joshpetersel.com

I write *narrative non-fiction* about technology and purpose.

What's *narrative non-fiction*?

The essays are true... but not quite in the just-the-facts way "non-fiction" implies. Writing is my vehicle (and excuse!) to explore the oddities of modern life. I don't follow MLA citation format and sometimes get a small detail wrong. Don't @ me on twitter, but *do* @ me in the sidecomments {::::}, which come with every essay when you subscribe. Some readers report that they see the world differently now, some love hanging out in the comment section, some are just being polite {::::}.

For example: What if...

- ...the TSA's real job is selling you a $9 bottle of water? Airports are Mandatory Malls, 2025
- ...the last job left is "person susceptible to marketing"? Luigi wins by doing absolutely nothing, 2026
- ...we don't solve self-driving cars for 7800 more years? Trojan Horse, 2020. My favorite thing I've written, and the only *science*-fiction I've ever published
- ...your friends are a better recommendation engine than the algorithm? Aesthetic Fleischaker, 2019
- ...self-driving cars do more damage to your friendships than to your commute? My Terrible Anxiety about our Future in Self Driving Cars, 2017

Latest (Oct '26)

Definitive proof that modern-day LLMs aren't conscious. A proof by way of The Game. (You just lost.)

Subscribe?

Sign up here if you want email notifs when there's something new. {::::}

About this doc, er, website

Writing is how I think.

Dialogue (not clicks or scale) is my metric of choice: Consistently over the past decade every 1,000 words I've written has turned into over 3,000 words in comments, replies, and new ideas from a few dozen loyal readers.

I operate out of *Google Docs* instead of, say, Substack & Discord, for Docs' unrivaled feature set:

- it's intuitive for most any computer user to navigate,
- there's nice Gmail integrations,
- it offers some obfuscation from search engines to engender a sense of intimacy,
- and you probably don't need to create some new login for credentials

About me & contact

Personally: I live in Toronto; I'm a Brooklyn & St Louis expat. I listen to albums, slowly. I volunteer with Big Brothers / Big Sisters. My favorite sport is surfing; my favorite game is Berlin-style ping-pong

Professionally: I'm building a VR company and a musical theatre company. Previously I was a Director at Spotify, where I built revenue systems and led a team across 4 continents. I measure, and often rely on data to make decisions, but also know when it's time to trust my experience & instincts

Email me: josh@joshpetersel.com

Archive

2026

1. Definitive proof that modern-day LLMs aren't conscious (Oct)
2. In response to your AI-generated document (May)
3. Quantifying Trump's Attention Tax (Apr)
4. **Luigi wins by doing absolutely nothing (Feb)**
5. Jordan Peterson's Microwave (Feb)

2026 (off-site)

6. You Will Probably Lose Your Money (Mar)
7. Antonio & Sheridan's wedding service (Apr)
8. Musical Theatre Governance (Apr)
9. Green (Notl Copy) (Apr)

2025

10. **Airports are Mandatory Malls (Dec)**
11. RSS (Nov)
12. "Reasonable" Cocktails, Incredible Profits (Nov)
13. From Coaches to Cockroaches (Aug)
14. Bits (Jun)

2025 (off-site)

15. Little Critters: Tower Defense that Hits Home (Nov)
16. House of Golf: Par for the (Home) Course (Oct)
17. Wordomi: A Daily Puzzle for Your Headset (Jun)
18. Detective VR: Unraveling the Mixed Reality Mystery (Feb)

2025 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

19. Re: WTF is an MAU (Mar)
20. Sweat Paywall (May)
21. Green (Apr)
22. What Mutual Friend learned in 2024 (Jan)

2024

23. **The Peter Principle (Nov)**
24. WaluigiBird (Oct)

25. **What the f*ck is a monthly active user (Sept)**
26. Unsubscribe (Aug)
27. **The Next Moneyball: WAR is over (if you want it) (Jun)**
28. Give up hoping for market pay (May)
29. RIPitchfork (Apr)
30. Two types of jobs (Feb)
31. **Doordash Dine-In (Jan)**
32. WaluiGPT (Jan)

2024 (off-site)

33. Shattered Hands-On: How badly do you want to get out? (Dec)
34. A Case for Pencil: Why Physical Drawing is Better in Mixed Reality (Sept)
35. Track Craft: Take this out for a drive (Aug)
36. Why you need to try MR Chess (Jun)

2024 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

37. Re: “Slow Jams (Aug)
38. Re: “iPhone XX (Jul)

2023

39. 2023 (Dec)
40. **Venn Puzzle: A New Social (Aug)**
41. AI Concert Posters (Jul)
42. Cold Plunge (Mar)
43. Andy waits for the last time (Mar)
44. Experimenting with a drug (Jan)

2023 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

45. MTA (Jul)
46. Introducing MVR (Apr)

2022

47. B2C...4B (Dec)
48. You’re the Worst: Reviewed over 8 years (Dec)
49. **On Time (Green Album) (Nov)**
50. **On Time (Aug)**
51. Four strikes, you’re out (Aug)
52. Polarize (Jul)
53. **iPhone XX (Jun)**
54. A Netflix Attack Vector (May)

55. In defense of college tuition (May)
56. Table of Contents (*you're here!!*) & changes for 2022 (Jan)
57. business advice for musicians (Jan)

2021

58. conspiracy theory (Dec)
59. a modest Sales Pipeline primer (Nov)
60. Hearthstone Clickables (Sep)
61. The birthday list (Jun) (*guest post!*)
62. After Zoom (Jun)
63. A decade of dysthymia (April)
64. The Fermi Paradox (Feb)
65. The end of the universe (Feb)
66. the inequity in equity (Feb)
67. Mandatory Fun (Jan)

2021 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

68. Songs to accompany you on the slopes (Feb)
69. You're the Worst, pt 4 (Feb)

2020

70. Playing with FIRE (Nov)
71. Getting a job at a Blockbuster (Nov)
72. Being Unaccountable Online (Aug)
73. Crossword Puzzle (Jul)
74. Trojan Horse (May)

2020 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

75. suffering from (Jul)
76. Covid (Mar)
77. Music Festivals (Jan)
78. Stockholm Syndrome (Jan)

2019

79. Alohomora (Nov)
80. The Great Congealing (Aug)
81. Aesthetic Fleischaker (Jun)
82. Lifestyles of the Rich & Bored (Apr)

2019 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

83. mixtape (Feb)
84. you're the worst pt 3 (Feb)

2018

85. The Hiring Manager's Dilemma (Oct)
86. Consider the Red Lobster (Jun)
87. Measuring (Jun)
88. Think With Your Ears (Jun)
89. The Lomo Dada (Mar)
90. XFL (Feb)

2018 (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

91. Beating evolution & exercises (Dec)
92. There Will Be No Miracles Here (Dec)
93. perpetually (Nov)
94. Hockey (Oct)
95. Softball (Aug)

Earlier

96. Global Warming
97. My Terrible Anxiety about our Future in Self Driving Cars
98. Slow Jams
99. $30,000
100. Money
101. Mario Odyssey
102. The worst thing
103. Harry Potter & the Fear
104. Don't Sell Shovels

Earlier (email exclusive — sign up for future ones)

105. all i really want
106. Foxy shazam
107. Lewis & Artemis

Even earlier (from the blog)...

108. I built a calculator
109. Tidal
110. The worst part about sports is the sport itself

111. Google X is just a marketing company

Work

I'm building a VR company and a musical theatre company. Previously I was a Director at Spotify, where I built revenue systems and led a team.

How I think about work, in essay form:

- iPhone XX (2022). Product strategy by subtraction: which feature would I cut from the iPhone, and what does cutting it make room for?
- Doordash Dine-In (2024). A product pitch with KPIs: DoorDash should build restaurant reservations.
- Venn Puzzle: A New Social (2023). Looking for a new product where four constraints overlap, and inviting readers to work the problem with me.
- On Time (2022). How I run meetings: being on time, and three tactics that make it stick.
- A modest Sales Pipeline primer (2021). Weighted pipelines, explained from running a sales team at Spotify.
- Measuring (2018). You make what you measure: how to pick a metric, and what happens when the metric becomes the goal.
- What the f*ck is a monthly active user (2024). On metrics: what a headline number hides, and why I'd rather build for people I can name.

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