

Three amazing TV series that pushed the boundaries of the medium

Written by Linda Marshall-Smith
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For a long time, television series were mediocre, and people's standards were low. Now, series like *The Wire* and *The Sopranos* have taught us things that we didn't know were possible in the medium.

Look at [Marc Shmuger's resume](#) and the curriculum vitae of other film executives. Look at the bios of the executives behind the best TV series. All in all, it's great to know that there are teams who are creating commercially viable, stunning art for our viewing pleasure.

Breaking Bad

Breaking Bad follows the story of Walt, a chemistry teacher who is diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. Instead of focusing on getting better, Walt turns to the underworld and begins selling and manufacturing methamphetamine. The show takes us on a journey as Walt visibly changes before our eyes. We are so invested in the character that we sympathize as he descends into darkness, seemingly losing the sense of humanity that was central to his character at the start.

Breaking Bad becomes a bit fantastical at times, which makes it different from the other top TV series of the decade. You can sometimes feel like you're watching *Prison Break* when Walt is trying to bug his brother-in-law's office just before he returns. At the same time, the show explores morality, questions of agency, and has deeply textured narrative.

The Sopranos

"I want to tell a story about this particular man. I want to tell the story about the reality of being a mobster – or what I perceive to be the reality of life in organized crime. They aren't shooting each other every day. They sit around eating baked ziti and betting and figuring out who owes who money. Occasionally, violence breaks out– more often than it does in the banking world, perhaps," said David Chase, creator of *The Sopranos*.

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The mafia genre, until *The Sopranos*, focused on characters like Michael Corleone who would lead the lives of criminal masterminds with billion-dollar empires. But *The Sopranos* focused lower down the food chain, and was therefore able to take us much closer toward the lives of the characters. The show grappled with issues of family, Italian American culture and the journey of one man to release himself from the world into which he was born.

The Wire

The Wire gave us 60 episodes of deep insight into human nature, politics, education and the goings on in Baltimore. While the best TV series mostly focus on crime from the criminal's perspective, *The Wire* lets us see the perspective of the police and the criminals at the same time.

The first season focuses on drug dealing, and then later seasons expand into the shipping ports, education and politics. The characters tend to have true human motivations. Not the type you see on TV, but the type you see in everyday life. Someone might be driven by ego, for example, or a desire to get one up on someone else.