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Doc for [Paratext for Fiction and Fandom](#)

Doc for [Original Work and Original Plan - Japanese Peritext](#)

Concept of Canon

New and old fans happily entering online fandom for the first time will stumble upon the word **canon** very quickly. Maybe it sounds trivial and overused, or it's confusing because you have no idea what religious dogma has to do with a romantic relationship between two characters. Further down the rabbit hole, veteran fans will talk about what related works count, why certain episodes from an anime don't matter, why you can't cite this or that, canon tier lists, contradictions being the most heinous crime ever committed, etc. All of this somehow inevitably leading to unhinged discourse about canon on every forum, blog, or YouTube comment section you step foot in. By the end of it, you're wondering why fandom didn't come with a warning label as you get the hell out of dodge.

But, don't feel too bad. Even veteran participants, after years and years of online debate and frustration, ask themselves this question:

"Why does it even matter?"

Luckily, if in the grand scheme of simply consuming entertainment as it presents itself: it doesn't matter. No, seriously. Anyone is allowed to freely enjoy all types of content available without user "eyeM1337" furiously typing "THAT ISN'T CANON!!!" at them.

Ultimately, you don't really have to care about this if just for your right of enjoying content. Not to mention, you certainly can coexist in online circles by this principle by simply not engaging in certain conversations. However, if you do decide to interact with many other fans outside of your own personal enjoyment of a franchise, if even to expand your knowledge about a series or to act on the desire to engage in all types of conversation—this seemingly taboo word can become a useful tool for the overall fandom experience. Between communal enjoyment and efficient discussion, there are numerous benefits to understanding the ideals behind the "concept of canon" for fictional media and its relationship to recognizing the levels of authenticity for all related materials and contexts to a given series.

This'll be a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon that is canon and its meaning and application, primarily for the fictional setting. Whether this assists you in fandom discussion or for research purposes, hopefully you'll be ready to learn what "eyeM1337"'s deal is the next time they yell at you.

- Definition of Canon

To inquire after the meaning of a word, typically the best place to start is its definition.

Other than the term canon itself, there are a few other words that are imperative to grasp when diving into the concept as a whole. Chances are you've come across these in the wilds of fandom several times. While they have multiple layers in their dictionary counterparts, [canon](#), [continuity](#), [canonical](#), and [canonicity](#) generally have the following meaning when applied **specifically** towards fictional media:

1. **Canon:** *Noun*. An official continuity of a fictional series established by and/or recognizable dominantly through the appropriate genuine parties [original creators, franchise owners, accredited persons] involved. For the sake of simplicity, it's considered to be the "official story" in totality.
2. **Continuity:** *Noun*. The *consistency* within a canon, or in another light, the glue that holds it together. It's the components of the "official story" [applicable expanded materials like spin-offs or side stories included] and focuses on the consistency holding these elements together—the scenarios/plot, character details, concepts, dialogue, etc.
3. **Canonical:** *Adj*. Describes the elements that directly represent or are applied to the continuity of a canon. In the case of "non-canonical", it's simply the opposite of this. Determining the canonical/non-canonical nature of something is largely what fandom is concerned with. When someone says something is "canon/non-canon" what they really mean is "canonical/non-canonical".
4. **Canonicity:** *Noun*. Following its dictionary counterpart, "the quality or state of being canonical", canonicity refers to the broad topic of a subject's canonical/non-canonical nature (as a whole and/or by specific details) relative to a canon and its continuity. This opens the discussion about specific sources of context that are represented under a single/different canon(s)—e.g. Game Canonicity, TV Show Canonicity, Movie Canonicity, etc. If we're talking about a series' "game canonicity", we're discussing the game's canonical or non-canonical elements or state of being as a whole.

So, easy enough. With definitions alone, the flames of discourse can be extinguished and all fandom residents can be at peace, right? Right?

Ha.

It wouldn't be such a hot topic if it was that easy. People aren't just seeking definitions, but rather how to function with them to get answers. Turns out that what we do with these definitions, or more directly, what the authorities over the series **don't** do, is partly what fuels "canon-talk" in fandom.

In general, if everything was copacetic in officially identifying *the canon*, these definitions hit the mark of what those confirmed materials would stand as. However, when an official, strict

establishment of a canon is absent, fandom communities will have to define and use these terms at different angles for classifying things in a series. This begets varying perceptions on canonicity and what exactly applies to the specific context, including many ontological discussions of a fictional material's place in the world for "what matters, what counts". This is either grounded in a different understanding of canon altogether, or this can be due to how the terms can have a certain nuance for a specific context [series] they're applicable to. Admittedly, there can be more questions than answers when diving into the subject, and this has understandably thrown fandom into a tizzy.

There's no need to bring out the pitchforks or heated tweets at the proper authorities over a series, however. Seeing as creators don't always feel (or need to be) obliged to follow the mindset or technicalities of canon, they're not entirely at an offense here when validation is lacking. Their number one priority is production and quality. There are companies that have efforts in establishing this on their own terms (e.g. Star Wars), or even some that do so to a degree that doesn't utilize the specifics of the term canon itself. But, not every series will explicitly carry a formal statement regarding canonicity, and it isn't exactly an immediate concern most of the time.

But for fandom, this absence can create quite the mess, most notably for multimedia franchises that have much more content to evaluate under the canonical lens. Without the official say, debate over what these words really mean will happen just as often as the extensive arguments over what constitutes canonical worth for the given series.

Is this side story an actual part of the continuity, is this characterization genuine, is this author considered legitimate, was this detail a retcon or is it just non-canonical fun-fodder, how do you even tell something is canonical, etc. Question after question, and soon what it means to be "official" can become frustratingly obscure when all these questions are coming from what is considered official, authentic products. That line between what's made to "count" and material made for the sake of entertainment blurs—even worse when we include the products that kind of function as both!

So, what do we do when definitions aren't enough for canonical recognition?

If we're using the understanding of canon as the starting place, we take a step back to break down the "how" and "why" of canon. Kind of a "what makes canon, canon" sort of deal. A significant step can be gained in this comprehension for its functionality and help us formulate recognition. What once was just a definition becomes much more of a wide concept free to examine fully to assess any given implementation. Or at least, for what can be done to one's best ability.

The following "key properties of canon", as I call them, are observable through how the term has functioned in history. Looking at its functional evolution in the act of selectivity for given materials, we are able to see the commonality behind the use of the term in any setting.

- Key Properties of Canon

Overall, there are three well known functionalities for canon:

1. **Biblical Canon:** In religious contexts, canon essentially refers to the chosen regulation or dogma decreed by a church council. For the establishment of the laws and principles of the church, this ideal centered on valued biblical text—what is recognized as an authoritative and genuinely accepted scripture in correspondence to the established dogma. The purpose here being in setting a hierarchical standard for church law by what is given the utmost authority for their beliefs.
2. **Literary Canon:** This refers to a sanctioned or accepted group of classic works. In the context of studying and observing literature throughout history, this is for the purpose of selecting valued texts that are considered to be the most significant and influential in a given time period and/or specific subject matter. The canonization of literature on this level is commonly associated with works that are selected for academic functions. From this type of hierarchy-based application, does the designation of this use of canon extend to valued philosophy, music, and art—all concerned with the authorship of relevant material as well in what material is considered.
3. **Fictional Canon:** In the early use for fictional continuity, canon plainly referred to the authentic works of a writer, or more specifically, authenticity centering on who the author is. Coined as an analogy with biblical canon, fictional canon was used for recognizing “the Canon” of the Sherlock Holmes series through authorship alone. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle being deemed as the true, authentic author for this fictional world—separate from that of later writers who adopted Doyle’s characters and setting. (I’ll refer to this as *Fictional Canon [Early]*) This simple approach arguably set the foundation of canonicity in fictional media today, largely for works that expanded further than a dependence on a writer, and instead acts as a descriptor of a set universe and chronology. (*Fictional Canon [Present], we’ll call it, refer back to the [canon definition](#)*)

As briefly demonstrated from the correlation made between Fictional Canon and Biblical Canon, each functionality is connected by the shared components inherently generated by canon. *Canon* as a whole, then, typically focuses on the nature of selectivism and the significance of material that is established as **Authoritative**, has accepted and accredited **Authorship**, and retains or has been given a specific **Application** to a given category and function—all seemingly contribute to a material’s merit of having **Significance** [most important/valued] for reaching that canonical standard, whatever it may be.

Authority, Authorship, Application, and Significance act as the *key properties of canon*—primarily in what the materials that reach “canon status” circulate on for either of the three common functionalities. Identifying these properties within the study of a canon, or

specifically if to discern a material's canonicity, is the key to understanding the concept. They can be used as a guide to see through the ambiguity to make a reasonable call on the subject's possible status. Though, the qualifications needed for something to have said status changes depending on the canon functionality—while these properties can be detected between its usage, the way they're used will vary from each example. We're concentrating mostly on the functionality of Fictional Canon.

In the case of Fictional Canon, we have to think about these properties in retrospect of its specific functionality and definition. The best place to start with is the *Significance* that a material has when it essentially meets the canonical standard in a fictional setting.

➤ Significance

Out of the four properties, I believe Significance captures what the ideals behind the establishment of a canon are the most—this being the selectivism [identification] of materials for canonical standing by virtue of some form of "pinnacle" value. This property refers to the value that is needed for something to be considered as a part of a canon in any function, how said materials meet the given qualifications. While Significance is justified and measured by the other three properties (authority, authorship, and application), it's the canon's function that sets what exactly the qualifications are—what defines it in the way of being "most important" or to be "what counts" in being canonical.

So, the qualifications change depending on the functionality of the canon. What it really means to be significant is going to be different because the way in which something would *need* to be is subject to that canon.

Unlike the other functionalities, Fictional Canon's primary function doesn't rely on the action of selecting material from a pit of others or deeming something of being the utmost important in representation. The "importance" evaluated here is much more straightforward—it depends on whether a material can be classified as being a part of the official story, *the canon*. That's...the rather direct point of it.

Canonical standing isn't determined by a material's value to the story in its varying degree, but rather of whether or not it is simply made to apply to it **at all**—keeping in mind that something of little value to the story can still be, by all right to the qualifications, canonical.

Typically on the topic of why something could [should] be canonical when discussing an ambiguous material, fans will evaluate its canonicity on the merit of the context's perceived importance to the canon. The idea of this isn't completely unreasonable, but it's a bit misapplied in that the nature of that type of conversation doesn't have a more direct interaction with how something is canonical. It can make for a good discussion, if not maybe being an accompanying note to make on canonicity, but it really isn't the point.

Naturally, canonical value holds more significance *to* the official story than something that, well, is non-canonical if the comparison is made. In a sense, “canonical=significant” isn't the worst mindset to have, in that something is deemed significant because it's canonical. But, it's important to know that this is only relative to the specific value of applying to the canon, NOT by its level of importance within it or by any other general standard of personal interest. The outright significance can't be known though until the knowledge of the application is made, so before then, it's not exactly a competition between existing materials to contend for the proverbial canon-seat.

Either way, there'd have to be a way that a material's significance to [for] the canon can be possibly measured in the case of ambiguity. The other three properties are what would lead the way to understanding how exactly something meets the qualifications [Significance] of being canonical. The hyper focus of evaluating a material's authenticity through the other properties is what I've personally coined as the “Three A's of Authenticity”.

- Three A's of Authenticity (TAA)

The “Three A's of Authenticity” [authority, authorship, application—TAA] essentially aims to decipher the doubt in the recognition of canonical materials meeting that qualification of Significance. When talking about the TAA in a conversation of canonicity, we look at how these properties function for the canon as a whole—the “authenticity” in this case stems from the properties' relationship to the canon established. This creates the notion that there is a certain authentic standard [who/what/why] represented by the properties for the material forming the canon, so any material expected to be free from doubt should typically retain the same standard in some fashion.

And for the most part, this is usually a very common threshold met when looking at the properties from that of the canon:

- Authority

As expected, it's the source of what/who has a position of authority over the canon—where the prospects of “officiality” are held the most. Represented here would typically be authoritative figures such as the original creators, development team, and/or the company with ownership over the franchise [license-holders]. Fans typically look at these parties for “canonical guidance”, those who would normally be in charge of directly establishing the canon of a series and thereafter what is or isn't canonical.

- Authorship

More specific than authority, this refers to the writers of the canon—those directly responsible for creating the fictional universe and its continuity, extending to the general plot, lore, characterization, etc. This considers the original creators, those who constructed the story's

origins, but it also extends to authors who have been added after the fact. Primarily, those whose authorship has been accredited by writing something specifically for the series' canon, no matter if its a major work or supplemental, and through the jurisdiction of those who have authority. Keep in mind that specific author representations (like original writers) will also fall under Authority as well in certain cases.

➤ Application

Even more straightforward than the other two, this refers to what applies to the canon and in observation of how this application is done or represented. It considers the context [continuity—being a part of the story] the most in application as a whole, but it also takes into account the existential functionality of the material as a work or paratext.

Judging from the above, there is essentially a “pool” of representations for the three properties that canon naturally contains when it is constructed. The materials making up the canon will represent this pool when meeting the qualifications towards the canon. Thus, marking whatever is in it as what typically “green-lights” its authenticity for the canon, if not at least the audience's ability to discern it as such. The three properties are something that can be identified for any individual material, simply by addressing who is the authority, author of a work, and what type of application it has in its own standing. When looking at any new material, naturally one's perception keys in on what these properties are.

Because of this, there are certainly works in fictional media where the answer to something's canonical standing would more or less be common sense. No ambiguity involved for those following the series closely. You won't find years of online debate for whether or not, say, Toy Story 2 was canonical to that series, or if Terminator was indeed the predecessor to T2. It can be understood much broader than this by going through the typical checklist—is the newly released movie sequel is officially produced by the proper company (Authority), written by either the original or accredited writers (Authorship), and is say, established story-wise as the sequel of a previous series (Application)? We're looking good here in what would normally just be considered a part of the canon. Even if it's subconscious, we understand canonicity due to the TAA being intact of what would otherwise not create any sense of doubt. The company matches and creative team matches, the authorship is the same, and even marketing, interviews, and story application in future installments proves its authenticity to the canon.

Ambiguity mostly lies within the observations of the fandom. This suspicion for a material's canonicity typically happens when there is a deviation of sorts. The doubt that this causes can be described as a *discrepancy*—when there's a deviation from the standards set by the canon's TAA that puts the authenticity of the material's own properties into question, thus rendering its canonical status ambiguous. For instance, the material might be produced by a different company, the author for a new work wasn't part of any previous canonical works, or even more,

the new story isn't applied in what is known to be canon, or isn't treated as a relevant work via paratext. The whirlwind of confusion this might bring is understandable. Some people might see these differences and not really give it a thought, but once it comes into play for online discourse, that doubt settles in on how the material really reflects the canon. The road block caused here unfortunately can hinder the discussion of a canon and its materials.

What we're hoping for here with the TAA is to find a solution to approach the ambiguity. Because ambiguity usually starts from the fandom perspective, there's a chance that said perspective can actually be answered for completely. However, sometimes this isn't the case, and what we have left is to draw logical conclusions based on the understanding of canon. The rationale for discussing this efficiently will start by proving how the key properties of canon are active in the questioned subject's canonicity. If there isn't a more definitive answer supplied in any source, one would have to settle more on the plausibility spectrum that is backed by compelling logos in order to justify the canonicity.

Test its authenticity, if you will.

This is where the "fun" of canon-talk really begins—the inevitable journey of investigation and reasoning conducted (debated) on fandom forums and other social media sites.

The TAA is designed not only to recognize a material's alignment with that of a canon, but for being a useful tool and perspective for inspecting the authenticity of a material. Or in other words, inspecting what authenticates the three properties that are represented for the material in question—this all hoping to lead to a logical understanding if the material meets the qualifications needed for canon or not. Finding answers comes by asking questions to fulfill what the material's properties would have for canon status. The questions parallel that of the properties:

1. **Authority:** If the authority behind the material isn't the same creators or company (internal), who are they, and have they been given a sense of authority from the former? Is the work officially licensed? Are they working in conjunction with them on the project? Have they worked with them before?
2. **Authorship:** Can the author/writers for the material be said to be accredited and authentic already? If not, is there information that supports they've been given this by the authority? Are they an external writer? Have they worked on the series or with any previous genuine parties before? On this project? Did the authorities speak on them and seek them out to write for the series?
3. **Application:** What are the reasons behind its development? How is the material applied within the series, if at all? Advertised as? Is there any information that can speak on a material's application or standing to a canon? Is it even capable of being applicable to the canon via its context? Should the topic even abide by the canon criteria in the first place? (e.g. fan works, which do not)

Investigation typically reaches that of paratext, including referential and epitext information such as interviews, guidebooks, website descriptions, etc. And for a lot of those questions, the answers can be found there. Looking at the literal context of the material, especially for that of Application inquiries, works just as well.

There are a number of things to keep in mind however, amongst others that typically come up when looking at authenticity concerning the TAA.

Even if a material has one or two discrepancies, it's possible that another property can still contain a proper representation from what is understood from the canon. In regards to Authority, the official company of a franchise can and will still produce material that, in application, isn't canonical. Probably the first thing to come to mind for some people are the typical production of movies or episode specials that popular anime series will have, or even a video game based on an anime series that might include its own content. This extends to even certain products that might reflect canonical elements of a canon (or several), but because of the type of game it is or its objective, it's non-canonical due to functionality. There are many other examples as well, this extending to even that of beyond just company production—official writers for a series can contribute to non-canonical works as well. The factor of entertainment and such spoken of earlier still needs to be considered even when evaluating the TAA.

For Authorship—remember that the correct representation here in identifying authenticity is that of those who write for the canon, specifically in thought of the creative endeavor aspect. While authorship should ultimately still be observed and marked, those who write the more analytical or objective information doesn't reflect the same representation here, e.g. writers for material like guidebooks, reviews, official articles, etc. However, if in the thought of "authenticity" in retrospect of the canon, the judgment for authors not in the creative sphere falls more on the basis of accuracy and truth of the information as opposed to their representation as authors for the series.

Given my audience here reading this, I'll use the example of Studio BentStuff, a company that is well known for writing different kinds of reference/analytical guidebooks like their ALL ABOUT, Kaitai Shinsho, and Ultimania Series books. The Ultimania Series is published directly by Square Enix, so BentStuff are "accredited" in the sense that their materials are considered official for video game franchises by SE. But, this isn't for the sake of their authorship to the canon, but that of the authenticity of specifically the paratext they provide—this validity is supported by the involvement of the Authority in this case, being that of SE. This is similar for other companies that write paratext materials for video games that are either published directly by SE or not, but might have their involvement in the construction of the information provided regardless. "Official" still applies in the not scenario as many valuable and valid materials for Square Enix series have been published through other companies. But, there's a sense of accountability and authenticity with having the official company [Authority] involved or directly publishing the paratext work.

The Application property can be seen as holding the immediate answer of canonical standing more than the other two properties. Mostly in how being applied to the canon story would be a pretty good sign of, well, having that qualification to the canon. And more than likely in that scenario, the other two properties should follow suit accordingly in authentic representation. But, that's only if it actually *is* applied. There being a distinct difference between being applicable and being applied—this aligns with the fans looking at the “could/should” qualifications mentioned prior in the Significance section. Application does consider both, but ultimately what matters the most is the more direct applied function of the material itself. There's also the scenario that contextual information may be applied to the canon, but it may not render the source of said information fully as canon. The odd situation here is typically when an original creator or company might adopt specific ideas from another work, but still render the work itself as non-canonical as a whole.

Also, similarly to how I spoke about correct representation for Authorship, the idea of Application can also be observed differently depending on the material. I mentioned before that application works well in consideration of the literal contexts (story material) being applied into the canon, like a new story finding its place, but new information can also be applicable to the canon, where you would keep in mind the source [Authority] and the type of information for canonical consideration. New, factual information for the canon given by the proper authorities falls under the same canonical umbrella that an actual work would for Application. Do keep in mind the type of information though, opinion or personal information isn't necessarily canonical, but it can be considered for other reasons.

Hopefully utilizing the TAA will help ambiguity of materials become clearer to form a solid stance on its canonicity, if not leading to an investigation where the answer is available. Recognizing canon or discerning ambiguity, there's a way this can be done to at least the degree of having constructive discussions about it.

Though, I'm sure all of this will vary from who reads it. It's not like I am any type of authority (heh) when it comes to the canon concept. If something is ambiguous by the end of all investigation and perception by the entirety of a fandom, then chances are there is no definitive answer in the first place. My conceptual ideals here aren't going to give you that necessarily in the face of it, but it can help hopefully in a sort of what's likely/less likely scope of understanding. Not to mention, someone else might have a compelling perception on canon that is different than my own that I will gladly be open for discussion for. Because, that's all that this amounts to and the purpose for it, as I've said in the very beginning.

Despite being something that creators might specifically implement themselves, canon overall is much more of a fandom concern in its strictness, and naturally begets discussion. Most of this only matters for the perception of authenticity that people have on material contents, and would

then have an effect on themselves and how they have said discussions. Unless an official word is out, we're on our own in how we perceive these types of things.

If you can understand this, then I hope it has and will help you in the future, and if you disagree with any of it, feel free to send that rebuttal and open up the discussion. A lot of this stuff isn't necessarily decided by one person anyway, it can be seen as a collective on what people can agree on, especially when this concept is a bit unconventional in explicit execution in the wilds of fandom. Canonicity subjects have been essentially peer created, like that of canon tiers.

On that note, all of the above isn't all there is to canon when it comes to the wider concept. "But wait, there's more!" really hits hard here. Most of what I've written here is designated for creating a good foundation of an understanding for the topic, with the extension of my own proposal to alleviating ambiguity regarding canon status through the TAA. There are many other things that can be covered with talking about canon. From here we'll be touching upon many different topics that might be useful for these types of discussions in the future.

Canonicity Subjects

This section will detail what I refer to as "Canonicity Subjects"—simply just a few extended conversations I find in fandom that revolve around canonicity in one way or the other.

*refer to [Definition of Canon](#) for refreshers on how I define certain terms as I'll use them throughout this section.

- Optional Canonicity

Often I've seen fandom communities have debates about the canonicity of optional or varied materials in a series, most particularly in video games. This is much more going to be my two cents on the perspective at play here.

For starters, I want to point out that there are essentially three typical circumstances that can be noted in a video game context (these "titles" are what I'd refer to them as based on how they function). There are probably more than just these three that can be noted, but I usually see fans circulate on issues around these types:

1. Obtainable Optional: Content that you would have to essentially "unlock or obtain" in order to experience a video game fully, but would still be able to complete the game's story without doing so (opposite of "non-optional" stuff). Ex. A side quest or cutscene that is unlocked.
2. Optional Variance: Something that is optional only in comparison—where two (or more) things are available to achieve and experience, but through a playthrough, only one can happen as the game continues on. Ex. The "success" cutscene vs the "failure" cutscene.

3. Optional to Canonical: This is typically where, in either option previously, something that was once merely optional is later proven to have happened regardless of what the player had experienced beforehand. Ex. A sequel to a game referencing the “good [true] ending” as opposed to the “bad [false] ending”.

All three of these aren't mutually exclusive, however. *Obtainable Optional* and *Optional Variance* especially can blend depending on what happens in the game. And, honestly, between those two, I would argue that it's much less of an issue of canonicity and more just part of the typical flexibility that a game has for player experience. This can happen for a multitude of types of games.

Let's say I was looking at *Optional Variance*—there are a myriad of games that are so specifically designed to be adjustable to player decision, so much it's really its own genre of games. Adventure games with optional dialogue and story direction like Mass Effect, Detroit: Become Human, every Telltale game, etc. It's a type of style and gameplay approach for the player experience and entertainment where strict canonicity isn't always a factor. Even the games that are the more typically designed with a set narrative and experience value can still retain any of *Obtainable Optional* and *Optional Variance* to different degrees easily.

However, I would argue that *Optional to Canonical* is where an issue for canonicity comes into place, especially when it's confirming something from *Optional Variance*. As per the example I gave, one of the most easy observations of this is when a game has a sequel that treats any previously optional thing as canonical. This can go beyond just endings to the game as well if any optional element is treated in an absolute way.

Usually the first thing that pops into my head for this is Metal Gear Solid. For those unfamiliar with the Metal Gear series, the first [“third”] game has two different endings that are based on either succeeding or failing (giving up) a gameplay sequence before the game ends. Some people may have thought that both endings were valid, but once things were revealed later in its future sequels, we come to find that only one ending (the successful one) is canonical. This happens in other games as well, again, even for things that aren't just endings, but there are a lot of games that do that. *Optional to Canonical* only really counts as such though if it's something that is essentially confirmed to have happened canonically regardless of its previously optional state of being. Mass Effect, being a series that purposefully carries over player options (especially the consequential ones), wouldn't count for such a thing.

So what does this mean for *Obtainable Optional* and *Optional Variance*?

Some people may disagree, but I would say that *normally*, these should be seen as valid and canonical until an issue of continuity is brought forth. In other words, especially for *Optional Variance*, all options unless presenting a contradiction can be seen as canonical. Truly, I don't believe it's a matter of canonicity most of the time as opposed to it being a part of the game

mechanics. But if it had to be viewed in light of canonicity, this is where they lay. I believe *Obtainable Optional* definitely is covered under this unless the extra content is blatantly against the continuity (e.g. easter egg that may not have canonical weight), but otherwise it should be accepted as canonical if there's no conflict. This idea extends to the circumstances of *Optional Variance* too. This doesn't include anything that results in a "game over", though. The game has to be able to be finished as if the optional material is a natural part of the player's experience. Everything is always going to be case by case in flexibility, so I wouldn't set it as such an absolute—more like a default reading of the optional nature in video games.

A Wolf Among Us, a game from video game company Telltale, is something I often think of. The actual game as a whole is indeed canonical [a prequel] to the comic book series it's based on. However, it still plays like a typical Telltale game and is filled with a myriad of variances based on player decision. At least for some of the options, knowing that the material has a place in the canon does ease the idea for players that the validity of their personal playthrough is retained regardless of some of the choices they make. I'm not sure if this applies to **everything** in the game, however, but it does create the sense of "inconsequential" results regarding canonicity as opposed to the consequences for the game experience.

Which case, *Optional Variance* can have inconsequential end results for even the game experience alone, if not the actual story of the game. Talking about canonicity in those cases remains a little point.

The first example I tend to think of is the first Squall [Leon] battle in Kingdom Hearts. It happens very early in the game, where the expectancy for beating him in that moment is low enough to have two different cutscenes for losing or beating him. Story-wise, it doesn't matter—you still pass out and are taken by the Traverse Town gang. There is, technically, a reward given to Sora by Aerith for beating Squall, but in no way does this have any conflict in canon. Not to mention, again, it's very easy to lose against him and the cutscene afterwards is hardly different from the loss one. I'd hardly call the success "more valid" in this case, but I can understand the case there given the success vs. failure logic (see more below). The previously mentioned A Wolf Among Us might, by the technical standards of being a prequel, be an example of practical inconsequential results because no matter what happens, the game is still a functioning prequel canon-wise. Any results really just affect the game experience specifically as is, not the canon.

As a sort of middle ground, I'd argue that there's a reasonable logic of prioritizing the validity of the successful/completion routes in optional circumstances. This being especially true for *Optional Variance*. It may not be an issue of canonicity, but it can certainly be a discussion about how games are developed in a way that rewards the players for being successful or completing something in full, and thus whatever is put in place for said "reward" (cutscene, dialogue, etc.) is something that should be considered more than whatever is given upon failure. Some might want to use the word "true", in a sense, but I'd be apprehensive of invalidating the other things that still have the validity of being available regardless. Saying that the successful,

completed route is “more valid” does hold some solid ground in retrospect to the game’s development.

Depending on what exactly is given for either the success or failure route makes a better argument for what sets the “hierarchical” value and validity of either outcome, if even there being more than two. Either way, it’s not an immediate concern to canonicity in the many ways this happens in a game.

So, I would beseech people to not use the terms “canon” or “canonicity” until they essentially need to be brought into the picture. When it comes to optional variety in a game, it doesn’t always induce an effect on continuity—there is a thin line here in the functionality of this creation within a game. One should really ask themselves if the subject at hand is (or should be) really about canonicity at all. But, if one was to use that “more valid” logic when evaluating the value retained in each option available, I would agree that a value that does correlate or would impact the story/continuity is fair for canonical consideration. That is, IF it is a value that indeed reflects those things inherently. Everything is case by case, so any discussions for particular games will have to be evaluated carefully.

- Canonical Representation

The phrase *canonical representation* simply refers to anything that reflects [represents] any canonical element of a canon. As simple as this is, it’s a very useful, foundational idea about the recognition of existing canonical elements and how the many ways that information can present itself.

Normally when you’re talking about canonicity for Fictional Canon, the agenda is to find out either if a work as a whole is canonical [part of the canon] or what specific details are canonical in that work. Viewing canonicity in retrospect to canonical representation leans a bit more to the latter—you can think of canonical representation as the branch of canonicity that focuses on recognizing canonical qualities and accuracy.

Adaptations are very susceptible to conversations on canonicity and canonical representation. Fans will often have discourse on how an adaptation is similar/different than that of its origin source, gauging how well the canon is preserved. Canonical representation by the equalization of the canon it’s coming from is very easy to observe when it comes to continuity at its most basic level (having the same plot, scenes, characterization, lore, etc.). It’s sort of an “in-context” type of representation, and this can expand to non-adaptive material (additive/completely new) that retains elements from a canon but as a whole isn’t applied to the canon(s) it’s reflecting.

Pretty easy examples are the movies that a lot of popular anime franchises will have—the Dragon Ball Z series having a long line of its own. Even though most of the DBZ films find no place within the canon of the series, it still retains a handful of obvious canonical elements that can be recognized regardless (the same characters and corresponding traits, powers, character

relationships, personalities, lore, etc.). Popular video games like Marvel's Ultimate Alliance, Kingdom Hearts, World of Final Fantasy, Dissidia Final Fantasy, Final Fantasy Brave Exvius, Star Ocean: Anamnesis**, etc.—these too contain canonical representations of other contexts that serve as supplements to tell their own stories and/or other game functionalities.

****Star Ocean: Anamnesis, where the canonical representation [characters] primarily happens outside of the main story, is a bit different since the main story itself does apply to the canon of the Star Ocean universe.**

The flexibility of this goes beyond the “in-context” stuff and to things like factual information reflecting the canon, referential information in a guidebook, information covered on a company website, the synopsis of the game's plotline, etc. Basically, paratext, especially on the informative side. All of these things represent the canon through the state of being factually accurate about the series information-wise—in the larger sense of paratext functionality and purpose. This means that even a fan-made summary can, by that grounds, create something that has canonical representation if it's objectively true to the canon. This matters not in who is relaying the information, but mostly in what the actual source of the information is coming from. If said information is from a preexisting, canonical source, then anyone can represent this if presented in its accurate and truest form.

Recognizing representation can certainly be used as support for many different conversations in the broader canon subject. Especially if someone is claiming specifically that something is canonical or should be seen as such in an authentic manner. Where I've seen this the most is probably for certain traits shown from a character in a work that isn't canonical as a whole. The argument here essentially being that the representation there is authentic for the character despite the entirety of the work not necessarily being a part of the canon it's representing, this being backed up by the TAA of the work itself. (more below) The anime movies are a prime example where this would thrive, and adaptations and other supplemental material would be home to these types of conversation too if applicable.

For gauging authenticity with the TAA, keep in mind that canonical representation is mostly about things that *already* pertain to the canon and fall under recognition—arguing if whether it, as completely new information, is being added to the canon is...well, a different argument ultimately.

While the understanding behind canonical representation can be used for many discussions, if you're dealing with something that is new in totality, THAT is subject to the TAA instead to gauge the authenticity of the material and the information. If the reflective “character trait” in a new work (like the example of an anime film to an existing series) was an expansion of the character's backstory or something, then canonical representation wouldn't be what's being argued initially. You'd still have to prove that the material itself is even canonical in the first place. If it's new information or is more creative context that isn't covered in the canon already,

we're going to want to be looking mostly at this from the credible authorities/authors perspective then to verify authenticity.

Think of paratext like a developer interview. While it will contain factual information that is already retained in the existing context, these interviews can also be home to new information that otherwise wouldn't have been gained from the game. The authenticity of this addition to the canon is validated by the interview being by the genuine authorities that can provide such information reliably. The information and the source of it is subject to the inspection of authenticity, which canonical representation shouldn't have to be, outside of the understanding of accuracy and facts. Whether it's really new information or information that can already be understood [or confirms it] can be weighed in the case by case scenarios.

This is the same with what a fan can say in regards to what happens in a scene or about a character. Either it falls under being accurate and acting as canonical representation, or it's labeled as a personal interpretation. Recognizing which is which is also a pretty common occurrence in fandom, especially when said interpretation might be deemed meritable depending on its congruency with the available information. However, referring to the context and its truths alone in a reasonable way helps avoid any issues this can cause.

- Canon Tiers

Canon tiers are fandom's bread and butter for systematically classifying and organizing materials for the sake of canonicity, including establishing a hierarchy for the case of conflicting information. The systems used for certain franchises will vary in functionality, whether this is established by fans or by official parties to the series.

Examples include the [Star Wars Canon Levels](#) (though it's not completely in effect after the 2014 reboot), [Harry Potter Canon Tier](#), [Star Trek Canon](#), and [Neon Genesis Evangelion Canon Tier](#). Not all include the specifics of "tiers", but there is some designation of canonical material regardless. Unless, you're a fan of [Doctor Who](#), then it's established officially as a free for all basically.

Most of what I see in fandom generally follows this type of scheme:

1. 1st Tier: What's considered the *primary* sources of the canon. Typically anything made by the original creator(s) themselves, not including whose considered external.
2. 2nd Tier: Paratextual info involving proper authorities (especially the creators), like interviews, company statements, or guidebooks.
3. 3rd Tier: Supplemental material that is, by intent and purpose, part of the canon and relative then to 1st and 2nd tier, but might contain contradictions or non-canonical material that otherwise are overruled by the two above. Adaptations that follow closely to its origin source and expanded material (side stories/spin-offs) made by internal/external writers are typically home here.

4. 4th Tier: Official, but non-canonical additions.

Though it varies in how things are classified, generally that idea of setting all materials that pertain to a unified continuity [canon] is the goal. I've seen fans designate their tier lists to essentially navigate the "more/less" important works for a canon. It can be a mix of objective and subjective reasoning, but a list agreed upon can be useful in the event of a series with a large pool of canonical works. Not to mention, there are lists (including that one) that emphasize who the material is even coming from and its purpose within the continuity. This is why you'll see so many lists prioritize authorship as the top level of canonicity classification. To me, this should enforce that everything on a tier list should correspond with the materials relationship to a single canon, **not** multiple. It reinforces a certain guideline that follows in what is established where and why.

The way this system uses canon is what inspired my thoughts on the functionality of the TAA, along with beginning my phase on investigating how canon essentially works. The canon tiers really set in stone what the implementation of canon does for fictional media.

I have a few concerns, though.

If there is something that firmly induces its own continuity, that entails that it too has its own canon and corresponding tiers relative to it. However in the likeness of how adaptations are created and function (even more detail in the next section), it can still be included on the list as long as it's understood that those elements are non-canonical as opposed to officially branching off to create their own continuity. Sometimes that is the case, but not always, which is one of the reasons adaptations truly capture the nature of evaluating canonicity. I find this isn't always considered by those who create tier lists. What's also often disregarded is that non-canonical sources can still have canonical representation of some sort—even adaptations that have their own continuity will inevitably have this in some form to emulate the "based on" idea, even if loosely done.

More than anything, I feel very strongly that a canon tier list should be relative to **a** single canon and its guidelines (what I call a "canon umbrella"), and the canonicity of each tier should gravitate on its relationship to that canon. This too is sometimes split in fandom. It's important because it would ensure that the tiers and all relevant materials are being evaluated efficiently, not to mention setting an understanding for why the list is made in the first place.

It's also of interest to me personally in how this is done as a certain safety measure for the authenticity of information—this being a system founded on creating hierarchy within the sources in a franchise for allocating what takes precedence in the event of contradictions. Anything that would induce another canon should either be labeled as non-canonical, ambiguous (or "semi-canon", as I've seen), or simply belong on another canon list.

Outside of being listed for the sake of being a derivative work of some kind, I see little point in creating a tier of things that, in nature, are expressing their own established continuity. There is the logic that in the efforts to label something as “non-canonical”, it would only be in the direct sense of making a comparison to another canon, as opposed to recognizing it’s canonicity in its own right. I mean, everything is going to be non-canonical if you compare and place it within a canon it doesn’t belong. I can see how it would be worth mentioning because it’s still related. But, it’s also important to note when works are actually functioning on their own continuity as opposed to simply having universally non-canonical elements within it.

Other than the idea of the “canon umbrella”, I also believe the tier system is mainly relevant for the hierarchy of information applicable to the canon. I have found some people aren’t committed to this mindset, particularly to whatever is designated as “third tier canon”. The tier system doesn’t often consider the aspects of canonical representation that can happen within non-canonical works—it’s much more concerned with the more existential standing of the material as a whole. Outside of those things that are basically labeled as non-canonical, everything else on the tier list should be considered canonical unless that contradiction speaks otherwise. It’s also important to remember that **any** of these tiers can have contradictions and in those circumstances, there’d have to be other information that sheds light on what is correct at the time. This may sound like it’s still determining if something is “more/less” canon, but really, it’s determining which information under conflict is applied or not.

If to determine what is or isn’t canonical by the full nature of the work, especially in authenticity, it takes much more than a tier title alone. Canonicity, in determining it, may be a spectrum of different factors and information. However, by the end result, it should only be one of three things concluded: Canonical, Non-Canonical, and Ambiguous.

That’s really it in practical means. There’s no “more/less” canon by the principles of the concept for what that means. Ambiguity of a canon can happen in a myriad of ways (hello [Schrödinger](#)), but in most cases there should be some type of information that supports some understanding regarding its canonicity if it’s to be considered anyway.

Another thing that’s important for a tier list is having a grasp of the sense of hierarchy for who is behind what pieces of information (this is in consideration of the TAA, as well). For example, I could also create a tier list based on authority and authorship, and it’s somewhat something I find that fans do often as well subconsciously:

1. Primary Parties (original creators, company with rights)
2. Directly hired by Tier 1 (specifically content creation), like external authors, guidebook companies, third parties for development team, etc.
3. Extended permissions and licenses in distribution for specific endeavors (Original interpretations, external authors (not directly hired), guidebooks by external companies)

This list isn't based on canonicity as any tier can be responsible for any canon/non-canon material. It's under who has the hierarchy of importance in regards to a franchise. But, this list is only possible because all of these people do have some sort of authenticity established for them—the third being the loosest if by standing on the leg of gaining permissions of sorts to publish officially. Depending on the case, they may not ultimately have any at all if by the perspective of those higher.

To recap, a canon tier essentially creates a “canon umbrella” that all relevant information gravitates around for a single canon. And from this, we can create an order for this information in the event of conflicting information. There's other functionalities that you'll see between different fandoms, but the prior two points will come in handy when evaluating many of them.

- Adaptations

As I somewhat covered in the previous section, I believe adaptations are where the subject of canonicity thrives the most.

An [adaptation](#), in its most simplest understanding for fandom, is when a specific story is remade in a different medium: book to movie, movie to book, manga to anime, movie to video game, etc. This is very common within multimedia franchises. The specifications of being an adaptation are for the entries that are retellings of the same story (e.g. Harry Potter books and movies) as opposed to just a completely new addition to the canon through another medium (FFVII game and Advent Children movie).

When a story is retold in another medium, those who know the original source are going to be most concerned with the canonicity of the new source—what canonical elements are retained [story, lore, events, characters, personalities, etc.], how the differences impact the storytelling, and essentially, if it's acting as a “proper adaptation”. However, there are several levels to this functionality that can be observed under the canon-lens. The crux of said observations, I believe, should be to retain a “sense of practicality” for what adaptations are, how they're made, what they're made for, and how closely tied they are to their source material.

Adaptations inherently have differences from that of their origin source. This is mostly due to the multitude of elements that come with whatever medium is used and, more often than not, different people developing the product than that of the origin source. However, multiple creative liberties and practical decisions made for production can lead to differences that may challenge the canonical elements of its predecessor, and for some fans this also challenges the canonical nature of the adaptation as a whole.

The sense of conflict that this produces can be quite the troubling circumstance in fandom for a multitude of reasons. It can be hard to have a conversation concerning canon when what someone knows from an adaptation differs from what is known from the origin source. This can range from inconsequential changes to ones that largely affect the continuity of what would

count for the canon. Completely new, unique elements are challenged as well even if they're not specifically contradictory to the origin source.

That “sense of practicality” is what can be used for judging the canonicity of an adaptation in relation to the canon it's based on and its authenticity for that. If there's not a better frame around the thoughts on what is understood about adaptations, the conversations that people have when talking about them can be a bit of a mess.

To start, I'd say there are three general types of adaptations that can be observed:

1. The adaptation that are “proper” in the way of being a reliable alternative. They effectively retain most, if not all, of the same canonical elements from its origin source. This can include additional elements as well. (Dragon Ball anime series)
2. The adaptations that largely [recognizably] retain the same canonical elements, but has a number of differences from its origin source. Some being that directly interact with or impact the story or characters that should be noted. (Harry Potter film series)
3. The adaptations that are typically described as “loosely based”. They may retain a few canonical elements as to the point of recognizing what it's based on, but otherwise has significant differences to that of its origin source. (How to Train Your Dragon film series)

Between these three, there's a sort of “spectrum” in functionality there for how great the differences are in the adaptations—anime examples often will have things like filler or specials that are exclusive to its source, but may not interfere with the core story anyhow. I'm sure there are other types that can be mentioned for how adaptations function, but these are just the general groupings that most people can observe. For the subject of canon though, it matters quite a lot to fans where the adaptation falls with its differences and those who are behind the production. This tends to happen when you're not just comparing similar canonical elements, but you're also looking at the authenticity of additional elements unique to that adaptation that can be a representation for the canon.

If we're dealing with a “proper adaptation” [Option #1], then the work itself should, in all intent and purposes, be a part of the same canon of it's origin source. Relative to canon tiers, it would safely be considered third tier canon (for what this is, generally), and subject to the inspection of the TAA for authenticity sake. This level of authenticity, if even for the sake of new information in the adaptation, can be accounted for as canonical if the adaptation finds its place in the same canon. From the Kingdom Hearts novel series, character details that don't contradict the canon should be considered canonical. In a way, this would be adaptations that can truly be seen as a supplement to the canon. The Naruto anime series even adapted completely new, canonical material different from its origin source (from novels instead of the manga). The Disney movie *Holes*, adaptation of the book by Louis Sachar, had [it's screenplay written by the author itself](#). Despite their goal being to “make the best movie I could make, not to be faithful to the book”—the movie turned out to be very close to the book either way, and the author themselves has a clear understanding of how certain things or ideas don't translate to the big screen, and

that it's not there to be against the source material. The result all of this created one of the best book to film adaptations, as well.

So, for an adaptation that closely follows its origin source, it wouldn't be practical to say it's functioning on its own canon when it's basically doing its job as an adaptation. Option #2 can also fit this same bill, however, this will heavily depend on the nature of the differences present and if considering, what purposes the differences exist for in relation to the canon. Obviously a movie depiction of a book (most notably a lengthy one) won't contain every single element featured in the book, nor will the scenes play out 1:1 for the sake of the practicality of a movie production. But, do those differences really mean it's functioning on a different canon, or is it still subject to the hierarchy ideals that third tier canon produces—if not, just being acceptable as it is within the medium with the understanding of the creative flexibility of different depictions?

Both are pretty common, yeah.

In fact, I'd say it's normal for an adaptation to have significant differences enough to be functioning within its own canon and writing direction without being really "loosely based" in execution. Option #2 presents the most flexible, yet sometimes the hardest canonicity to judge because of this. There are a lot of popular franchises that have very significant differences but are much more tied to the general story beats of their origin source, like the *Lord of the Rings*, *Jurassic Park*, or *The Walking Dead* franchises. One of the most easily observable and common ways this happens is how characters can be treated in their respective adaptations—some characters will either be completely absent or completely changed by who they are (personality, gender, back story, story impact, etc.). Because of this, Option #2 can have a difference that should set it in a way of being within its own canon as opposed to deeming the conflicting information as universally non-canonical within a canon it doesn't belong in.

Option #3, if in reverse of Option #1, is mostly going to be functioning on its own canon due to the nature and significance of all its differences from the origin source. This is typically very easy to pinpoint, to the point where I would honestly say that the "loosely based" materials aren't really "adaptations" in a traditional sense. Think *Dragon Ball: Evolution* or M. Night Shyamalan's *Avatar: The Last Airbender*—the former is very far removed from its origin source, and while the latter does convey more similarities setting-wise, it's considered similarly as well in being....*far* from its origin source. It's no secret that both of these depictions weren't, uhh...received well. But, this isn't always a showing of this nature in regards to canonicity of course. *Maleficent/Maleficent: Mistress of Evil* and the *How to Train Your Dragon* film series are great examples of how a more loosely based adaptation can function within their own canon, but do so on a well received level.

It's always going to be case by case and a discussion to be had, as is anything concerning canon. If I'm going to be specifically talking about canon, it all boils down to this:

Can adaptations, as a whole, be considered a part of it's origin source's canon (third tier)?

My answer to this would be a very definitive yes, but depending on where it falls within the three, this may not always be the case. As we can observe from the usage of canon tiers, canon isn't defined by the mediums in which it's produced in, or necessarily limited to them either. In the case of adaptations, they can very well be produced to be an authentic alternative to their origin source in the way of representing all canonical representations genuinely by support of the TAA. This means it's also possible for it to be home to new canonical elements that are introduced in it. Though just as we observed in Option #3, some adaptations are much more removed from their original source in a way that puts it into another canon.

We've spoken before how certain franchises have taken details from non-canonical works and used in the official canon, and this is something that can happen between two different canons (just as it would for whatever the adaptation takes). However, even this doesn't result in rendering the entire work canonical to the other (or merging the canons)—you'd simply just take into account canonical representation where it lies between the two canons, but that would be subject to the TAA still for the conventional consideration.

Option #2 and #3 can create some canonical strife if other canons are being created. But this doesn't always happen, and for good reason.

As easy as it might be to say a new canon is created from *any* continuity deviation made in an adaptation, this runs the risk of causing the material to not be “backwards compatible”. If keeping in mind the tier system (third tier), an adaptation would typically be subject to “being canonical with the exemption of contradictions” IF it was sharing the same canon as its origin source. This works especially for new elements introduced in supplemental material because it falls under that canon umbrella and authenticity—what happens in an adaptation can be seen as applicable to the canon its origin source is from. If it isn't and is a part of another canon, then the ruling prior would essentially be mute, possibly along with other prospects like the gauging of authenticity relative to the other canon.

It's also important to keep note of differences that are in place for the means of the medium as opposed to forming its own continuity as a series. Changes made for an adaptation aren't always done for the sake of inducing another continuity. If in the discussion of canon, the conflicting information can still be understood as non-canonical universally. One of the primary things being that different ≠ non-canonical in such an ultimate way, especially if this judgement is impractical to the considerations of the production of the adaptation. If looking at something for the sake of being a contradiction, it needs to be done so on the basis of how it affects the important components of a canon and how it moves forward on its own with that difference continuity-wise. The understanding of “practicality” for judging material can vary from person to person in what they believe is reasonable.

There's got to be SOME kind of line drawn here for conventional-sake of the production of adaptations.

A character picking up a cup with their left hand in the game but being drawn in the manga with their right hand IS NOT a contradiction and doesn't render the scene, if not the whole adaptation, non-canonical. It shouldn't be, anyway. If that sounds absolutely ridiculous, then you're on the right path in drawing said line. The important matter is understanding how adaptations can still express the same thing but differently. I can't say if there is an ultimate, definitive line that can be described for every adaptation.

Again, Option #2 usually presents this type of flexibility that might be hard to call and understand from those judging the authenticity from the adaptation.

Certainly there's another very reasonable idea that disregards the importance of canonicity altogether, and is more accepting simply of the adaptation functioning within its own realm. Kind of a, there is no "wrong or right" because whatever is presented within the adaptation is there by creative choice that consider the medium. It doesn't mean that those difference aren't something that can't be understood or enjoyed in the manner they take shape, and looking at it from a canon-lens with another product is unproductive.

It is a easier mindset to have for the sake of entertainment, honestly, but it also does somewhat undermine the deeper subject of canonicity and authenticity of materials.

Ultimately, if there is something to say about the canonical standing of an adaptation, it's always good to look at things with a more pragmatic view for adaptations, whether that's just for the ability to enjoy the differences it might have or having it be considered as third tier canon. The purpose, intent, the marketing, production, execution, etc. of the adaptation naturally begets differences, but canonicity in the way of being a different canon isn't always an intended or applied factor.