Beyond historical context, a great title sequence often precedes a groundbreaking film. *Vertigo* opened with an extreme close-up of a female eye, setting the stage for its twisted commentary on voyeurism and misogyny. Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* announced its presence with authority, starting with three minutes of a hip-hop dancing Rosie Perez backed by Public Enemy's *Fight the Power*. Neither white nor black

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audiences had seen anything like it in a cinema. Stanley Kubrick's *Dr Strangelove* set the standard for irony, opening with serene classical music played over images of nuclear fighter pilots.

- 10 If artful sequences like these are indeed dying out, Netflix's decision is more symptom than cause. For decades, the opening credits have been shrinking, from the full cast and crew list that opened films in the classical era to today, when most films go straight from the title card to the action. It's not just in Hollywood blockbusters, either. Of the nine films nominated for best picture at 2017's Oscars, only one – *Lion* – had an opening credits sequence that lasted beyond the film's title. *Moonlight*, the eventual winner, had no opening titles at all, instead jumping straight into its human drama.

- 11 Perhaps the end of title sequences seems inevitable but that doesn't mean we should allow ourselves to rewrite the past. Watching an older film without its opening titles is like erasing history itself or at least radically distorting it to fit present viewing habits. In this age, all media is designed to fit our dwindling attention spans and films, which, by definition, require more patience from their audience, are already fighting an uphill battle in this larger war. At least we can each do our part. Resist the temptation, watch the intro and save a little piece of history.

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4 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer according to the text.

- Why is Netflix's new 'skip intro' feature controversial?
 - because some people don't like saving a few minutes
 - because some film-lovers don't want to miss the introduction
 - because some people believe the introduction has artistic value
- When did title sequences change from simply listing the actors and members of the crew?
 - the 1930s
 - the 1950s
 - the 1970s
- Which decade was noted for its dark, cynical films?
 - the 1960s
 - the 1970s
 - the 1980s
- What is the author's view?
 - that people have a dwindling attention span so skipping the intro is a good thing
 - that films require more patience from the audience so intros should remain
 - that people should watch intros to preserve a little piece of history

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5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text.

1. a two-word phrasal verb meaning *arrive* (para 1)
2. a three-word noun phrase meaning *not very important* (para 1)
3. a three-word noun phrase meaning *a situation that is the worst one that you can imagine* (para 1)
4. a noun meaning *a strong feeling of respect and admiration for someone or something* (para 4)
5. a six-word noun phrase used for saying that, although someone seems to be doing something in a strange way, there is a good reason for doing it that way (para 4)
6. an adjective meaning *very detailed and complicated* (para 7)
7. a noun meaning *a feeling of hating or strongly disliking women, or being prejudiced against them* (para 9)
8. a four-word verb phrase meaning *try to do something that will probably fail* (para 11)

6 Noun phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make phrases from the text.

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. anxiety | a. habits |
| 2. title | b. credits |
| 3. graphic | c. attack |
| 4. opening | d. sequence |
| 5. viewing | e. span |
| 6. attention | f. designer |

7 Word-building

Complete the sentences using the correct form of the word in brackets at the end of each sentence.

1. If we lose title sequences, we might lose something of _____ value. [ART]
2. The title sequence has a unique and _____ path through history. [COLOUR]
3. The audience's _____ with a film should begin with the first frame. [INVOLVE]
4. *Vertigo* was a twisted _____ on voyeurism and misogyny. [COMMENT]
5. Films require more _____ from their audience. [PATIENT]
6. Resist the _____ and watch the intro! [TEMPT]

8 Discussion

Discuss the statements.

- Anything that saves time is a good thing.
- Films aren't as good as they used to be.
- It's much better to watch a film at the cinema. Watching on a computer just isn't the same.

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KEY

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1. c
2. d
3. f
4. a
5. b
6. e

2 Key words

7. trailer
8. credits
9. shush
10. streaming
11. skip
12. pop up
13. drag
14. crew
15. groundbreaking
16. blockbuster

3 Find the information

17. Spike Lee
18. in March, 2017
19. three minutes
20. the 1990s
21. one
22. *Dr Strangelove*

4 Comprehension check

23. c
24. b
25. b
26. c

5 Find the word

27. turn up
28. no big deal
29. worst-case scenario
30. reverence
31. there is method in the madness
32. elaborate
33. misogyny
34. fight an uphill battle

6 Noun phrases

35. c
36. d
37. f
38. b
39. a
40. e

7 Word-building

41. artistic
42. colourful
43. involvement
44. commentary
45. patience
46. temptation