Suspension of disbelief or "willing suspension of disbelief" is a formula named as such in English by the poet and aesthetic philosopher Samuel Taylor Coleridge to justify the use of fantastic or non-realistic elements in literature. Coleridge suggested that if a writer could infuse a "human interest and a semblance of truth" into a fantastic tale, the reader would suspend judgment concerning the implausibility of the narrative.

The phrase came to be used more loosely in the later 20th century, often used to imply that the onus was on the reader, rather than the writer, to achieve it. It might be used to refer to the willingness of the audience to overlook the limitations of a medium, so that these do not interfere with the acceptance of those premises. According to the theory, suspension of disbelief is a quid pro quo: the audience tacitly agrees to provisionally suspend their judgment in exchange for the promise of entertainment. These fictional premises may also lend to the engagement of the mind and perhaps proposition of thoughts, ideas, art and theories.

Coleridge's original formulation

Coleridge coined the phrase in his Biographia Literaria, published in 1817, in the context of the creation and reading of poetry. Chapter XIV describes the preparations with Wordsworth for their revolutionary collaboration Lyrical Ballads (first edition 1798), for which Coleridge had contributed the more romantic, Gothic pieces including The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. Poetry and fiction involving the supernatural had gone out of fashion to a large
extent in the eighteenth century, in part due to the declining belief in
witches and other supernatural agents among the educated classes, who
embraced the rational approach to the world offered by the new science.
Alexander Pope, notably, felt the need to explain and justify his use of
elemental spirits in *The Rape of the Lock*, one of the few English poems of
the century that invoked the supernatural. Coleridge wished to revive the
use of fantastic elements in poetry. The concept of "willing suspension of
disbelief" explained how a modern, enlightened audience might continue to
enjoy such types of story.

Coleridge recalled:

“... It was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons
and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer
from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth
sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing
suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.
Mr. Wordsworth on the other hand was to propose to himself as his
object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to
excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the
mind's attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the
loveliness and the wonders of the world before us ...”

The notion of such an action by an audience was however recognised in
antiquity, as seen particularly in the Roman theoretical concerns of Horace,
who also lived in an age of increasing skepticism about the supernatural, in
his *Ars Poetica*. 
Scientists have discovered that people will believe anything when you say "Scientists have discovered that..."

People can believe anything that they want. Despite how disorganized it may seem to the all-knowing public, the process went as it should.

Let's be honest. People can believe anything they want without being ostracized.
STUPID PEOPLE WILL BELIEVE ANYTHING YOU TELL THEM
I GUARANTEE IT

The American people don’t believe anything until they see it on television.

Richard M. Nixon, U.S. president
Examples in literature

Suspension of disbelief is sometimes said to be an essential component of live theatre, where it was recognized by Shakespeare, who refers to it in the Prologue to Henry V:

"[...] make imaginary puissance [...] 'tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings [...] turning th'accomplishment of many years into an hourglass."

See also dramatic convention.

Examples in modern forms of entertainment

According to the theory, suspension of disbelief is an essential ingredient for any kind of storytelling. With any film, the viewer has to ignore the reality that they are viewing a two-dimensional moving image on a screen and temporarily accept it as reality in order to be entertained. Black & White films provide an obvious early example that audiences are willing to suspend disbelief, no matter how "unreal" the images appear, for the sake of entertainment. Except in the case of color-blindness, no one viewing these films sees the real world without color, but they are still willing to suspend disbelief and accept the images in order to be entertained. The advent of films in color has not changed the audience acceptance of Black & White films.

Most see the enjoyment of many B-grade science fiction films and television series such as the early series of Doctor Who, where the audience willingly ignores low-budget "cheesy" props and occasional plot holes, in order to engage fully with the enjoyable story — which may be the more so for those additions to its inherent outrageousness. A counterpoint to "bad special effects" would be the "gratuitous special effects" which have become common in recent films. Special effects have become inexpensive enough that filmmakers will insert special effects laden scenes into a film which are not important to the storyline, creating a plot hole in the process. When this happens, the filmmakers' quest to entertain with more and better special effects is thwarted, as the plot hole created breaks the suspension of disbelief. "Bad special effects" which are integral to a story will be accepted by an audience willing to suspend disbelief, whereas good (even great) "gratuitous special effects" will not.

Suspension of disbelief is also supposed to be essential for the enjoyment of many movies and TV shows involving complex stunts, special effects, and
seemingly "unrealistic" plots, characterizations, etc. The theory professes to explain why a subset of action movie fans are willing to accept the idea that the good guy can get away with shooting guns in public places, or never running out of ammunition, or that cars will explode with a well-placed shot to the gas tank.

Suspension of disbelief is also needed when a character is not supposed to age over the course of a series but the actor eventually does, or vice versa (e.g. Angel, Highlander).

On the three CSI series, it is frequently implied that forensic test results are received immediately after said tests are performed; since in reality, it can take several months to get results back, it is inconvenient to the plots to show the necessary waiting period. To advance the plot, a suspension of disbelief is necessary, and viewers must accept that the waiting period has passed.

Experimental rock group Circa Survive also has a song entitled "Suspending Disbelief", which refers to plot-holes and inconsistencies in writing.

American singer/songwriter and keyboardist Bill Kurzenberger released a self-produced CD in 2005 entitled, "Suspending Disbelief." The CD was recorded in Columbus, Ohio with his backing band, The Resonators.

Animations and comics

One contemporary example of suspension of disbelief is the audience's acceptance that Superman hides his identity from the world by simply donning a pair of glasses, conservative clothing, and acting in a "mild-mannered" fashion. Not only is the disguise so thin as to be ridiculous, but also in the TV series, Adventures of Superman, this absurdity was carried to an extreme. Lois Lane and Jimmy Olsen constantly suspected Clark Kent of being Superman, yet when obvious evidence was right in their faces — such as times when Clark was missing his glasses — they never saw the resemblance. (Noel Neill and Jack Larson, in DVD commentary, said their standard answer when questioned about this was, "We wanted to keep our jobs!")

Some find it strange that while some audience members took issue with the flimsiness of Superman's disguise, they didn't take issue with the idea of the existence of a superbeing whose only weakness was kryptonite. One arguing from the theory of suspension of disbelief would contend that while Superman's abilities and vulnerabilities are the foundational premises the audience accepted as their part of the initial deal; they did not accept a
persistent inability for otherwise normal characters to recognize a close colleague solely because of changes in clothing.

Another major example of suspended disbelief was *The Flintstones* cartoon series. The characters have televisions, cars, telephones, and various appliances that would be powered by electricity in modern society, but since the show was set in "prehistoric" times - electricity could not have been mastered, and especially not used. The "prehistoric" characters were even shown to celebrate Christmas and travel into the future, not to mention coexist with dinosaurs, though science has determined humans did not inhabit the earth during the dinosaur era.

Gary Larson discussed the question with regard to his comic strip, *The Far Side*; he noted that readers wrote him to complain that a male mosquito referred to his "job" sucking blood when it is in fact the females that drain blood, but that the same readers accepted that the mosquitoes (in "fact") live in houses, wear clothes, and speak English.

**Video games**

Video games are also said to require suspension of disbelief. Often realism is compromised even in games that set out to be realistic, either intentionally to not overly complicate game mechanics or due to technical limitations. Some games based on *Spider-Man* have the comic hero swinging around a city with his webs sticking to nothing but the sky. Another example is of *Solid Snake*'s performance of near impossible acrobatic stunts in *Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes* remake as opposed to his more down-to-earth style of combat in the original *Metal Gear Solid*. There are other examples of breaking the fourth wall in the *Metal Gear* series which require a suspension of disbelief, notably in *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* and *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. In particular, the postmodern narrative of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty* in the latter part of the game requires a suspension of disbelief in the common occurrence of bizarre supernatural phenomena and unconventional plot twists in an otherwise realistic setting. Fighting games often feature magical elements, such as characters who can throw fireballs.

Other video games feature instant death upon falling into water instead of giving the player a chance to swim out before drowning (such as *Grand Theft Auto* and *Assassin's Creed*, among many others). Also, in many video games (particularly RPGs), a character will say the same phrase over and over indefinitely when repeatedly talked to. Some video games begin with a tutorial in which the player is taught how to play. These are often woven into the story, for example a character in the game might say to the player,
"Press the triangle button to jump! Walk up to a crystal to save your game! Don't forget to use the 'select' button to change your weapons!" and so forth. In the fictional context of the game world, such sequences make no sense — the character is being told to push a button which (from his perspective) does not exist, in order to perform normal activities such as jumping and running. In a few games, the NPCs who tell the character how to act in game terms often profess that they really don't know what they mean by it (such as in Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening). In Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door the player can see an NPC being taught a same tutorial as the player was taught. According to proponents of the theory, it is up to the player to reconcile this problem by suspending disbelief. Super Paper Mario takes this a step further when characters are asked by Mario about things like the 1 button, they simply reply that any inter-dimensional beings would know what they were talking about.

However, it is possible for a tutorial to be 'written in' to a video game as part of the overall plot of the game. For example, in the video game Assassin's Creed, the ability for the player to receive specific tuition as to which buttons to press to perform certain actions (entering a first person perspective, drawing one's weapon and 'free running' (a notable feature of the series) and so on) is permitted by the narrative of the video game as it has been explained to the player that the main events portrayed in the story are done so as part of a computer recreation of historical events. The use of standard video game inputs (left and right mouse buttons, the WASD keys, the arrow keys, the space bar and so on (for the PC)) is explained away in the manual that accompanies the game as an attempt by the producers of the computer recreation software to 'acclimatise' the person used to recreate the historical events to the device used to perform these recreations.

Other examples

Another example where suspended disbelief is said to be necessary is kayfabe professional wrestling. The characters (that is, the professional wrestlers) somehow manage to keep their violent exchanges to the confines of the wrestling arena. They do not follow each other home, assault each other between TV episodes, or bring guns to the ring and shoot each other if they are losing a match, etc.

A further example can be found in Star Wars and other films which include a space setting, where sounds caused by spacecraft (e.g. engines, gunfire) can be heard despite the scenes being viewed from within space itself (sound cannot travel in the vacuum of space). Such sound effects are often vital for creating the atmosphere of a scene, such as space battles (the series Firefly is one of the few shows to actually observe silence in space).
Other shows, such as the re-imagined series of *Battlestar Galactica* uses more ambient sound to create an impression of empty space. Also, space ships that are on fire tend to show a wake of smoke and debris as if the space ship was flying through an atmosphere, whereas of course in the vacuum of space a cloud (with the space ship in its center) rather than a wake would form.

Another example would be the character *Angel* from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*. It is obvious across both shows that David Boreanaz gets older, even though it is firmly established that vampires don't age. To enjoy the two series, one must suspend their disbelief and accept that Angel is the same age in every episode. Similarly, in *That '70s Show*, the serial last for over 8 years and we can see the characters age over time. But according to the story, the time passed for the entire series is 3 or 4 years maximum. This makes audience accept actors close to their 30s playing the roles of teenagers.

Many instances where suspension of disbelief is required are not due to elements which transcend laws of science of physics. They may be purely psychological elements based on history, culture, and human nature. For example. In many children's adventure tales, adults are often invariably depicted as less competent in order for the underage main characters to accomplish heroic deeds. Also, many characters are placed in settings which would normally pose difficulty for a person of their race or color. The same is done for many female characters who are placed as heroines in male dominated settings. It is always the intention that the incongruity be left unnoticed by the other characters unlike reality where racial or gender issues would not be ignored.
Yet another example would be music present in many movies and games. In reality, no music would be present without a source, like a TV, radio, or people playing instruments.

In the film *Tootsie* (1982) the Dustin Hoffman character is a male actor who can’t get work, so he transforms himself into a gorgeous, talented woman who is more capable of getting acting roles. We the audience do not have to suspend our disbelief that tells us he is yet a man pretending to be a woman; it is enough that we can believe that the characters who see “her” believe that she is a woman. In effect we suspend their disbelief.

The movie *Spaceballs* also has a classic reference where the actors literally address the audience during the beginnings of the movie as the plot is explained. Making a joke of "suspension disbelief" by suggesting the entire plot line in the beginnings of the movie and then turning to the camera directly and saying "Everybody get that?" and in effect suggesting the audience is 'along for the ride now' and will accept anything that occurs in the movie from here on-in. There is also a reference made in Austin Powers two in relation to time travel where the dynamics are quickly criticized and worked out to be impossible to occur as Austin may engage his future self, the issue is solved simply through suspension disbelief via the audience
being directly addressed and told to just accept the fact that this is fantasy and not at all in reality.

**Actual use in film**

Several examples exist of films in which the principle of suspension of disbelief is not only used, but also mentioned as such.

In the 1994 film *Ed Wood*, the main character (played by Johnny Depp), uses the term in the dialogue. He is on the set of *Grave Robbers from Outer Space* and is arguing with one of the producers who asks, "How 'bout that the policemen arrive in the daylight, but now it's suddenly night?" to which Wood replies "What do you know? Haven't you ever heard of 'suspension of disbelief'?"

The term is also used in the film *Basic Instinct* when the character Catherine Tramell, played by Sharon Stone, explains to the detectives while riding to
the police station in the back of the police car that she usually applies the application in her fictional stories. Gus Moran, the detective friend of Nick Curran, then responds "suspension of disbelief! I like that!"

These examples can be seen as breaking the fourth wall, in the sense that the film blatantly admits to the viewer that it is a work of fiction where the narrative principle of suspension of disbelief is used (by the writer) and required (by the viewer). Of course, at first such an action creates disbelief rather than suspending it, but paradoxically it may actually inspire the viewer to immerse himself in the narrative premise of the story.

Use in psychology

Suspension of disbelief has also been used within a mental health context by Frank DeFulgentis in his book Flux. It is an attempt to describe the phenomenon of forgetting irrational thoughts associated with cases of OCD. In the book, the author suggests 'suspending disbelief' as opposed to forcing ourselves to forget; similar to how one would put a virus in quarantine. We can thereby allow ourselves to be absorbed in the activities around us until these irrationalities vanish on their own accord.

Criticism of the theory

As in the examples of Superman's powers and Gary Larson's cartoon, it is unclear that suspension of disbelief correctly describes an audience's perception of art. If the theory were to be true, the individual events of suspension would appear to be highly selective. (It would appear that one
chooses to suspend disbelief for the ability to fly, but not to suspend it for myopic co-workers.)

Aesthetic philosophers generally reject claims that suspension of disbelief accurately characterizes the relationship between people and "fictions." Kendall Walton notes that, if viewers were to truly suspend disbelief at a horror movie and accept its images as true, they would have a true-to-life set of reactions. For instance, audience members would cry out, "Look behind you!" to an endangered on-screen character or call the police when they witnessed an on-screen murder.[8]

However, many of these criticisms simply fail to notice that Coleridge's original statement came in a restrictive clause. The formulation "...that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith," of necessity implies that there are different sorts of suspension of disbelief and specifies that poetic faith is one instance of a larger class. One need not choose to believe that a character in a horror film is a real person in order, for example, to choose to believe that the character is looking at the building seen in the following reverse-shot. More often than not, both beliefs would be equally false.

**Problems the theory presents**

The theory would seem to create several other problems.

**Self-reference:** One problem the theory suggests is apparent in characters' self-awareness — when a character addresses the audience directly or otherwise realizes that he is a character in a work of fiction. This action would seem to challenge the audience's suspension of disbelief, which would according to the theory make the audience unable to enjoy the fiction. But in fact, self-referential moments do sometimes entertain audiences.

**Canonical Worlds:** Suspension of disbelief can also become problematic for long-running series and franchises with a well-known fictional world, wherein the geography, chronology and dramatis personae (and even natural laws) are established and remain internally consistent across multiple episodes, and even multiple programs (for instance, in spinoffs). This is really a very strong form of suspension of disbelief, particularly common in Science Fiction and Gaming, where dedicated fans of the franchise immerse themselves in the fictional world to an exceptional degree. A good example of this is *Star Trek*.

When this happens, several problems can occur: When such franchises indulge in crossovers, where characters or events from one series appear, or
are even just acknowledged to exist, in another, there is potential for mistakes, leading to inconsistencies in one or both fictional worlds. For instance, a character in one series might have previously referred to characters in another as being fictional, then have to interact with one of those characters in a crossover appearance. The phenomenon is not only seen in TV and film but also in Gaming, where it is known as canon-puncturing.[9]

Due to crossover appearances, a large proportion of television drama (90 percent, according to an estimate by Tommy Westphal[citation needed]) could be seen to exist within the same fictional world. This would mean that if one television series is shown to be imaginary or fictional, then they all must be (see The Tommy Westphall Universe Hypothesis).

Inconsistencies or plot holes that violate the premises, plot-lines or chronology of the established canon can be viewed as breaking the tacit Suspension of Disbelief agreement. For particularly loyal fans, these lapses can be deeply resented.

For instance, in one episode of Step by Step, Cody acknowledges Full House as a fictional TV show. The character of Steve Urkel guest-starred in an episode of Full House as well as an episode of Step by Step. This creates a contradiction, since if Urkel was a real person in the Step by Step world — a world in which Full House was fiction — he wouldn't be able to get into the fictional Full House world.

An early episode of Mad About You featured Paul's old bachelor pad, which was now Kramer's (a character from Seinfeld) new apartment. This would mean Mad About You and Seinfeld occur in the same in-universe New York city. However, in a latter episode of Seinfeld, George Costanza and his fiancée are seen watching an episode of Mad About You.

Problems are also noticeable in Friends where celebrities such as Winona Ryder and Bruce Willis are mentioned by name and later appear playing characters other than themselves. It would seem that the characters in the shows would recognize the celebrities, therefore making suspension of disbelief impossible or at least illogical. In the movie Ocean's Twelve, Julia Roberts' character is made-up to be mistaken for the real actress and even briefly interacts with "herself" in the following scene. This is done deliberately for comedic effect, but it can then be difficult for one to re-suspend disbelief while watching Roberts throughout the rest of the film.

Another circle of fiction was created by Matt Groening when Futurama appeared as a television show on The Simpsons and vice versa.
In the classic show *The Odd Couple*, there were episodes that used flashbacks to explain the evolution and escapades Felix and Oscar's friendship. In one such flashback, Oscar (who was in the military at the time) and Blanche get married. Felix was best man. No mention of Felix's wife Gloria is ever made. However, in another episode, reference to Felix and Gloria's marriage has a single Oscar in it. Since their marriages overlapped - both ending in divorce - there is an obvious contradiction about who got married first.

In many long running adventure series, the main characters progress in age, rank, status, and prestige, yet continue to perform activities that are more suitable to younger, lower ranking characters of lesser importance. This trend is seen in many *space opera* franchises, especially those in which the characters are part of a quasi-military organization. Frequently, the main characters, despite achieving legendary status and promotions to higher ranks of leadership and responsibility, often find excuses to become embroiled in exciting adventures. This is in sharp contrast to reality where senior officers are supposed to remain behind the frontlines out of danger and act as instructors, administrators, strategists, and issue orders to lower ranking personnel. This is frequently found in the *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* and *Stargate SG-1* franchises where main characters, even after being promoted to higher ranks such as admirals or generals, continue to go on hazardous missions as spies, commandos, combat pilots, or elite operative squads. Conversely, main characters may deliberately and continuously turn down promotions so that they may remain where the action is; a practice not commonly seen in the real world where not only is it considered a bad career move, but physical age (typically no later than age 40) dictates eventual mandatory retirement from field missions. The rationale for this trend may simply be audience attachment to a character or family of characters. Additionally, many long running action-adventure characters often implausibly lack any lasting medical or physical problems due to serious injuries that they may have suffered in previous adventures.

Long running comic book series by companies such as *Marvel Comics* and *DC Comics* have operated on the principle that their stories are set in modern Earth where all of the real world events also occur concurrently with the existence of superheroes and supervillains. However, the attitudes and lives of normal, non superpowered humans is for the most part unaffected by the existence of these superbeings. And despite the large number of costumed heroes and villains in both universes, the average person may never encounter any of them.
More Criticism

Not all authors believe that suspension of the disbelief characterizes the audience's relationship to imaginative works of art. Tolkien challenges this concept in his essay "On Fairy-Stories", choosing instead the paradigm of subcreation based on internal consistency of reality. Tolkien says that indeed the reader should in order for the narrative to work, chose to believe in the fiction he is reading - not willingly suspend his disbelief. By focusing on how to create an internal consistent fictional world, the author becomes a sub-creator.

Suspension of Disbelief

In the world of fiction you are often required to believe a premise which you would never accept in the real world. Especially in genres such as fantasy and science fiction, things happen in the story which you would not believe if they were presented in a newspaper as fact. Even in more real-world genres such as action movies, the action routinely goes beyond the boundaries of what you think could really happen.

In order to enjoy such stories, the audience engages in a phenomenon known as "suspension of disbelief". This is a semi-conscious decision in which you put aside your disbelief and accept the premise as being real for the duration of the story.

Suspension of disbelief only works to a point. It is important that the story maintains its own form of believability and doesn't push the limits too far. There are many factors for the budding story-writer or film-maker to consider, including the following....

The initial premise can be quite outrageous as long as the story maintains consistency within that premise. There are many things about the Star Trek universe which are basically impossible in the real world, but because Star Trek makes an effort to work consistently within its own universe, the stories become believable. For example, as long as you're willing to accept that the Galaxy is mostly populated by humanoids then there is nothing within the series that will break the believability.

The quality of special effects must be believable. It is harder to suspend disbelief in movies where the special effects appear fake.

The genre will determine the lengths to which you can push believability. Audiences will be willing to believe an action hero can perform super-human feats, but the same feats performed suddenly in a romantic drama would result in confusion and disbelief.
Some stories purposely push the suspension of disbelief to the limit. The Indiana Jones movies were a good example, where the audience was expected to find the improbable antics amusing.

One important area of belief is in human actions and emotion. People must act, react and interact in ways which are believable. In cases where such interactions do require suspension of disbelief, the normal rules of consistency apply. Audiences are very unforgiving if they think a character is behaving in an unbelievable fashion.
It is now life and not art that requires the willing suspension of disbelief.

(Lionel Trilling)

PROPAGANDA IS AMAZING. PEOPLE CAN BE LED TO BELIEVE ANYTHING.

Alice Walker
www.quote-coyote.com

There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn’t true.

The other is to refuse to accept what is true." - Soren Kierkegaard

IMUNE
International Medical University for Natural Education
Evidence Based Natural Energetic Medicine Education

Medical EXPOSE
http://www.medicalexpose.com/