

Why Referencing Pop Culture is a Bad Idea

On Medium, I found a piece of advice on making your articles more popular. It was to reference pop culture. I disagree for several reasons: Not everyone will understand the reference; referencing pop culture gives your writing a cartoony feel; referencing pop culture diminishes the quality of your writing; Referencing implies that the writer barely has a surface-level understanding of the situation as well as the reference; and referencing pop culture serves as a crutch in your writing.



Not everyone will understand the reference, thus alienating your readers.

Believe it or not, not everyone is familiar with Star Wars or Marvel Comics. Comparing the social media villain-of-the-minute to Darth Vader or Magneto confuses these readers, and these readers may not return to your blog.

Referencing pop culture infantilizes your writing, giving it a cartoony feel.

Just because the average American reads at a sixth-grade level, doesn't mean you have to write your article as if it's set in a cartoon. The world isn't as dystopian as you think it is.

Without context, referencing pop culture diminishes your writing's quality.

Understanding the reason behind your pop culture reference is important, because there is a lot of context behind said reference. Not understanding the reference you're making leads to sloppy writing and sloppy research.

People who reference pop culture often have a surface-level understanding of the reference as well as the topic.

Typically, villains don't become villains to ruin people's lives or aid in some arbitrary culture war. Villains often think they're doing the right thing. The average writer either doesn't understand a villain's motives or doesn't care.

Referencing pop culture serves as a crutch in your writing.

Just like passive voice, pop culture references are words to meet a word count, instead of adding substantial content to your article.

Conclusion

Pop culture references do not make a popular article. In my opinion, it can easily make for sloppy writing.