

# Pet Peeves on Parade

How does television annoy me? Let me count the 14 ways. | **By Richard G. Carter**

**H**ave you ever stopped to think how annoying watching television has become? Perhaps, if like me, you've been around long enough to have seen everything from grainy black-and-white reception on a small screen in a boxy wooden housing, to a crystal clear, high-definition picture in living color on a huge screen housed in sleek metal alloys.

Most noteworthy of all, we've witnessed the advent of multi-channel cable television which has turned over-the-air broadcast TV into a dinosaur — especially the latter's limited news programming, which is a day late and a dollar short.

Yes, the world of the TV watcher has changed considerably over the last half-century. Happily, most of the new things are far better than what came before, such as those revolutionary flat screens and spiffy remote control devices that have turned so many of us into willing couch potatoes.

Unhappily, however, some new wrinkles make me hanker for the not always good old days, when a TV set in the home was considered a luxury and made you the envy of your neighbors.

As a matter of fact, a lot of the newer innovations foisted off on viewers—with apologies to Alfred Hitchcock—are strictly for the birds.

So, for better or for worse, here's a look at my "Fearless 14" of the most bothersome aspects of today's TV-viewing—including complaints reported to me in reader letters, as well as by many friends and neighbors. Look out below:

**On-screen clutter:** Why do networks and local stations place their logos in the picture—insulting our intelligence and spoiling the image? We know what channel we're watching. Even more intrusive is the ugly message bar at the bottom of the screen on many cable news and sports channels. This greatly reduces the picture and blocks the action — especially in sports telecasts. Golfers know what I mean. While it's nice to be kept abreast of breaking news, give us a break! The repetitive sports scores and irrelevant filler material is ridiculous and the crawling words distract the eye.

**Shrinking credits:** Discerning movie fans want to know who played what

part and participated in making a film. We love reading credits at the end. So why do many broadcast stations shrink closing credits to half-screen to preview upcoming programs or show anchor people touting the news? And speed-up closing credits for a TV show so they are virtually unreadable? Premium cable movie channels such as Encore and Starz also downsize closings credits to tout upcoming films. Dumb!

**Ill-informed news anchors:** Have you heard the one about the news anchor who called combat soldiers “fire fighters” while discussing an Iraq War “fire fight”? Earth to anchor lady: Fire fighters extinguish fires. Combat soldiers do “fire fights.” Many also mispronounce names or words or screw-up dates. MSNBC newsreader Chris Jansing referred to famed St. Louis Cardinals’ play-by-play announcer Jack Buck as Jack Burk. And NBC reporter Norah O’Donnell told viewers Pancho Villa was driven out of Texas in 1960. Uh, Ms. O’Donnell, that historic event took place in 1916.

**Ill-advised pro basketball announcers:** In a game where a player’s height means everything, viewers these days rarely are given this information. An exception is Walt (Clyde) Frazier on Madison Square Garden Network’s telecasts of the New York Knicks. A 6-4 Hall of Fame guard, he knows how vital this is. Good for you, Clyde.

**Politically correct commercials:** Everyone knows American society has become more and more racially diverse, which is fine. But is it necessary to beat us over the head? Why are so many commercials so unrealistically

politically correct? For example, why are black males and/or females in situations with white males and/or females that are not true-to-life? Speaking as a black man, I resent this. Let’s face it, most social situations are not racially mixed—so, why not tell it like it is?

**Showboating athletes:** Many people in this media-oriented age—especially children and teen-agers—emulate what they see on TV. Thus, when athletes in televised games behave in an outrageous “look-at-me” fashion—often highlighted on ESPN SportsCenter—there’s no reason for concern. In addition to muscle flexing, chest beating and duck walking, here are two revolting examples: After New Orleans Saints’ Joe Horn caught a scoring pass, teammate Michael Lewis extracted a hidden cell phone from goal-post padding and handed it to Horn, who punched in numbers and pranced around making conversation. After celebrating a touchdown, Chad Johnson of the Cincinnati Bengals displayed a printed sign hidden in nearby snow that proclaimed “Dear NFL : Please don’t fine me again. Merry Christmas.” Instead of ignoring such exhibitionist, often vulgar, behavior, SportsCenter shows this stuff incessantly.

**“We’ve got to take a break to pay some bills.”** Speaking of news anchors, are you, like me, tired of someone telling us they’re going to a commercial with these foolish words? Perhaps they think it’s cute. But it’s not—just silly and annoying. And I have heard it from some of the best-known network talking heads and news readers. Are you listening, Brit Hume, et al?

**Letterboxed movies:** Otherwise wonderful Turner Classic Movies is the leading offender. Named for its slim, rectangular image, letterboxing drastically squishes the vertical picture with repulsive thick, black horizontal borders at the top and bottom. It is pure visual pollution. Viewing a film this way is akin to looking through a basement window from the inside. Designed to show actors at far left and right of a wide-screen film, it's distracting and often cuts off tops of heads. I've heard more gripes about this than any other aspect of movies on TV. C'mon, TCM. It's OK to deep-six the LB.

**Anchorpersons who smile when reporting bad news:** As a veteran print and broadcast journalist, I am well aware that bad news sells. Most people gravitate to a story about a natural disaster, murder, fire or tragic death, which is why the media so often lead with the worst news of the day. Thus, why do we often see TV news anchors — especially on the local level — smiling while delivering bad news? Is it nervousness, inexperience or plain stupidity? This is the ultimate in bad taste.

**Ignoring PA announcers in pro sports:** Sadly, the networks have gotten away from letting us see and hear pro football and basketball players and boxers introduced over the loudspeaker at the scene of weekly events. As participants are introduced to the in-person crowd, TV viewers are denied this excitement and subjected to the jibber-jabber of TV analysts. The only time it's done properly these days is for championship fights or championship football and basketball games.

**Cutting movies for language or to fit a time slot:** Yes, I know those who want R-rated movies and shows such as *Sex in the City* can subscribe to premium cable such as HBO, Cinemax and Showtime. Yet, why do non-cable networks and local channels schedule adult programming if they bleep every other word? In the case of award-winning films such as "The Godfather," "The French Connection" and "Dog Day Afternoon," for example, this is a sacrilege. And wholesale cuts to squeeze a two-hour movie into a 90-minute, commercial-addled slot, is madness.

**Joining games in progress:** This most often occurs when the first game of a pro football or basketball doubleheader runs long—which is the nature of such contests. However, prior to switching to the second game, networks often air several minutes of commercials, depriving viewers of parts of the games they tuned-in to watch. Hey ya'll, how about holding these commercials until half-time?

**Overkill of so-called "news":** Coverage of salacious criminal cases involving Jon Benet Ramsey, Scott Peterson, O.J. Simpson, Michael Jackson and the "runaway bride" — to name a few — are among cheesy stories foisted off ad nauseam on TV viewers the last dozen years. Cable's 24-hour news channels are most at fault here.

**Annoying sideline sports reporters:** How often, when viewing pro basketball, have you endured the likes of Michelle Tafoya, Craig Sager, Jim Gray or Cheryl Miller talking over the action or depriving viewers of game images while asking a spectator innocuous questions?

Why not save these silly interludes for pre-game, halftime and post-game? This also happens at football games and big fights.

**Bottom line:** TV has come a long way, baby, but sometimes, it seems it lost

its way getting from there-to-here. My advice to those who are running the show is to take a long look at how your product is perceived by the only people who count—your viewers. Then go back to the drawing board and figure out a better way.

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