

## **r/FanFiction: A Positive, Collaborative Community**

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Using 3 late days for all members

## Abstract

Consisting of over 265,000 users (as of March 31, 2022), r/FanFiction is a one-stop-shop for fanfiction writers and readers alike. With an average of 64 posts and 1064 comments per day [8], this subreddit (or sub) is quite active compared to its counterparts (on Reddit or otherwise). This study will analyze the site according to Amy Jo Kim's Nine Design Principles [2]. During this analysis, the firsthand experiences of 9 users of the subreddit will be introduced and elaborated upon. This paper will argue that the moderation practices of r/FanFiction are a large contributor to the sub's notably positive atmosphere which, in parallel, causes the community to be very collaborative and inspirational in nature.

*Keywords:* Online community, fanfiction, fics, Reddit, moderation, collaboration

## r/FanFiction: A Positive, Collaborative Community

r/FanFiction is the largest fanfiction related subreddit (sub) on the entire Reddit site. As of March 31, 2022, this site has over 265,000 total users and averages about 64 posts and 1064 comments per day [8]. On this sub, any user is able to browse, post, or reply to anything related to fanfiction. Unlike many similar subreddits, r/FanFiction has several provisions for community building incorporated into its page. From customizable flairs to monthly contests, the sub includes a few notable features that establish and encourage camaraderie amongst members of the community. This paper will analyze the r/FanFiction according to Amy Jo Kim's Nine Design Principles [2]. During this analysis, the firsthand experiences of 9 users of the subreddit will be introduced and elaborated upon. This paper will argue that the moderation practices of r/FanFiction are a large contributor to the sub's notably positive atmosphere which, in parallel, causes the community to be very collaborative and inspirational in nature.

A brief analysis of r/FanFiction according to Ray Oldenberg's definition of a "third place" reveals that this subreddit is, in fact, a third place. In *The Great Good Place*, Oldenburg describes eight requirements for a place to be a third place [4]. 1) The users of this subreddit have complete control of when they join and or leave, so r/FanFiction is considered "neutral ground" by Oldenberg's definition. 2) This subreddit is also a leveler, as pseudo-anonymity ensures that no users' socioeconomic status gives them any direct advantages over another user. 3) The home page of the sub consists purely of conversation between users, so conversation is clearly the main activity. 4) The users of r/FanFiction are readers and writers of fanfiction, and the sub is accessible and openly accommodates users of each type and of varying levels of expertise. 5) Regulars on r/FanFiction are those that can be found posting and replying often, while simultaneously embodying and setting the atmosphere of the subreddit. They set an

example for newcomers. 6) The subreddit does indeed maintain “a low profile”. There is a general consensus that the subreddit is very positive (more details given later), making it feel like a “safe space” to several users. 7) r/FanFiction moderates conversation in a way that prevents hostile or targeted posts from impacting the community. 8) Members come to the subreddit when they feel depressed, and it provides warmth and support.

### **Related Work**

Our study of r/FanFiction intersects prior research in Reddit as an online community and fanfiction. Although r/FanFiction has never explicitly been studied before, we were able to find two studies which recruited participants from r/FanFiction as part of their studies [5][6]. The first study by Reysen *et al.* [5] recruited participants from r/FanFiction and other fanfiction-related sites to study whether ingroup projection, the act of projecting one’s subgroup onto a larger superordinate group, plays a role in the relationship between ingroup identification and ingroup bias. They discovered that in the fanfiction community, ingroup projection is predictive of ingroup bias and that group identification significantly predicts a participant’s degree of ingroup. The second study [6], on the other hand, recruited participants from r/FanFiction and many other sites to determine to what degree readers perform literary analysis on their pleasure readings. By performing a qualitative and quantitative analysis, Rouse concluded that the comments of fanfiction works contained not only methods of learned literary analysis but also a developing community that was interested and supported in the work. This further informs our research on r/FanFiction as a community, and we hope to expound upon how users develop connections through their common interest in fanfiction.

## Methods

The authors spent over 30 hours on r/FanFiction observing the characteristics and participants of the subreddit. They recorded detailed field notes over at least five days each. Interview requests were sent to participants through the Reddit chat function; participants were selected based on any notable posts or comments that they made. One such example template for contacting participants is listed below:

Hi! My name is [researcher name], and I'm a student researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology in the USA. I and two partners are studying r/FanFiction as the focus of our research project for the Online Communities class at Tech. I really liked the discussion that your post about [topic] from a couple days ago inspired, and I was wondering if I could interview you for my study. This would entail a single 90-minute session, either through audio/video or synchronous chat at a time of your choosing. Our study is IRB-approved, and if you have any questions about the study or the class, our professor is Dr. Amy Bruckman - <https://www.cc.gatech.edu/fac/Amy.Bruckman/>. Thanks and I hope to hear back from you soon!

Each researcher interviewed three users, at least one of which was conducted through audio, and the rest of which were conducted through a real-time chat platform such as Reddit chat. Interview questions were developed according to the guidelines from Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* [9]. Serena interviewed Alice, R. D. Aya, and Evia. Gabrielle interviewed Carter, Brendan, and Alex. Eric interviewed Rose, SkyFather, and Lauren. Each interviewee has a profile outlined below, which have been anonymized appropriately using light disguise as described by Dr. Bruckman in *Studying the Amateur Artist: A Perspective on Disguising Data Collected in Human Subjects Research on the Internet* [1].

## **Alice**

This interviewee requested to remain anonymous, so an alias is used. Alice is a 40-year-old woman who speaks English, French, and Shona. The highest level of school that she has completed is a postgraduate degree, and she both reads and writes fanfiction on Archive of Our Own. Some of her main interests are Harry Potter, Jeeves and Wooster, and Lord of the Rings. Alice joined Reddit about three years ago, and she joined r/FanFiction about two years ago. She considers herself an active participant on the subreddit, but she participated on it more heavily in the past, during which she was online for more than 10 hours a week.

## **R. D. Aya**

This interviewee requested to use this name. R.D. Aya is a young adult of about 18-22 years of age. He uses he/him and they/them pronouns. He speaks English and some Japanese. R. D. Aya reads and writes fanfiction primarily on Archive of Our Own, though he previously used Fanfiction.net. He enjoys reading fanfiction in the Street Fighter and Percy Jackson fandoms, but he is also open to reading fandom-blind fanfiction. He writes primarily for the Marvel fandom. He joined Reddit and r/FanFiction around the same time 3-4 months ago, in late December. He aims to improve his writing skills and find new fanfiction to read on the subreddit. He is active on the subreddit and spends about an hour on it every day.

## **Evia**

This interviewee requested to use this name. Evia is a 23-year-old that uses he/him and they/them pronouns. He primarily speaks English, and he has obtained a bachelor's degree in English and Creative Writing. He has been reading and writing fanfiction for over a decade, most recently on Archive of Our Own, and he is also a professional writer by trade. His favorite tropes in fanfiction are hurt/comfort and found family. He spends 1-2 hours daily on the subreddit. Evia

cites altruism and giving personal input as the main reasons for participating on r/FanFiction. He had previously been in other fanfiction-centric communities on Tumblr and Discord, but they ceased to be active, leading him to join r/FanFiction.

### **Carter**

This interviewee requested to use this name. Carter is a 23-year-old male who uses he/him pronouns. His primary language is English, and the highest level of education that he has achieved is a bachelor's degree. He has been interested in fanfiction and fan work since he was in middle school, and he started using r/FanFiction approximately 8 years ago. He notes that his usage has been variable over time based on his mood and schedule. Nowadays, he reports that he uses the subreddit on average 5 days a week yet admits that he was a lot more active, participating daily, in the past when he was in high school. His primary fandom has also evolved over time. In middle school, he became interested in fanfiction after reading some Hunger Games fics, and nowadays, he is most interested in My Little Pony fics. Additionally, he was inspired to start writing his own fanfiction after seeing the community of writers on r/FanFiction and interacting with some. For him, r/FanFiction has provided him an opportunity to explore niche interests, and the community has provided a support system for him, as he would look to the subreddit as a means of escape during tough times in his life.

### **Brendan**

This interviewee requested to remain anonymous, so an alias is used. Brendan is a 20-year-old male who uses he/him pronouns. His primary language is English, and he is currently in college. He has been using r/FanFiction for around two years and considers himself active compared to the average user on r/FanFiction. He started posting on the subreddit approximately a year after joining and currently posts at least 3 to 5 times a week. Brendan

enjoys reading and posting his own fanfiction on Fanfiction.net and on the Weekly Fic Showcase. He sees r/FanFiction as a great way to meet people with similar interests and improve your own personal fanfiction.

### **Alex**

This interviewee requested to remain anonymous, so an alias is used. Alex is a 21-year-old male who uses he/him pronouns. His primary language is English, and the highest level of education he received is a high school degree. He estimates that he was first introduced to the site approximately one and a half to two years ago, and he started posting on the subreddit a couple months into using the site. His favorite fandoms are Harry Potter and Avatar: The Last Airbender, and he enjoys both reading and writing his own fanfiction. He describes his average usage as a couple hours per week. He says that r/FanFiction has “opened my eyes to a bunch of different - like a whole new art form” and later states, “it’s kind of like being in a club at a school. It’s just, you know, you meet people that share a common interest.”

### **Rose**

This interviewee requested to remain anonymous, so an alias is used. Rose is a 27-year-old female who uses she/her pronouns. Her native language is Arabic, but her primary language is English. She has received her bachelor’s degree. She estimates that she was first introduced to the subreddit about one year ago, but did not begin posting on the subreddit until a few months after that. Currently, her favorite fanfictions involve anime (i.e., Naruto), but she has also been interested in My Chemical Romance, Supernatural, and various other fandoms. She reads and writes fanfiction. She estimates that she spends roughly 10-15 minutes at a time on the subreddit, and 30-40 minutes on it if she finds a post that interests her. When asked what the



subreddit meant to them, she stated that “it’s a source of comfort.” Because of her experience with the stress that comes with writing fanfiction, she also empathizes with other writers on the platform. She states that “seeing people struggling just the way as I am... it makes me sad, and I just want to comfort them [and] I’m glad that I have that opportunity to do so.”

### **SkyFather**

This interviewee requested to use this name. SkyFather is a male university student who uses he/him pronouns. His primary language is English. He estimates that he was first introduced to the subreddit roughly one and a half years ago, and he has only made comments under posts during his time in the subreddit. His favorite fandoms center around anime, including Naruto, My Hero Academia, and One Piece. SkyFather states that he does not really write fanfiction, though he has tried in the past. He also states that he spends very little time on r/FanFiction. Typically, he only clicks on the subreddit when an interesting post shows on his main feed, but it is not often that he purposely seeks out the subreddit. Despite this, SkyFather believes that r/FanFiction is “a place for me to interact with other people and find new ways of thinking, even if the way that they are found is not the most obvious.”

### **Lauren**

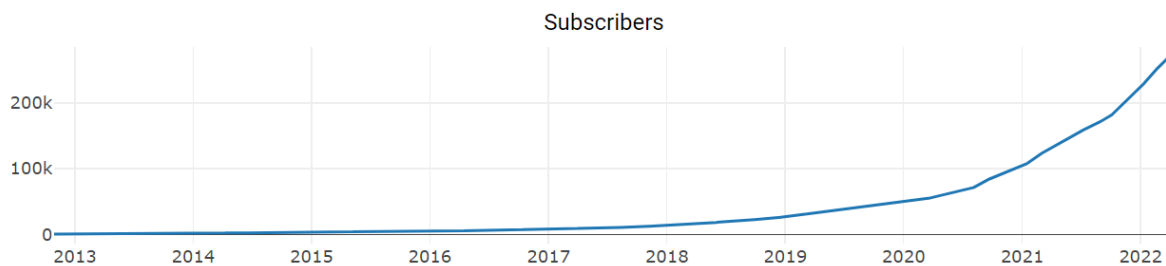
This interviewee requested to remain anonymous, so an alias is used. Lauren opted to remain anonymous. She is a 26-year-old female who uses she/her pronouns. Her primary languages are German and Russian, but she uses English in online environments. She has attended university. Lauren estimates that she joined the subreddit a few weeks prior to the interview (less than a month) and began posting on it a few days after joining. She switches fandoms almost every year but is currently a fan of “The Scum Villain’s Self-Saving System”. She estimates that she spends about half an hour each day on the subreddit. Because she only

joined the sub recently, when asked what r/FanFiction meant to her, she stated: “I’m pretty new to it, but I think I would like to continue to follow it.”

## Amy Jo Kim Design Principles

### Purpose

The community r/FanFiction is a subreddit on the host website, Reddit. Reddit itself is composed of numerous topic boards - subreddits/subs - where users can submit posts or media to be publicly viewable. Other users can then interact with these posts by using the rating system of upvotes and downvotes, giving awards, and replying with comments. As a subreddit, r/FanFiction is themed around fanfiction: fan-authored works of literature derived from existing media. r/FanFiction’s official description is “A supportive community for writers, readers, and reccers [recommenders] to talk about and share FanFiction”. Reddit was founded June 23, 2005, and r/FanFiction was created Aug 25, 2009, a few years after Reddit’s inception. As of the time this paper was written, r/FanFiction has 270,112 members and a lifetime average of 64 user-submitted posts daily, though that number has increased significantly and now hovers around 100 posts daily.



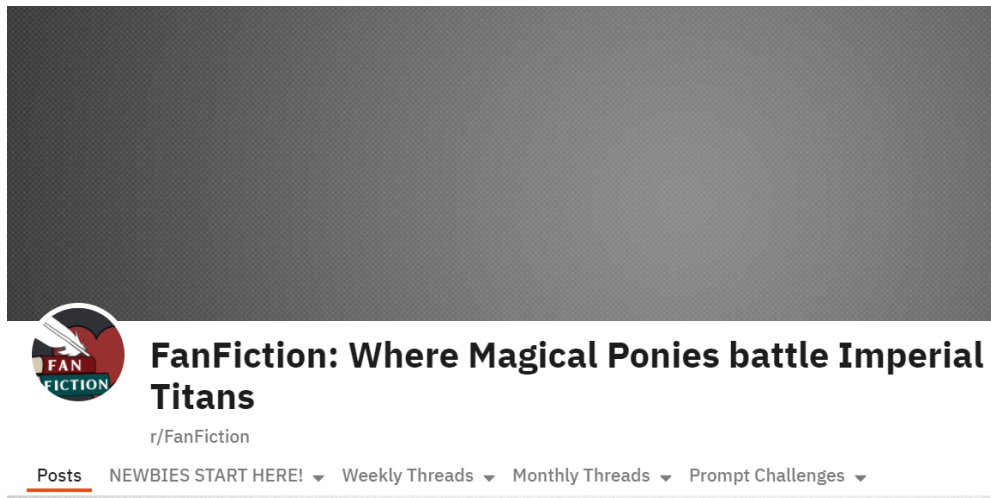
*Figure 1. Change in subscribers over time from subredditstats.com [8]*

**Audience.** r/FanFiction, as stated in its description, is for all people who engage with fanfiction: writers, readers, and recommenders. A common thread between interviewees was

wanting a community to talk about fanfiction with. Evia commented, “[r/FanFiction]’s just a great place to be, overall, because it ALSO has a big sense of community, like you mentioned. I get to interact with other readers and writers who have a similar interest: fic.” A vast variety of people from different walks of life populate the subreddit, and together they form a community that can bond over a hobby that is often ostracized. Alice described this phenomenon:

“Somebody on a thread once, I think they encapsulated it nicely that things - excuse my French, but basically things that teenage girls like, people love to shit on them, and just make it make it seem cringy and awful...But this sort of falls into the same category. People don't want to make themselves seem like weirdos in that they love fanfiction, so I don't think it's really talked about in real life.”

**Visual Appearance and Branding.** Unlike many subreddits, r/FanFiction displays the header title “FanFiction: Where Magical Ponies battle Imperial Titans”, a reference to the diverse source content encapsulated within fanfiction. There is also a header bar containing links and dropdowns to important information about the subreddit: “NEWBIES START HERE!” links to subreddit rules and FAQ, “Weekly Threads” and “Monthly Threads” link to all previous weekly and monthly themed moderator-created megathreads, and “Prompt Challenges” links to previous special themed events that did not follow the usual structure.



*Figure 2. r/FanFiction’s subreddit header and links [7]*

**Backstory.** r/FanFiction’s history extends from the history of fanfiction and fandom in general, in that it is a modern hub for those who engage with fanfiction. Fanfiction has its roots in the Star Trek fandom, and the fandom is still well and alive today. As for r/FanFiction, while it does have over a decade of activity, our research did not reveal many historical elements of the subreddit. Alice described a fictional local deity named “Our Lady of Perpetual Refreshing”. She said, “If you're writing, and you refresh because you want to have more hits, or more kudos, or more things in your inbox, and nothing's actually happened though, there's like this deity that's like, all wise and kind, and you can light a candle so that you get more hits.” This humorously reflects a dilemma many fanfiction writers have, which is increasing the audience for their works.

**Gathering Places.** Understanding the concept of “gathering places” within r/FanFiction is quite tricky. At first glance, there appears to only be one place for users to congregate: the subreddit’s Home Page. Conversations between users typically begin when one user makes a post and other users reply to said post. While it is possible for people to chat with individual users, there are not necessarily any places for people to gather within the subreddit.

**Places and Map.** Upon further exploration, though, it is evident that gathering places for this subreddit's users are a little more complex than what was previously mentioned. Instead of having gathering places within the subreddit, r/FanFiction supports the creation and membership of other smaller subreddits, as well as an external Discord server that is mentioned on the Sub Rules, FAQ and Weekly Threads page. On the sub's sidebar, there is a list of other subreddits that users may want to check out if they want to discuss specific types of content (i.e., fandom-specific content, writing help, recommendations, etc.). As of March 31, 2022, there are 35 subreddits advertised in this section of the sub's sidebar. Since these subreddits are content-specific, they are also smaller. Rose, who is also a user of r/NarutoFanFiction, believes that they are more likely to be recognized on r/NarutoFanFiction than r/FanFiction. They state that "NarutoFanFiction [is] pretty small and it's not as active [...] so I'm pretty sure if [users] scroll back, they can see my older posts and be like 'Oh, I know this person!'". When asked if they would recognize any users on the site, Rose responded by saying: "Honestly, I don't pay attention to them. I don't even know their usernames at all." This pair of statements supports the notion that the external subreddits are more like gathering places than any of the sub's internal mechanisms.

Due to the large number of external gathering places, both subreddits and the Discord, it was decided that studying these sites firsthand was not feasible. As a result, information aside from that mentioned above is not available in this paper.

**Building.** In terms of account and environment building, r/FanFiction provides its users with the ability to add "flairs" to their posts and accounts. Flairs are required for posts, and ones with the incorrect flair are updated by the moderators. Account flairs are optional to users, but

they are commonly used as a way to identify certain key traits that are important to users (i.e., fandom, reader/writer, etc.).

**Gallery.** One of the defining features of this subreddit is its organized, community-wide threads. More information on their overarching effect on the community will be discussed in the later section titled Cyclic Events. However, there are four types of these community wide threads in particular that serve as a way for subreddit members to showcase their talents. First, the “Weekly Fic Showcase” is a weekly thread set aside for users to promote their (and others’) writings. Similarly, the weekly “Excerpt Extravaganza” thread is a place for users to share excerpts from their (or others’) stories (of length no longer than 10 line breaks). Thirdly, the “Weekend Writing” thread allows users to discuss their writing plans for a given weekend. These threads give users a way to explicitly show off their work in a way that they cannot do on the main page (as promotion on the home page is strictly prohibited).

### **Profiles that Evolve Over Time**

**Barriers to Entry.** As with many specialized communities, r/FanFiction has distinct vocabulary relating to its focus around fanfiction, such as BNF (big-name fan), concrit (constructive criticism, usually regarding writing), and AO3 (Archive of Our Own, a popular fanfiction hosting website). Some of these terms are easier to understand for users who have participated in fan communities before, but others are more writing-specific. r/FanFiction provides a short glossary of terms in their subreddit wiki. Notably, concrit is not listed on that glossary; Alice reported that she often Googled terminology for clarification when she first joined. Other than this, however, there are very few barriers to entry for r/FanFiction. Creating a Reddit account and clicking the Join button are all that is needed to join the community as an

entry-level member, though it is possible to browse - but not interact with - the subreddit without an account.

Upon joining, users are introduced to a number of helpful posts and master threads. There are moderator posts for the purpose of promoting others' or your own work (Weekly Fic Showcase), official posts for finding other volunteer users to edit your work (Beta Bartering), and even a post for users to offer up their expertise in order to fact-check fanfiction (Scholarly Sources). It is up to the user to explore these resources; the initial welcome message that all joiners of the subreddit receive does link to the "NEWBIES START HERE!" page, but it can be overwhelming to understand all the presented information without a human guide to mentor new users through the process. For example, Lauren "wasn't actually aware" of the moderator-hosted community events because she was relatively new to the community.

**Representation and History.** Users have the inherent capability to set their Reddit account's username, profile picture, and biography, among other features. On r/FanFiction, users can set their account flair - a colored tag that appears below the username - to some text. Often, users use this to show their username on their fanfiction website of choice or a short quote about themselves. By default, the user flair is empty, and r/FanFiction provides a few pre-populated fanfiction-related options for users: "OC FF Linker", "X-Over Maniac", "Plot? What Plot?", "Classicist", "Furry", "Get off my lawn!", and "Fiction Terrorist". Other than this, there is no official guideline for user flairs. History for each individual member can be found on the user's profile by navigating to their posts, or by using the search function on the subreddit and filtering by author:username.

## Promoting Effective Leadership

**Mentoring and Recruiting.** Although r/FanFiction does not have an explicitly advertised mentorship program for becoming a moderator (“mod”), there are certain ways that they promote becoming a mod and share experiences that can give insight into what it is like. Additionally, it is important to note that in the past, there may not have been a need for a mentorship program due to the subreddit’s smaller size. According to a recent public post from a mod on r/FanFiction, “at the beginning of 2020, we reached 50,000 members – a milestone that had taken almost a decade to achieve. Fast forward two years, a couple of lockdowns and a billion hours of enjoying fanfiction, and we are fast approaching 250,000 members in our little community.” The mod later explains in the same post that the recent increase in members and popularity of r/FanFiction has led to a substantial increase in workload for the mod team, and therefore, they are recruiting more moderators. In the replies of the post, there are several users expressing interest and asking further questions about what the position would entail, which the mod team appropriately responds to.

What exactly *is* the workload? Like, how many hours is a typical mod on active mod duty? What exactly does that entail? Answering modmail? Lurking in New posts? Keeping an eye on Controversial posts? Are there any specific timezones you need covering?

↑ 28 ↓ Reply Share Report Save Follow

  OP · 2m ago · edited 2m ago

No worries, fire away!

First of all, there is no 'active mod duty'. We don't schedule shifts, expect people to be here at a particular time or anything like that so if you're busy, you're busy. You don't need to block out time and most of it can just be done when you're already online looking at the subreddit. All of us have continued to be active community members. Part of the reason we are recruiting currently is to make sure we keep that workload manageable for everyone but also to make sure that we aren't spreading anyone too thinly on certain timezones.

The workload is hard to define as it varies per moderator, and is somewhat dependent on if you get involved in things outside of the regular duties (such as running events).

*Figure 3.* Excerpt from a conversation in the replies of a mod’s post recruiting new mods [7]



This level of transparency with regular users is helpful in recruiting new mods, as it ensures that people know what they are getting into before signing up. The mod team also stresses that no experience in either moderating a subreddit or using CSS or Automod is necessary. Therefore, the only barrier to becoming a mod is being an active member in the community, which many mods say that they have remained throughout the duration of their mod experience. There is also some evidence that this transparency and answering people's questions are influential in a user's decision to become a mod. For example, one user who responded to the mod's reply in Figure 3 actually joined the mod team approximately 2 months later! While we did reach out to this user to interview them about their experience, we were unfortunately unable to interview them or any members of the mod team. Therefore, we are unable to definitively say if there is a hosting manual or orientation for new mods. The reply in Figure 3 later states that more complicated "Modmail" (emails sent from users to mods) queries are discussed as a group among the mods, which suggests that they do meet as a group to discuss issues and perhaps welcome new mods. Overall, as the subreddit continues to grow, there may be a need for more mentorship related opportunities; however, the current method of promoting effective leadership by being heavily involved and transparent with the community has been successful thus far.

### **Clear-Yet-Flexible Code of Conduct**

**Constitution.** r/FanFiction has a clear, visible code of conduct that is available on the sidebar of the main page, the "Rules" page, the "NEWBIES START HERE!" page, and *each* "Daily Discussion" thread which are updated every day. There are currently 14 rules for r/FanFiction, and they are labeled as the following:

1. No Promotion of Fics on the Front Page

2. Post to the Appropriate Topic
3. Posting Flairs
4. Remember the Human
5. No Negative Drama
6. Live and Let Live/No Bashing
7. Mature and Explicit Fics and Topics Must Be Tagged
8. No Original Fiction or Fan Art
9. No Discussion of Fanfiction Commissions or Any Related Topic
10. No Witch Hunting, Doxxing, or Trolling
11. Spoiler
12. Content Restrictions
13. Spam, Meme, and Low-effort Posts
14. Surveys

Each rule is further explained in detail on the “Rules” page, and certain terms that could be considered ambiguous, such as “Promotion” and “Bashing”, are clearly defined. The rules can for the most part be divided into two categories: keeping the subreddit organized and appropriate and prohibiting bad behaviors, with some rules falling into both. For example, rules #1, #2, and #3 help to keep the subreddit organized. There are many designated threads on r/FanFiction, and each thread typically serves a specific purpose. Having this organized structure gives users the ability to quickly locate various aspects of fanfiction that they might be looking for such as recommendations, discussions, or particular advice. Additionally, this structure would not be possible without these rules that prohibit making posts in the wrong location or with the wrong flairs. Rules #7, #11, and #12 focus on keeping the subreddit appropriate for all users. This

includes requiring authors to appropriately tag all mature/explicit fics or topics as well as those that contain spoilers. Rule #12 introduces further restrictions on fics containing underage relationships or extreme violence/rape, with the only topic strictly banned being pedophilia.

Other rules on the subreddit focus on prohibiting certain behaviors and encouraging civil behavior. One of the most important rules among these is rule #1, which prohibits sharing fics on the main page. Upon joining the subreddit, a bot sends you a DM welcoming you to r/FanFiction. Aside from being the first rule listed, rule #1 is also the only rule specifically mentioned in the welcoming message.

**Welcome to r/FanFiction!**

✓ welcomebot 🍷 • 59d

Welcome to [r/FanFiction!](#)

Thank you so much for joining our subreddit. If you would like to share a fic, please post it in the [Weekly Fic Showcase](#) which is always stickied at the top of the subreddit.

Please **do not** post fics on the main page.

For more information on our rules and schedule for our weekly & monthly participation threads, please visit the [Rules and Overview](#) page.

*Figure 4. Welcome DM from r/FanFiction [7]*

One might wonder why this rule is of utmost importance. It is essential in keeping the subreddit organized and helps users promote and find fics efficiently. Another two very prominent rules are rule #6, which prohibits “bashing” or shaming other users based on their particular interests, as well as rule #10, which prohibits witch hunting, doxxing, and trolling.

## 10. No Witch Hunting, Doxxing, or Trolling

Violation of these rules may result in an immediate ban. Please report to the mods if you see anything that causes you concern.

- **No Doxxing.** If the information in a post can lead to finding a person IRL, it will be removed.
- **No Witch Hunting.** A witch-hunt is an attempt to find and punish a particular person or group, either on this subreddit or off-site, for their opinions or to blame them for something. Got a complaint or suspicion? [Take it to the Mods.](#)
- **No Trolling.** Being intentionally provoking or cruel will not be tolerated.

*Figure 5. Rule #10 on the “Rules” page of r/FanFiction [7]*

**Amendments.** r/FanFiction is a community that is very dedicated to its people, as is evident by the fact that there are many rules encouraging pleasant behavior. Therefore, the moderators are also very receptive to community feedback and suggestions for new rules and amendments. Over the last couple years as the subreddit increased in popularity, it was necessary at times to adjust the rules. For example, rule #1 (no fics on the main page) and the “Weekly Fic Showcase” were introduced approximately four years ago in order to avoid interesting discussions and fics getting lost on the main page.

For the next few years after this wave of rule changes, the rules remained unchanged. Interestingly, however, on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2022 during the time that we were studying the site, the moderators decided to introduce the first set of rule changes in the last four years. According to the post that introduced the new rules, “it has been a *very* long time since the rules were updated, more than 4 years in fact, and the subreddit is almost 25 times the size it was when they were.” Several rules that were introduced in the previous section were added during this rule change

such as rules #2, #3, and #4. Overall, the rules of this community and the process of amending and adding rules to better support the community has deeply contributed to the friendly and peaceful atmosphere that permeates r/FanFiction.

### Cyclic Events

Cyclic events are key in increasing interaction between members of an online community. The subreddit has a fairly extensive list of weekly and monthly event threads for users to participate in.

**Weekly Events.** As of March 31, 2022, r/FanFiction hosts 9 weekly event threads for its users to participate in. A list containing each the names and descriptions of each of these events is given below. This list of descriptions is taken directly from the subreddit's Sub Rules, FAQ and Weekly Threads page.

Day	Thread	Description
Monday	<a href="#">Excerpt Extravaganza</a>	Share lines from fic you liked, yours or other people's.
Tuesday	<a href="#">At This Point In Time</a>	Share what you're currently working on and what you've posted this week.
Wednesday	<a href="#">Comment Cooperative</a>	Giving and getting positive reviews from each other.
Thursday	<a href="#">Talkback Thursday</a>	Share the latest review you've gotten.
Thursday	<a href="#">Beta Bartering</a>	Find a Beta or co-writer, Offer Beta Services.
Friday	<a href="#">Fix Your Fic Front-end</a>	Help for your title, tags, and summaries.
Friday	<a href="#">Weekly Fic Showcase</a>	Post your fics! Post any recs! Pinned to top of subreddit.
Saturday	<a href="#">Concrit Commune</a>	Trade feedback on pieces of your fic.
Saturday	<a href="#">Writing Weekends</a>	Your weekend plans writing-wise.

*Figure 6: List of Weekly Threads on r/FanFiction [7]*

**Monthly Events.** As of March 31, 2022, r/FanFiction hosts 3 monthly event threads for its users to interact with. This list of descriptions is taken directly from the subreddit's Sub Rules,

FAQ and Weekly Threads page.

Thread	Description
<a href="#">Member Roundup</a>	What you've been reading. New fandoms. Writing Goals. Community discussion.
<a href="#">Scholarly Sources</a>	Help each other on specific topics for fic research and fact-checking.
<a href="#">Plot Bunny Adoption</a>	Post plot ideas, fic requests and writing prompts that you would like to share for others to use.

*Figure 7: List of Monthly Threads on r/FanFiction [7]*

**Contests.** There is a section in the subreddit's navigation bar dedicated to Prompt Challenges that are hosted monthly. In these contest-like threads, users of the subreddit are given a certain challenge for which they are to write a fanfiction/excerpt about. At the end of the submission period, the moderators compile a showcase of all of the submissions to share with all users of the subreddit. Some of these prompts help promote interaction between users of the subreddit by requiring other users to give writing suggestions. The “March XOver” prompt challenge that was hosted in March 2022 is an example of such prompts. This challenge requires a user, A, to list their top fandoms and another user, B, to recommend a pair of user A's picks for them to write a “crossover” fanfiction about. As of March 31, 2022, the thread contains 176 comments from users— and a quick scroll through the thread shows that almost all of the comments have replies. Furthermore, there is a yearly “Best of r/FanFiction” contest, where user submissions for various categories of fanfiction are accepted, voted upon, and tallied.

### Range of Roles

The main roles on r/FanFiction are visitors, new members, regular members (which can be subdivided into readers and writers), and moderators.

Visitors, the most peripheral set of members, comprise those users who have not joined the subreddit, regardless of whether they have a registered Reddit account or not. They can view

all content on the subreddit, but they cannot post, comment, or rate posts using the voting system.

New members are those who have joined the subreddit but have not made any posts or comments. They may have interacted invisibly, such as upvoting posts or responding to anonymous polls.

Regular members have different activity types based on how they interact with fanfiction. Out of the posts made in the past 24 hours, 53 were specifically geared towards writers and the writing process, 22 were centered around aspects of reading fanfiction like providing recommendations or looking for help finding a lost fanfiction, and 15 could be categorized into either or both categories, such as posts about a recent bug on Archive of Our Own. Readers, or those who only read fanfiction and do not write fanfiction of their own, participate more on threads about fanfiction tropes and ships (romantic pairings between characters), which are commonly sorted under the “Recs Wanted”, “Lost Fic”, or “Discussion” post tags. Writers as a category usually overlap with readers, since users who write fanfiction usually read fanfiction as well; Alice stated that she actually began writing fanfiction because of r/FanFiction.

“Um, but in terms of actually on r/FanFiction, or Archive of Our Own or something like that, I had never written before. But I saw on r/FanFiction people talking about writing challenges they're having and all that kind of thing. And they're like normal people. I think I had just put the authors of fanfiction as just, they, just in a cloud, somewhere away and they're people who went to writing school or they're wearing berets, and they're talking about symbolism and like, it's not for you, that's, you know, let them do it and you can just read your story. And I was like, no, these are normal people. You know, I'll have a go... So then I started writing. And I used r/FanFiction a lot for support and hand

holding. And I ended up finding some beta readers there. And they've really, really helped me.”

Transitioning from the role of reader only to becoming a writer is facilitated by the community-sourced resources that r/FanFiction provides, and the act of writing becomes demystified by interacting with others in the community. As writers, users can offer input on more types of posts in the community, and they may find more posts interesting or useful to them. Writers are more likely to have indicators of their status in their account flair, which may now be changed to reflect their writing pseudonym in order to promote their work.

Moderators of the subreddit are generally chosen from members of the community. As stated previously, moderators are selected from user-submitted applications, and moderators tend to be active users. Applications do not open often; they are need-based. There is a list of moderators on the subreddit, and while the exact duties of r/FanFiction moderators are unclear, Reddit moderator settings include the powers to manage users, chats, community settings, flairs, modmail, posts, comments, and the subreddit wiki. Currently, all nine r/FanFiction moderators (plus the AutoMod bot) have the power to manage all of those settings.

## **Subgroups**

Reddit as a platform is not very suited to the creation of subgroups. Rather, subgroups manifest themselves as different subreddits. r/FanFiction publicly lists a number of related fandom subreddits on its right sidebar, and any Reddit user can create a new subreddit. Members of r/FanFiction can host their own events on the subreddit, such as fanfiction review exchanges; there are moderator-hosted weekly events, but members often create their own themes for other members to engage with.



## **Integrating Online with the Real World**

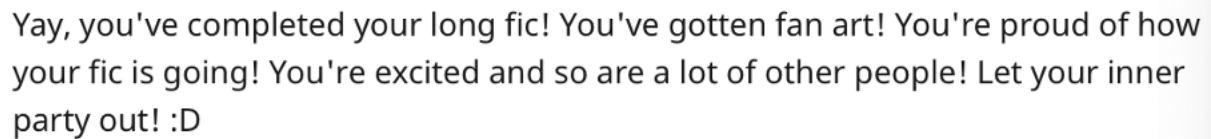
**Personal Events and Meeting IRL.** We have seen that there are many cyclic events that take place on r/FanFiction, but do these events or interactions between users ever transcend the online world into the “real world?” In terms of events, most are organized specifically online through threads, which could be in part due to r/Fanfiction’s recent growth in popularity during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we were curious if users of this site felt comfortable sharing or integrating their personal life with their identity on r/FanFiction, so we decided to ask our site participants how much of their IRL identity they generally share on r/FanFiction. Surprisingly, all nine of our participants had similar responses. In general, our participants do not share a significant amount of personal information on r/FanFiction with many opting to go by their username or nickname rather than their first name. According to our participants, the reason is two-part. On one hand, many participants are reluctant to reveal identifying information due to safety concerns. One participant, Alice, notes, “I think it’s partly – I think it might partly be a generational thing. Because when I was growing up, the Internet is stranger danger and if you even say your name, someone will come and kidnap you.” Another participant, Carter, said, “it just would make me feel uncomfortable to release my real information over Reddit of all places.”

However, there’s slightly more to this decision than just safety concerns. Many of our participants also stated in some way that they prefer to have their fanfiction identity separate from their real-life identity for various reasons. For example, Rose stated, “It’s just, I don’t know, I’m always paranoid that someone from in real life would know that I’m writing fanfiction and they discover my work, and I don’t know how to explain it to them.” Alex agreed in saying, “I tend to live a kind of closed off lifestyle, you know, people in person kinda have their opinion of me, and I would say that maybe the stuff I write doesn’t really coincide with my personality, so it

might take people by surprise.” Therefore, we gather that r/FanFiction, in part because of the accepting community and its guidelines, provide users an opportunity to explore an alternative identity, in a kind environment that prohibits shaming and is free from the common negative stigma that surrounds fanfiction.

Although there may not be many instances of integrating real-life with online, users are still able to celebrate personal goals and events through flairs. For example, users can use the “Celebrate” flair to celebrate a recent accomplishment that they’ve achieved.

- **Celebrate:**



Yay, you've completed your long fic! You've gotten fan art! You're proud of how your fic is going! You're excited and so are a lot of other people! Let your inner party out! :D

*Figure 8.* Description of the “Celebrate” flair [7]

Users can also use the “Activites&Events” flair to promote a personal fandom challenge or contest. Instead of integrating real-life with r/FanFiction, these flairs give users an opportunity to integrate personal fanfiction-related goals and events with the community online, which supports the desire of users to keep their identities separate.

## Research Questions

We constructed three primary research questions as the focus of our study.

1. How do the rules and moderation style on r/FanFiction impact the atmosphere of its community?
2. How does r/FanFiction encourage users to improve their writing abilities and confidence?
3. How does r/FanFiction create a positive, collaborative community of readers and writers?

## Rules and Moderation

The rules of r/FanFiction are quite extensive compared to other popular subreddits and are specifically crafted for the needs of its community. As mentioned in the previous section on Code of Conduct, many rules focus on keeping r/FanFiction organized for ease of use, while other rules keep the community appropriate and pleasant for all users. In this section, we will further argue that the rules and strong moderation style of r/FanFiction contribute to making r/FanFiction a safe, friendly space for all participants. However, we will also share experiences from some of our interviewees who would argue that the moderation is perhaps even “strong to a fault.”

As previously stated, the rules of r/FanFiction are very visible despite your location on the subreddit. It is quite difficult as a user to *not* come in contact with the rules in some fashion, which establishes the community as a space for civility and respect even if the users don’t explicitly take time to read each rule. According to Alice, “I don't really know what the rules are to be fair. I just haven't, I can't, didn't really, I don't think I've been breaking them. And just haven't, I think the ones that I'm most aware of are, ‘don't start a thread promoting a specific post, a specific story outside of that weekly one’. And I think that's very good. Because as I was saying before that, if you didn't have that it would just be flooded.” When asked if they thought

the rules of the subreddit were adequate, Evia remarked, “Yeah. I just glanced back over them, and I think they're adequate.” When asked if she had read through the rules of the subreddit, Lauren similarly said, “um, yes, I think I briefly skimmed them.” Therefore, many of our participants were not cognizant of each and every rule of r/FanFiction. In spite of this, each participant was still aware of the general expectations and norms for behavior on the site, even though some are highly specific. Due to the strong moderation style and willingness of the community to promote a friendly atmosphere, users of r/FanFiction can quickly acclimate to its guidelines without needing to remember or read each one.

Compared to other subreddits, r/FanFiction has many rules that prohibit bad behavior and encourage civil discussions among users. These rules, in particular, contribute to making r/FanFiction a safe place where users of all interests can discuss niche topics that might have stigmas behind them in real life. Fanfiction in general can compromise a wide variety of topics, some of which may not be appropriate or satisfactory to all readers. In order to avoid stifling creativity or putting people down, r/FanFiction handles this issue by prohibiting shaming other people for their writings or interests (rule #6) while also mandating that certain posts and fics be tagged with an appropriate warning (rule #12). Even though these two rules have been in place for the last four years, there are still some users who disagree with them. One participant, Rose, shared a personal experience with us that she described as her worst experience on r/FanFiction:

“It was that one time where they had to remove my comment. I just said that I honestly don't like that my fandom has a lot of like, this could be triggering, incest, pedophilia, and you know, rape. And people were telling me that I was being rude. And they justified this type of writing as a ‘kink’. And I had to calmly explain to them that this is not okay. And I gave them statistics of how, you know, this type of thing could be used as a weapon

to victims. And I said, it's okay, if it was like a type of fic, where it shows you like the harmful effects of these things, or the damage it can cause– like, I get it, or like, you know, where someone becomes stronger after enduring something horrible. I would be okay with that... but the fact that people are writing it as a kink is just so weird. And then the mod was like, 'Hey, I'm sorry, but we have to remove your posts because you were bashing people' ...like, okay?!"

As previously mentioned, the only topic that is strictly banned on r/FanFiction is pedophilia as per rule #12. However, according to the same rule, “underage (teen + teen, teen + adult) fics and extreme or encouraged violence/rape fics must be linked with a clear warning, plaintext fic will be removed, discussions must have a clear warning.” When asked about this rule, Rose responded:

“I think they're like, too loose. I think they should moderate these types of fanfiction. You know, like I said, if it was an inspirational type of thing... I guess it's fine to post about these things to help victims cope with it. But like I said, using it as a means of porn, I guess... that's not really okay. And they should be very strict about it, but I guess I really can't do anything about an organization that's super popular. And I guess powerful too.”

This could certainly be troubling to some users who are not looking for this material, especially if these topics are common in their particular fandoms. However, it is worth noting that this is one user's *worst* experience on the site, and many of our other participants expressed their pleasure with rules #6 and #12. When asked if there are any specific elements that contribute to making r/FanFiction a friendly environment, Evia responded, “I think one of the top rules is, ‘don't bash people for what they enjoy.’ And generally, seeing that and having it enforced, too, keeps everything civil. And civility, in my opinion, brings about that welcoming environment.

Because instead of constant arguments and anger, it's a lot of people just chatting.” When asked the same question, Alice similarly replied:

“When you're in a new place, you read what other people are writing. And then you sort of pick up that same tone. And I think there is very strong moderation and from the mods about abusive language and negative talk and things. I think they're quite quick to clamp down on that. So it's not a place where people really insult each other all day, things like that. And people are very sincere and earnest in, you know, their replies about things. So it just has a feeling of - I don't know, people being very sincere, which is not something you always find.”

Aside from the rules, the strong moderation style of r/FanFiction ensures that all content on the subreddit meets the proper guidelines. The mods on the subreddit are fairly visible with each one introducing themselves upon joining the team. As mods depart from the team, a moderator farewell message is also posted in their honor. They are very active members of the community and are therefore very invested in it themselves. They also care deeply about community feedback and making sure that users are enjoying the direction that r/FanFiction is going.

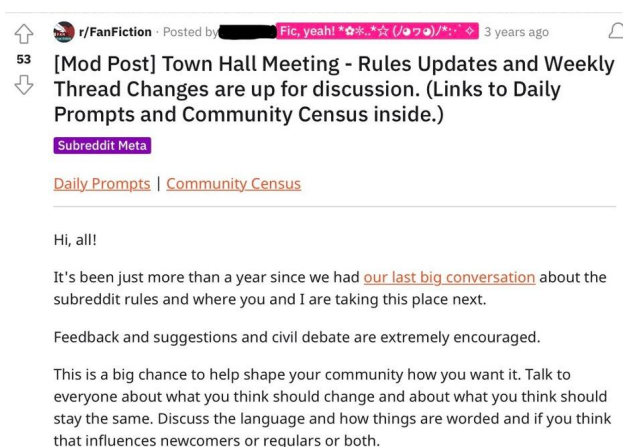


Figure 9. Excerpt from a public post by a moderator discussing recent rule changes [7]

In Figure 9, it is evident that the moderators in this community want to create a space that is friendly to all users whether they be newcomers, novices, or regulars. Additionally, it is clear that the purpose and direction of r/FanFiction is firmly in the hands of the users. This is something that our interviewees agreed on as well. When asked about how well he felt the moderators handled the subreddit, Brendan replied:

“I would say overall they do a good job. I've been on other subreddits where the mod team is awful. They don't really do anything, or they just straight up take control of the subreddit and push it in a completely different direction that just ruins it for me, and this mod team hasn't done that, so they've done a pretty solid job.”

Similarly, when asked about his thoughts on the moderation of r/FanFiction, Alex responded, “Yeah I think it's pretty good. I think that everyone has the right to freely express themselves, and they can, you know, write whatever they want.” Overall, the strong moderation and guidelines on r/FanFiction have helped to create the friendly, positive atmosphere that is shared among community members. While some users may believe that some rules should be altered or that the moderation is too strong, we have found that, in general, users are pleased with the current guidelines and moderation style.

### **Improving Writing Ability**

Writers on r/FanFiction come from a variety of backgrounds, ages, and countries. Some write fanfiction in English despite not speaking English as a first language. One common resource that r/FanFiction encourages is beta readers: volunteer users who will review your writing for grammatical errors. Some beta readers will also inspect characterization or plot continuity. Several of our interviewees participate as beta readers for other writers, including through the official Beta Bartering thread. Sometimes, these beta reader-writer relationships

grow into something more lasting, where users continue to assist each other with their work over time. Alice said about her experience with beta readers on r/FanFiction: “I ended up finding some beta readers there. And they've really, really helped me.” The relatively decentralized form of feedback in fanfiction communities like r/FanFiction not only emphasizes grammar in a helpful way, it also encourages positive feedback to motivate writers as described by Eric Littleton [3].

Often, users post general writing advice on the subreddit, such as tips for writing good dialogue or fight scenes. Evia said that one of his primary reasons for participating on the subreddit was assisting others with their writing. He wrote, “So, I like helping people out. It feels good. And a lot of people on that sub got a lot of questions about writing. I LOVE answering them to the best of my ability.” R. D. Aya likewise actively helps out other writers on the subreddit, most recently with a thread where he offered to write fanfiction summaries for those who were struggling to come up with eye-catching descriptions. Even something as little as commenting on a writer’s story can help them to improve their writing. Brendan remarked, “I love hearing what other people have to say about my work and even hear the criticisms that they have to give. I think that that helps me become a better writer and improve my personal growth.”

r/FanFiction provides several other moderator-hosted resources to assist with the writing process. Saturday’s Concrit Commune post is a space for writers to exchange helpful criticism on snippets of their work. Users seeking help usually get at least one or two replies offering advice. In addition, the Writing Weekends post is a masterpost for users sharing their weekend writing plans, which provides space for small updates that may not be important enough for a full post; users also use it as an accountability tactic, so that they are more motivated to finish what they announced.



## **Positive Collaborative Community**

As previously mentioned, the moderators of r/FanFiction help ensure that the subreddit's atmosphere remains civil and polite. We extend that further and propose that members of the subreddit actively work towards a positive, collaborative, and accepting community. From the results of our interviews, it is clear that many members adhere to a pay-it-forward rationale. Many of the moderator-hosted weekly posts also encourage this sort of cooperative, reciprocal relationship, since users are expected to help others in return when advice is given to them. When queried about his post where he volunteered to help other writers with their fanfiction summaries, R. D. Aya said, "Because I wanted to pay the sub back for helping me, whether directly or indirectly, with any help I needed, so I saw something that people had trouble with, knew that I was good at it, and basically the post wrote itself". Alex also stated, "I would say that the community is my favorite part, just being able to have a way to express my creativity and just hear peoples comments and stuff and receive support and stuff you know it does boost my self-esteem."

r/FanFiction welcomes writers of all skill levels, and the subreddit even encourages non-writers to begin writing fanfiction. Alice began writing fanfiction due to the support of the subreddit, and now is a writer and beta reader. She said, "I think - I think I like even when I do beta reading for people, and it's quite obvious that they're young or new, there's always a charm to somebody writing, y'know, for their first time and expressing their ideas...And it's just lovely, though, I think every, every stage, I don't know if you can call it stages, but every bit of level of quality of writing to me has something special to offer."

r/FanFiction also serves as a place for readers and writers of fanfiction to safely express their enthusiasm for their shared hobby. Many interviewees noted that fanfiction is difficult to

discuss with others, due to the fact that there is a stigma around fanfiction. Evia said, “People in our community maybe feel like they're bashed in their fandoms / around "normal fans", so maybe that sense of comradery is present just in the word itself, "fanfiction". You know what I mean? Like, the amount of people that go, "Oh, you write FANFICTION? Yikes.”

Finally, r/FanFiction provides a supportive release from real life. Carter said, “I think that the community that gets built is what makes the subreddit a great place to be. I wanted to participate in this interview so I could maybe raise awareness for the benefit the site offers and how it can help people that are struggling. Throughout my life ever since I discovered the site I go on there especially if I'm depressed or something bad happened recently. It acts as kind of an escape from reality I guess and sometimes that's what I need to get back on the right track.”

Alice also used r/FanFiction as a way to find release. She said, “So there was a time I'll say, when I was actually feeling really low and depressed and I was spending a lot of time on it, which was, I was just procrastinating from doing real life. So there was a point where I could say, maybe I'll even spend more than a couple of hours a day.” Since r/FanFiction is a place where users can positively and safely engage with others about a hobby that they enjoy, it is possible for users to unwind when they log onto the subreddit. Brendan stated, “I see the site as a good way to build a community of people who also like fanfiction and meet new people. It's fun to have quick conversations with people and get a variety of different inputs. It also gives me a way to try to make people's lives a little bit better. I'm taking it as a personal challenge to grow and get my name out there so I can make more people's days better. I also just think it's fun to write fanfiction and r/FanFiction is a really popular site to share that kind of stuff.”

Both writers and readers alike find support, resources, and kindness on r/FanFiction. It is a place for sincere discussion and constructive criticism; writers can improve their technique, and

readers can evolve how they interact with fanfiction. The positive atmosphere of r/FanFiction is derived both from the efforts of the moderation team and the contributions of subreddit members. Altogether, r/FanFiction is a positive, collaborative community where members come together to improve and grow.

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