

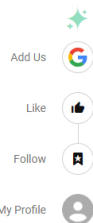


Should You Skip Filler Episodes in Anime?



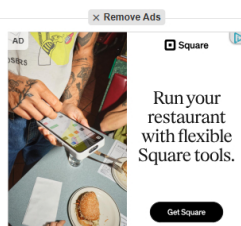
By Rachel Sandell Published Sep 24, 2023, 4:30 AM EDT

Rachel Sandell is an experienced editor and proofreader with a love for language and storytelling. A graduate of the creative writing MFA program, The Rainier Writing Workshop, she is the author of five short stories and analyzes the different facets of fiction her spare time. She's also a huge...



Long-running TV shows are bound to have an episode or two that isn't essential to the plot. Some shows run for years across many seasons, so a few episodes are going to be just plain skippable. Anime, especially, suffers from these skippable episodes, which can even elongate into long-running arcs, turning large chunks of seasons into filler. And in the case of shows like *Naruto Shippuden*, filler episodes can accumulate so much screen time that wading through it feels needless and frustrating.

Naruto Shippuden filler is an extreme case (of about 500 episodes, approximately 190 of them are skippable, meaning that over one-fifth of the whole series is filler), but it's true that anime, as a genre, runs the risk of having filler episodes and arcs that go nowhere, and they are widely considered to be a waste of screen time. At the end of the day, filler episodes are skippable, it's true — but *should* you skip them? Are you missing anything by jumping ahead to the next relevant plot point? The short answer: yes. The filler is important. Bear with me; here's why.



Why Anime Filler Episodes in Shows like 'Naruto Shippuden' Exist



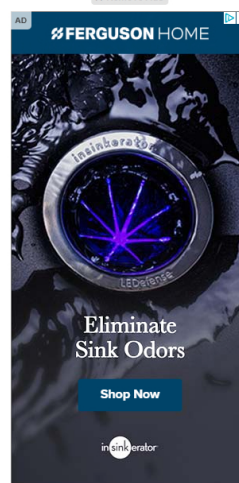
The reasons for filler episodes in anime can be numerous — depending on the show, the filler episodes serve different purposes. But they do serve a purpose of some sort. Consider TV adaptations of stories like *Naruto Shippuden* and *Fullmetal Alchemist*. For both of these cases, the manga that the shows are based on weren't finished by the time production on the TV versions began. Western adaptations sometimes do this, and *Game of Thrones* is an example of the show finishing before the book series. However, in the case of *Game of Thrones*, author **George R. R. Martin** gave the showrunners an idea of how the story ends.



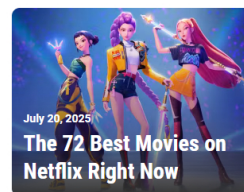
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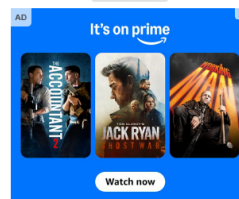
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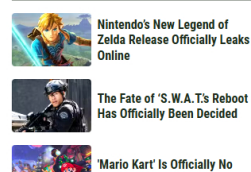
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Naruto Shippuden and *Fullmetal Alchemist* took different approaches. *Naruto Shippuden* ran out of source material to adapt, so, to avoid straying too far from future source material, the show started airing filler episodes and slowed down to wait for more manga chapters. This is a solid reason to slow down and wait for the source material to catch up, and filler episodes can be engaging even if they have no bearing on future plot points. This also helps the show maintain a faithful adaptation of the manga without stopping the show and losing audience interest in the interim. In the case of *Attack on Titan*, the showrunners chose to wait for more manga chapters to release so they could tell the story faithfully; however, they ended up with a five-year gap between seasons one and two, during which the hype for the show started to die down a little. Thankfully, the show remains **one of the most popular modern anime**, and the five-year gap didn't hurt the franchise as much as it could have. It was, however, a risk.

Fullmetal Alchemist is an interesting case in that there are two versions of the anime: one that didn't wait for the manga to catch up and one that did. *Fullmetal Alchemist (2003)* kept running despite the manga's **unfinished status**, with a blessing from the author, **Hiromu Arakawa**, to take a completely different direction with the story. The second anime adaptation, *Fullmetal Alchemist: Brotherhood* (2009), took a direction that was much more faithful to the manga, nearly being a one-for-one retelling. Both series had very few filler episodes but for very different reasons, and each show is a completely different story after a certain point. Whereas filler episodes/arcs aren't necessarily useful on the surface, there are valid reasons for including them. Depending on the series, filler episodes can be immensely useful — and fun!

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Using Filler for Downtime and Characterization



Whether it's an entire battle arc or the classic beach episode, filler episodes come in a wide variety. No matter which tone it conveys, filler does have a use other than external reasons like following the manga, and that is characterization. Especially for plot-heavy stories, it can be easy to overlook character-building moments that occur during filler episodes. While filler episodes, by definition, don't further plot or characterization in terms of story and are generally technically skippable, it can be enlightening to **watch how characters behave in their downtime**, while the pressure of following the story is off. (Besides that, it can be fun to see familiar characters let loose and just have a fun day at the beach.) The plot beats and important character development is crucial, but it can be just as illuminating character-wise to watch the protagonist do nothing in particular.

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For filler episodes and arcs with completely anime-original storylines that go nowhere, there's also a certain level of freedom that goes with the knowledge that this portion of the story will have no bearing on the plot. Filler moments help to round out the story world and are absolutely worth investing in.

Some Anime Like 'One Piece' Have Less Filler Episodes



Don't get me wrong: filler episodes can be absolutely mind-numbing and, especially if you don't see them coming, frustrating when all you want to do is get back to the main story. Deciding whether to skip filler depends on the show, and on what you are willing to define as important to the story and characters. It all essentially comes down to what you want to spend your time watching. *Naruto Shippuden*'s filler episodes total more than 100, making up more than a fifth of the series as a whole. In contrast, *One Piece*'s episode list has increased to more than 1,000 episodes, of which only 90-some are filler. Each show uses filler in its own way and to varying degrees of success. Some are fun, others are boring, but they are all worth a try.

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All in all, filler episodes are absolutely worth watching and experiencing, if not for the furthering of plot then for a full, well-rounded story moment. Seeing how character behave in their downtime and how they interact with non-important and plot-irrelevant characters present new perspectives on the story, as well as help to slow the plot down, whether to give the source material time to catch up or to give the audience a moment to catch their breath. When it comes to anime, filler is an important part of the anime experience. Just like the genre itself, filler can be hit or miss, but it's definitely trying out. Next time you come across a list of "skippable" *Naruto* episodes or find yourself **facing a seemingly useless arc**, take a closer look and ask what purpose these episodes might fulfill. Try not to jump on that skip button — these nothing moments might actually be well worth your time.

SUMMARY

- Anime filler episodes, although skippable, serve a purpose and can be important to the overall story and character development.
- Filler episodes provide downtime and allow for characterization, giving viewers a chance to see how characters behave when not focused on the main plot.
- The amount of filler episodes varies between anime series, with some shows like *One Piece* having fewer fillers compared to others like *Naruto Shippuden*, but all filler episodes are worth giving a try.

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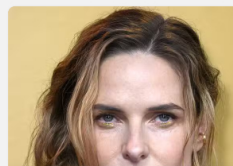
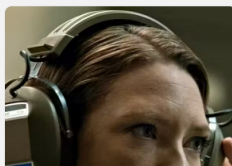
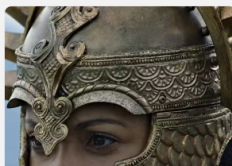
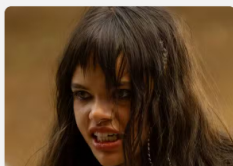
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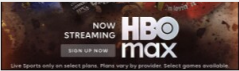
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