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English 101

How to Become an Anime Otaku

Many people go through life never knowing the joy that is Japanese animation, or *anime*. *Anime* originated in Japan during the 1960s and has since then swept through the country, gaining popularity and devoted followers. It has even spread to other countries of the world like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. This guide will explain how you, too, can become an *anime otaku*.

Otaku means "obsessed fan" in Japanese and it is the term that true *anime* enthusiasts use to describe themselves. An *otaku* once said in her e-mail signature that *anime* is, "...the STD of the Internet: it spreads quickly, is hard to trace, and one-in-four high schoolers have it." Some people believe that it is difficult to submerge themselves in an entirely new culture but, actually, it's quite simple if you know what to do. If you believe you are prepared, read on. Otherwise, spend as much time as you can asleep because you won't be receiving much of it on your quest to *otakudom*.

First things first: you have to find an *anime* to worship devoutly. It doesn't matter if you like it or not, only that you dedicate yourself to it. I recommend that you search the TV listings for *anime* broadcasts if you've heard about a few in passing. But what if you have no idea which shows are, indeed, *anime*? Never fear, dear reader, because Cartoon Network shows more *anime* than any other network out there (besides the Anime Network, of course). During the afternoon, you can get a dose of "light" *anime* that's suitable to watch even with your children (who probably already know a substantial amount about *otaku*-ism). At night, you have your pick of more mature themes. Of course, these *anime* titles are all dubbed in English, but you're not yet at the point when you really care.

After making a selection, watch your new *anime* as much as possible. If all of the episodes are available, make sure that you see every single one at least twice. If the network only has a portion of them, write, call, fax, e-mail, etc. the corporate representatives until they give in and show the rest.

Joy is multiplied if it can be shared, right? If your friends have not yet had an *anime* experience, then try your best to convince them that *anime* is the greatest thing since cellular telephones. Call them around the time your beloved *anime* series is due to start and plead with them to watch until they relent. If your friends resist all forms of conversion, give up on them temporarily and search for people who already love your series as much as you do. Your school, work, or local community center is a good place to make new friends. Spend time talking with these new people until they find excuses to be anyplace that you're not. Continue to approach them with conversation and questions until they threaten you with bodily harm. You aren't yet at the level of *otaku*-ism where you will do anything for *anime*.

When you have exhausted all local sources for social contacts, it is now time to take it to the national and international level. Turn to the Internet and it will aid you. For now, it is perfectly fine to use public access at your local school, library, or even your workplace. Those office rumors about your boss tracking your Internet activities are easily ignored and often unfounded. Search for information related to your *anime* interest and learn as much as you can about it (such as the name of the creator and the true Japanese names of all the characters). Most 'net *otakus* will know more than you do and the last thing you want is to appear ignorant.

Once you feel confident enough, locate a related chat room, mailing list, or online community group. Immerse yourself in the brilliant words of fellow fans and realize that you're spending more time at the library than you are at home. If you haven't yet purchased a computer and/or subscribed to the Internet, now is the time to do so. Now, even at three a.m., you can spend time indulging your habit!

When one of your online friends mentions something known as “fanfiction,” search for it. Read every fan-written story about your series that you can, remembering to write down unfamiliar terms to be defined later. Find an online Japanese-to-English dictionary and keep the meanings of words like *baka* (which means “idiot”) and *kawaii* (which means “cute”) in mind because you *will* be seeing them again.

Depending on where your creative talents lie, you should now either: a) start to write your very own fanfiction or, b) start to draw your own fan art. If you choose fanfiction first, polish up your writing skills and find an editor. Established authors hate to see newbies butcher the English language. If you choose art first, then make sure that you actually have talent before displaying your work to the world.

Broaden your horizons by finding another *anime* or two that interests you when you realize that you can’t love just one. If possible, locate a fansubber (or someone who sells original Japanese *anime* with English subtitles) on the ‘net and purchase CD-Rs or videocassettes from them. Not only is it less expensive than the dubbed version, but it also sends you on your way to *otaku* level six: complete obsession. *Anime* purism is everything.

Start a collection of *anime*. Search the Internet for countless hours for information and make a list of all potential candidates for your collection. When you run out of money to pay the subber and finally descend into withdrawal, go ahead and pawn everything of value that you own to get your fix. But leave the computer, the television, the DVD player or VCR, the bed, and the fridge. You’ll need something to watch your *anime* on and even the greatest *otaku* has to sleep and eat *sometime*.

By now you should start to think that you are an *anime* expert. Ranting at someone when they ignorantly call your obsession a cartoon isn’t a bad thing and even greatly encouraged by fellow *anime* lovers everywhere. You should even go a step further and enlighten them to the wonders of the *anime* universe. It’s about

time that someone educated these poor lost souls and guided them to the proper path.

Congratulations! You are now the biggest *anime otaku* ever. Even when you have alienated all of your non-*anime*-loving friends and are constantly penniless due to the fact that three-quarters of your paycheck now goes to your fansubber, you can be comfortable with the knowledge that you are, indeed, an *anime otaku*.