

Media Journey

REQUIREMENT 1 – Reality TV

1) Name Reality TV shows you have seen (not just seen a commercial, but actually watched)

2) Learn about 3 different kinds of reality TV shows:

Documentary-style or “slice-of-life”

Camera shooting and footage editing give the viewer the impression that they are passive observers following people going about their daily personal and professional activities; this style of filming is often referred to as [fly on the wall](#) or [factual television](#). Story "plots" are often constructed via editing or planned situations, with the results resembling soap operas—hence the terms *docus soap* and *docudrama*. In other shows, a [cinéma vérité](#) style is adopted, where the filmmaker is more than a passive observer—their presence and influence is a large part of the show.

Competition

Another sub-genre of reality TV is "reality [competition](#)" or so-called "reality game shows," which follow the format of a non-tournament [elimination contests](#). Typically, participants are filmed competing to win a prize, often while living together in a confined environment. In many cases, participants are removed until only one person or team remains, who/which is then declared the winner. Usually this is done by eliminating participants one at a time, in [balloon debate](#) style, through either [disapproval voting](#) or by voting for the most popular choice to win. Voting is done by the viewing audience, the show's own participants, a panel of judges, or some combination of the three.

A well-known example of a reality-competition show is the globally-syndicated [Big Brother](#), in which cast members live together in the same house, with participants removed at regular intervals by either the viewing audience or, in the case of the American version, by the participants themselves.

There remains some disagreement over whether talent-search shows such as the [Idol series](#), [America's Got Talent](#), [Dancing with the Stars](#), and [Celebrity Duets](#) are truly reality television, or just newer incarnations of shows such as [Star Search](#). Although the shows involve a traditional talent search, the

shows follow the reality-competition conventions of removing one or more contestants per episode and allowing the public to vote on who is removed; the *Idol* series also require the contestants to live together during the run of the show (though their daily life is never shown onscreen). Additionally, there is a good deal of interaction shown between contestants and judges. As a result, such shows are often considered reality television, and the American [Primetime Emmy Awards](#) have nominated both [American Idol](#) and *Dancing with the Stars* for the [Outstanding Reality-Competition Program](#) Emmy.

Self-Improvement/Makeover

Some reality television shows cover a person or group of people improving their lives. Sometimes the same group of people are covered over an entire season (as in [The Swan](#) and [Celebrity Fit Club](#)), but usually there is a new target for improvement in each episode. Despite differences in the content, the format is usually the same: first the show introduces the subjects in their current, less-than-ideal environment. Then the subjects meet with a group of experts, who give the subjects instructions on how to improve things; they offer aid and encouragement along the way. Finally, the subjects are placed back in their environment and they, along with their friends and family and the experts, appraise the changes that have occurred. Other self-improvement or makeover shows include "How Do I Look?" (fashion makeover), [The Biggest Loser](#) and [Fat March](#), (which covers weight loss), [Extreme Makeover](#) (entire physical appearance), [Queer Eye](#) and [What Not to Wear](#) (style and grooming), [Supernanny](#) (child-rearing), [Made](#) (attaining difficult goals), [Trinny & Susannah Undress](#) (fashion makeover and marriage), [Tool Academy](#) (relationship building) and [Charm School](#) and [From G's to Gents](#) (self-improvement and manners).

Side-Note: Sub-genres

Some reality shows are about a very specific “niche” or “genre” and the entire premise of the show is based on that. For example, *Cake Boss* is about a bakery, *Pawn Stars* is about a Pawn Shop, *American Idol* is about singing. These reality shows only focus on the specific niche for the entire series.

Of the shows you listed at the top, match the show with one of the 3 kinds of reality shows:

Show Name	Kind of Reality Show

3) Learn why there are so many reality TV shows on TV.

Why do you think TV networks have as many reality TV shows as they do traditional, scripted shows?

Write your answer here:

There is only one reason that networks have reality TV shows: money. What is a network's only goal? It is to make money. There is nothing else that a network is trying to do. When a network has a hit show, they get more viewers, which bring in more advertising dollars, which brings in more money. Networks are large corporations, they are not non-profit organizations or small businesses. They are publically traded (in the stock market) and they want to keep their stock prices high.

Write the name of your favorite non-reality TV show on the left; don't include game shows or talk shows. Then list out all the people that you think a network needs to pay in order to get a reality show. Now do the same thing for a reality show:

My favorite non-reality TV show:	Any Reality TV show:
People a network needs to pay in order to get a non-reality TV show on the air:	People a network needs to pay in order to get a reality tv show on the air:

The answers to the above are:

Any non-reality TV show	Any reality TV show
--------------------------------	----------------------------

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Writers 2) Actors 3) Crew (this includes camera crew, makeup, wardrobe, props, etc.) 4) Special effects are required for some TV shows like CSI, Bones, etc. 5) Producers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Crew 2) Producers

Reality TV show participants are not actors, and usually do not belong to the Screen Actors' Guild (SAG). This means they do not have to be paid. If a reality show hires writers, they are also usually not members of SAG.

What is the Screen Actors' Guild?

The **Screen Actors Guild (SAG)** is an American [labor union](#) representing over 200,000 [film](#) and television [principal performers](#) and [background performers](#) worldwide. According to SAG's Mission Statement, the Guild seeks to:

- negotiate and enforce collective bargaining agreements that establish equitable levels of compensation, benefits, and working conditions for its performers;
- collect compensation for exploitation of recorded performances by its members, and provide protection against unauthorized use of those performances;
- and preserve and expand work opportunities for its members

What is a TV Producer?

The primary role of a **television producer** is to control all aspects of production, ranging from show idea development and cast hiring to shoot supervision and fact-checking. It is often the producer who is responsible for the show's overall quality and survivability, though the roles depend on the particular show or organization.

Some producers take more of an executive role, in that they conceive new programs and pitch them to the networks, but upon acceptance they focus on business matters, such as budgets and contracts. Other producers are more involved with the day-to-day workings, participating in activities such as screenwriting, set design, casting, and even directing.

In television, there are a variety of different producers on a show. A traditional producer is one who manages a show's budget and maintains a schedule, but this is no longer the case in modern television. In fact, nowadays a producer is almost synonymous with a writer.

Now that you've learned a bit about the costs of producing TV shows and Reality TV shows, describe why Reality Shows are so cheap to produce. Also describe what you think it costs to produce a regular TV show:

And explain who makes the most money from a Reality TV show and why:

4) Ethical Problems with Some Reality Shows

Some have claimed that the success of reality television is due to its ability to satisfy the desire of viewers to see others humiliated. American magazine [Entertainment Weekly](#) wrote, "Do we watch reality television for precious insight into the human condition? Please. We watch for those awkward scenes that make us feel a smidge better about our own little unfiled lives." Media analyst Tom Alderman wrote, "There is a sub-set of Reality TV that can only be described as Shame TV because it uses humiliation as its core appeal."

Some reality shows may cross a line and exploit people who have problems so big, their ability to make a good judgement about being paraded on TV as a spectacle on a Reality Show is impaired.

The definition of [exploitation of people](#):

Utilization of another person or group for selfish purposes. To take advantage of a person, situation, etc., especially unethically or unjustly, for one's own selfish ends.

Critical thinking exercise

Three reality shows that may cross the line into Exploitation. All the people on these shows have serious medical disorders:

- 1) **The Biggest Loser** – a show that features morbidly obese people
- 2) [Intervention](#) – a show that features people with severe drug additions
- 3) [Hoarders](#) – a show that features people with a serious, untreated mental disorder (compulsive hoarding)

The Biggest Loser is an [American reality game show](#) that debuted on [NBC](#) October 19, 2004. The show features [obese](#) people competing to win a cash prize by losing the highest percentage of weight relative to their initial weight.

The show is currently in its eleventh season (normally the show features two seasons per year); Season 11 premiered on January 4, 2011. [Read about The Biggest Loser if you have never seen it.](#)

Think Critically:

Obese people are extremely unhealthy, and sometimes are only a few years away from death due to their very serious health crisis.

The Biggest Loser's premise is based around getting kicked off the show if you are the person or team who lost the least amount of weight in a week. According to the United States Government ([nutrition.gov](#)) very obese people, only under a doctor's strict supervision (meeting your doctor every few days), should only be losing 3-5 pounds a week, and only for the short-term of 3 months. After that time, they should continue on a long-term weight-loss program of .5-2 pounds a week, which is the international recommended standard of a healthy amount of weight for anyone to lose.

On the biggest loser, contestants are encouraged to lose 10 pounds or more a week. They are required to wear a sports bra and workout shorts (women) and workout shorts (men) and get on the scale at the end of each show to see how they did for the week.

Do you think that The Biggest Loser is acting in the contestants' best interests by encouraging them to lose more than 5 pounds a week, or get kicked off the show? Why?

How do you think the contestants feel when they have to only wear a sports bra and workout shorts on national television?

Do you think that the contestants on Biggest Loser are exploited? Why or why not?

When you watch TV shows, you support them. You drive up ratings, which increases ad revenue to the network, which keeps a show on the air, and makes the networks rich.

Now that you have read and thought about Reality shows that may exploit people, would you watch one of these shows? Why or why not?

The Reality of Reality TV

The one thing that ALL reality shows have in common, is that they are not real at all. Reality television shows are among the most scripted kinds of television shows on the air. How can this be?

"Reality" as misnomer

Some commentators have said that the name "reality television" is an inaccurate description for several styles of program included in the genre.^[2] [Irene McGee](#), a castmember on the 1998 [The Real World: Seattle](#), has done public speaking tours about the negative and misleading aspects of reality TV.

Unreal environments

In competition-based programs such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, and other special living environment shows like *The Real World*, the producers design the format of the show and control the day-to-day activities and the environment, creating a completely [fabricated](#) world in which the competition plays out. Producers specifically select the participants and use carefully designed scenarios, challenges, events, and settings to encourage particular behaviors and conflicts. [Mark Burnett](#), creator of *Survivor* and other reality shows, has agreed with this assessment, and avoids the word "reality" to describe his shows; he has said, "I tell good stories. It really is not reality TV. It really is unscripted drama."^[41]

Misleading editing

In 2004, [VH1](#) aired a program called *Reality TV Secrets Revealed*, which detailed various misleading tricks of reality TV producers.^[42] According to the show, various reality shows (notably [Joe Millionaire](#)) combined audio and video from different times, or from different sets of footage, to create an artificial illusion of time chronology that did not occur, and a misportrayal of participant behaviors and actions.

In docusoap programming, which follows people in their daily life, producers may be highly deliberate in their editing strategies, able to portray certain participants as heroes or villains,

and may guide the drama through altered chronology and selective presentation of events. A Season 3 episode of [Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe](#) included a segment on the ways in which selective editing can be used to this end.^[13]

Restaging

According to VH1's *Reality TV Secrets Revealed*, the shows [The Restaurant](#) and [Survivor](#) had at times recreated incidents that had actually occurred, but were not properly recorded by cameras to the required technical standard, or had not been recorded at all. In order to get the footage, the event was restaged for the cameras.

Premeditated scripting and acting

Reality television shows have faced speculation that the participants themselves are involved in fakery, acting out [storylines](#) that have been planned in advance by producers.^[2] [The Hills](#) is one notable example; the show has long faced allegations that its plots are scripted ahead of time. During the second season of [Hell's Kitchen](#), it was speculated that the customers eating meals prepared by the contestants were in fact paid actors.^[43] Some participants of reality shows have also stated afterwards that they altered their behavior to appear more crazy or emotional in order to get more camera time.

[Daniel Petrie Jr.](#), former president of the [Writers Guild of America, west](#), an organization that represents 9,000 Hollywood film and television writers, stated: "We look at reality TV, which is billed as unscripted, and we know it is scripted. We understand that shows don't want to call the writers writers because they want to maintain the illusion that it is reality, that stuff just happens."^[2]

Misleading premise

Even the premise of shows has been called into question. The winner of the [first "cycle"](#), in 2003, of [America's Next Top Model](#), [Adrienne Curry](#), claimed that part of the grand prize she received, a modeling contract with [Revlon](#), was for a much smaller amount of work than what was promised throughout the show.^[44] During the airing of the first season of [A Shot at Love with Tila Tequila](#), in which a group of both men and women vied for the heart of [Tila Tequila](#), there were rumors that its star was not only heterosexual, but also had a boyfriend already.^[45] The show's winner, [Bobby Banhart](#), claimed that he never saw Ms. Tequila again after the show finished taping, and that he was never even given her telephone number.^[46]

From MEdia The Journey Book:

When Reality Isn't Reality

Reality TV has made countless celebrities out of virtual “nobodies.” But reality TV isn’t reality.

“It’s probably the most scripted television in Los Angeles,” says TV producer **Melissa Freeman Fuller**.

Fuller has seen crew members set up situations, feed lines to the participants, plant people in scenes, and edit shots to make them appear more dramatic or interesting. She could give dozens of examples, but the most extreme are from her time in Las Vegas filming a series called “Caesars 24/7” for A&E. The show was meant to capture all the drama of running a large hotel. To accomplish this, many scenes had to be invented or embellished.

The crew, including Fuller, told cast members how to act and what to say. Even when a wedding cake accidentally dropped on the floor, the crew asked that it be done again—to get a better shot. They even asked the people involved to change their reactions.

Inventive tactics continued in the editing rooms, where people’s quotes were taken out of context or spliced together to make them fulfill whatever “role” the show needed. “You can be the nicest person in the world. But by the time we cut you up, you’re a monster,” Fuller says. (The term coined for this practice is “Franken-editing,” after Victor Frankenstein, the monster-making scientist in Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein*.)

Not all shows are so highly produced, but “the demand for shock value has made the industry do some pretty shameless things to boost ratings,” Fuller says. These days, though, she rarely watches.

Melissa Freeman Fuller’s credits

Eleven years in the industry—first as a camera assistant and then as associate producer and writer for various shows, including “Arrest & Trial,” “Girls Behaving Badly,” “Fear Factor,” and “Junkyard Wars,” an engineering game show. Plus four years with The History Channel’s “Modern Marvels” series.

So if Reality TV can edit, re-stage and script nice, regular people to appear to be horrible, mean and nasty people, or really stupid, weird or selfish people, why do people keep signing up to be on Reality TV shows?

The Potential for Instant celebrity

Reality television has the potential to turn its participants into national [celebrities](#), at least for a short period. This is most notable in talent-search programs such as the *Idol* series, which has spawned music stars in many of the countries in which it has aired. Many other shows, however, such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, have made at least temporary celebrities out of their

participants; some participants have then been able to parlay this fame into media careers. For example, [Elisabeth Hasselbeck](#), a contestant on [Survivor: The Australian Outback](#), later became a host on morning talk show [The View](#); and [Kristin Cavallari](#), who appeared on [Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County](#), has gone on to become a television host and actress. [Michael "The Situation" Sorrentino](#), who appeared on MTV's [Jersey Shore](#), was able to parlay his fame into lucrative endorsement deals. [Jamie Chung](#), a former contestant on [The Real World](#), went on to pursue an acting career, starring in films such as [Dragonball Evolution](#). [Tiffany Pollard](#), originally a contestant on [Flavor of Love](#), was eventually given four additional reality series of her own on VH1: [I Love New York](#), [I Love New York 2](#), [New York Goes to Hollywood](#) and [New York Goes to Work](#). In Britain, [Jade Goody](#) became famous after appearing on [Big Brother 3](#) in 2002; she later appeared on other reality programs, wrote a bestselling autobiography and launched a top-selling perfume line. She later received extensive media coverage during her battle with [cervical cancer](#), from which she died in 2009. [Mike "The Miz" Mizanin](#), who has appeared on [The Real World](#) and various spin-offs, later became a professional wrestler for World Wrestling Entertainment.

Some reality-television alumni take on the role of professional greeters at nightclubs, appear at automobile shows, and the like.

Reality TV contestants are sometimes derided as "[Z-list celebrities](#)" or "nonebrities" who have done nothing to warrant their newfound fame.^[47] The newspaper *The Sun* defined a "nonebrity" as "a pointless media figure who would love to rise up high enough to scrape on to the bottom end of the D-list."^[47]

It's because some of these people think that the potential to ruin their reputations on national TV is a risk they will take – because they could become very rich! Some of the former Reality TV stars go on to earn millions of dollars in acting careers, endorsements, talk shows, appearances and more!

Would you ever consider appearing on a Reality TV show? Why or why not?

If you could create a reality show, what would it be about and how would you do it?

Come up with one more question about Reality TV, and ask Melissa about it when you hand in this worksheet.