

YEAR WITHOUT SCREENS PLANNING

*****MY YEAR WITHOUT (SMART) SCREENS*****

****RULES****

1. No screens (with some non-smart screen exceptions) starting January 8th, 2026 and ending January 8th, 2027

****SPECIFIC LIMITATIONS AND REPLACEMENT PLANS****

Note: Where possible, electronics were purchased second hand and/or refurbished.

1. ****No smart phone****

1. Maps and navigation – purchased a small handheld GPS and uploaded city navigation apps onto it, which will be my navigation replacement for walking and biking. Also got a good old fashioned GPS with turn by turn navigation for the car!
2. Recording/demo making – Best friend and hero Liam Duncan has loaned me his little 8 track, and gave me my first lesson on using it! He also dropped off enough tapes for me to make demos for at least the next couple of months.
3. Content/job related social media use – Will use my cameras and recording gear (from 8 track to small handheld recorder) to make things for posting and sharing, and will hire someone who I trust creatively to turn my physical media into digital media weekly and then post throughout that week consistently. (This will probably look like meeting up once a week to transfer things off of SD cards and tapes, and if necessary, approving of any upcoming posts/announcements!)
 1. I will not be allowed to check any comments or responses to anything I've posted, but I can be told about significant things from whoever is running my social media.
4. Personal pictures – all personal pictures will be taken on my digital camera and I will go once a month to get them physically printed and keep them in albums/potentially make art with some of them to hang on the wall. I will also send digital files to my email for when the year is finished.
5. Note-taking – I have a notebook, duh hahaha
6. Alarms/time – Purchased a reliable little alarm clock that allows for radio alarms so I can wake up to the CBC like I did when I was young. Have also purchased a watch! LOL!
7. Music – I am going to go back to CDs! Going shopping/thrifting for good CDs and have started the process of asking my friends to make me mixed CDs. I hope they remember how. I also purchased a little under the counter CD

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player, a discman, and a little CD booklet for taking music on walks or in the car.

8. Online banking – I think this will fall under the public library computer exception (**see exceptions section below**,) as it will be hard for me to do it any other way. Either that or I will start going to the bank in person once a month!
9. News – This is the thing I am most nervous about? Very few newspapers have reliable reporting, and even fewer remain independent and/or not owned by conservatives, fascists or centrists. That being said, I know of at least one or two leftist newspapers in Winnipeg who report on local and international news. My plan is to make sure I am getting them as they come out, and then just doing what I probably should've been doing anyways, which is going to the library and reading about whatever I want to know more about. My local library is very well stocked with new books and if there was anything I couldn't find, I could also just visit my local book store. I will also just be relying heavily on friends. I am going to make sure that everyone who loves me knows that they should call me and just actually tell me about anything they think I should know or would be interested in.
10. Voice memos – bought a good quality, pocket sized handheld recorder! Does the exact same thing.

2. ****No TV ****–

1. idk I guess I will read books and try to pick up new skills/hobbiesahhahaha

3. ****No laptop or desktop computer**** – This will be a harder one

4. Email – will rely more on phone calls for decisions and job based communication (this would probably not be possible without Rebecca, Kelsey, and other friends who work with me but I think it will be possible with their help – another way I will really need to lean on people to be able to do this!) Can also fall into the library computer exemption, depending on how urgent it is.
5. Writing – will try to do as much physical writing as possible, but I also have a free write that I got many years ago for writing poetry, and can use that if I want to write anything that is too lengthy to write down physically!
6. Google/search engines – Another big lean on the friends/community. My idea is to just start calling people when I have questions and politely asking if they will please google something for me on the smart phones that they still have. Probably will go to my mum first every time because I have a lot of trust in her research skills. Sorry Mum.

4. ****No gaming systems****

1. I am going to have to play physical games I suppose. Maybe I will get really good at like 20 different card games. Especially solitaire?

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****EXCEPTIONS****

1. **Movie Theatres**

1. I am going to allow myself to go the theatres because I love movies and I know that there is no way for me to spend extra or unsupervised time in there

2. **Movie nights at friends houses**

1. Going to avoid this as best as I can but the reasoning for the exception is similar to the movie theatre exception – it is impossible for me to be unsupervised at a group watch and also is a beautiful thing that I don't want to have to miss out on
3. This exception could also potentially apply to weekly tv show but ONLY if the show is being released once a week. Binge-ing will be against the rules, even with company.

3. **Library computers in emergencies or essential situations**

1. In cases where there is something I really need to do for work (sign an e-document or be a part of an essential meeting,) I will either use a friend's laptop or preferably, I will go to a public space with a computer
3. I could also use public computers for important things like booking flights and other important purchases

4. **Family Facetimes**

1. My mum has humbly requested that she get to see my face sometimes because we live far apart, which I think is a perfectly reasonable request. I would also like to see her sweet face. Same with my grandma, siblings, dad and just my family and close friends in general.
2. These would be done on a friend's phone or my partner's and be supervised

****MISSION STATEMENT (for lack of a better term)****

There are many reasons why I want to do this project, but it can be broken down into three main motivations: a desire to break an addiction that has taken control of my life, curiosity, and resistance!

I have a severe addiction to screens of all kinds, and it dates back to grade 8 or 9 (can't quite remember which,) when I got my first real smart device. Before then, I could still happily watch movies all day in the basement, and was a little obsessive about media that I liked, but it wasn't something that often disrupted my life or affected my mental or physical well-being. When I started using smart devices and social media, that changed pretty dramatically.

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I won't tell you the whole excruciating story, and just skip to where it ended up: weeks, sometimes months of my life where I wake up, immediately open social media, scroll for hours, finally go downstairs, put the tv on, scroll while I watch tv for 12 hours, take my phone upstairs, and scroll until I fell asleep again. This is maybe a slight exaggeration, but only very slight.

It's honestly, incredibly embarrassing to admit that, but when I feel down or really anxious, that is legitimately what my life can become. There are also periods where I don't struggle as much with it and read lots of books and get outside and live relatively normally, but usually even the normal days are filled with at least 2 or 3 lengthy doom scrolls.

My lifestyle as a musician doesn't help with this, seeing as I am either working all day everyday on the road or in the studio, or at home, where the work I had to do could be done remotely or sporadically. Sometimes, I have no reason to leave the house.

In the really bad periods, I barely spend a single waking second without looking at a screen, or multiple screens somehow. If I try to stop, I become so anxious and so consumed with self hatred that the only relief I can find is in picking it back up again.

Because of what I have just described to you, I have tried to have a healthy relationship with screens so many times. I have tried everything you could possibly imagine. App blocking programs, having no phone or a dumb phone, getting other, "healthier" social media apps, only using my phone or devices in one room in the house, asking friends and family to help and to keep me accountable, the list goes on and on,,, but nothing has worked for me. Even if I successfully get off my phone (which is rare,) I watch tv all day. If I manage to stay off the tv, I pick up my switch and tell myself it's really different somehow because at least I am exercising some part of my brain. Or I just find an excuse to go back on my phone. I always find a way. We're talking about scrolling Instagram On The Roku Tv Browser levels of dependency.

But the truth is, I can't self help my way out of it because it is a real and actual addiction that I have been living with for a very long time. In fact, one of the main catalysts for my doing this project was a moment in which I finally felt justified in naming this as an addiction. It made me feel empowered to treat it as such. And if it is threatening my livelihood, happiness, health and relationships, then a slightly more drastic action might be appropriate, and this is my more drastic action.

(None of this is a moral condemnation of addiction or any person who experiences it, myself included. It's more a tool for me to name what is happening to me so I can better understand how to help myself and how to move forward.)

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I get a pit in my stomach when I think about the years I've lost. (Yes years, because I did the math and I've spent actual years of my life just on my phone.) The songs that I would've written but now, will never exist, the friends I could have been making, the experiences I could've had that are gone forever.

I know this might all sound very dramatic but I could be much better at guitar. I know I could have started in on learning the fiddle. I could've read a couple hundred more books, could've learned so many new things in the time that I've wasted.

That's not to say that all of it was wasted, I've had so many meaningful experiences and interactions. Being online essentially gave me my career, and I don't want to be misunderstood – that is and was magical and incredible and I will always be eternally grateful for the opportunities being online has given me.

But if I were to be completely honest, the moments that were genuinely fulfilling and important were a tiny, tiny fraction of the time I've spent on screens.

I want to live in my body again. It's the main reason why I am doing this.

Next up, curiosity! Almost scientific curiosity, to be specific.

I have been thinking a lot about how long screens, (but especially social media,) have been in my life. Almost as far back as my reliable memory goes. Because of that, it feels hard to divorce things that I know about myself (and everything else in my life,) from things that might have been affected, changed, or invented by my relationship to smart technology.

I know that there was a version of me that existed without it, but I can hardly remember them. I want to know what is going to happen when I remove screens (and again, especially social media,) from my understanding of my characteristics, tendencies, and identity. From my sense of self!

Throughout the year, I am hoping to take extensive notes and sort of study myself and my life to see how things change. Here's a short list of things I am going to be monitoring, and am most curious about:

- Most obvious one, and perhaps the biggest: my basic, day to day happiness level and mental well-being. Will it improve overall? Dip at first and then even out? Will it plateau or continue to change? How will it change? What will I find the most pleasure or happiness in? Will it be different than what I find it in now? The same but more tangible? Sharper?
- Art/music/songwriting: Will I write more songs? Will I create more in general? Will

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it be easier to be creative? Will I be less affected by insecurity and comparison when making art? HOW WILL MY ART CHANGE???? Will it change?!? How will I feel about music and about writing and about creation in general after awhile?

- Relationships: Will it be harder or easier for me to maintain relationships? Will my lifestyle even be compatible with my friends? How will my relationships change over the course of the year? What will I learn about the way that I am in relationships without the assistance of social media? What will I learn about other people? Will my relationships feel deepened or strained by the project? Will I meet more people and make more friends? Or alternatively, will I be even more isolated? Will it make me feel more or less capable of being social?
- Being a helpful community member: This is one I feel so so curious about. I have anxiety about going off social media and seeing less opportunities to participate in mutual aid, and feeling less involved in my communities, because one way I feel like I access community is through the internet. But will being off screens actually **improve** the number of tangible things that I do for my families/communities? Will the fact that I will need to be out in real life doing the work mean that I am more connected to it, and therefore more connected to the people around me? I am also still going to get my friends to inform me of mutual aid call outs they see through social media. Will speaking to my friends about those things directly actually deepen my relationships both with them, and the act of participating in mutual aid? Will a lack of screens inspire me to get out and do more, or will it feel harder to get involved in things that matter to me?
- Brain stuff: I suffer from executive dysfunction and intrusive thoughts a lot, as well as many sensory and social issues. How will my relationship to these things change? Will it change? How much of being online is affecting the literal way my brain works and copes with every day situations?
- Self esteem..... I feel so curious about learning to love myself in a way I haven't in a very long time. I think a lot about being a kid and the freedom you feel in not being observed. Since I got a smart device, I've sort of just felt constantly observed, even though I can't always put my finger on why. It's that thing with the journal where you write as though someone will read it one day. (I don't remember who I first saw talk about that phenomenon, but it has stuck with me.) I think I have almost learned to **live** like someone is watching me, and then to value myself based on what I imagine they see. I feel hopeful that I will lose a bit of that feeling in the next year, and giddy about the possibility of being exploratory and curious just for the sake of living a good life, and not for the end goal of proving that I did.

There are a lot of other things that I feel interested in observing and discovering about myself, and many that haven't even occurred to me that I'm sure I will encounter. I will try to update the list from afar as I go, if I can.

Finally, resistance.

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I'm sure many people are feeling the same way, but being online has taken a turn for me in the last couple of years. And it's not always about the content I am seeing. In fact, sometimes that has been the light in the darkness.

It's about how glaringly obvious it has become that it is working in favour of the people and corporations in power.

I can barely do anything without something using AI without my consent, the algorithm tries to send me down conservative pipelines daily, all content about liberation is suppressed, and all bigotry and oppressive violence is pushed algorithmically. Everything is sensationalized on purpose, so that there can be no easy community building. We have to work so hard to push through the noise and propaganda and reach each other.

And for me, recognizing all of that frames my addiction and use of social media in a new light, because the unhappiness and loneliness I experience because of it isn't just circumstantial and flukey. It's purposeful.

I am letting them take my attention span, my intelligence, my willingness to sit down and really learn something, my eagerness to seek out expertise, my desire to approach a person with an understanding of their humanity, my urge to go and actually be with people in real life, and to support those people in real life, even if it requires sacrifice. I am letting them try to convince me not to sacrifice to make other people's experiences on earth easier! I am letting them take my time! My beautiful, precious time being alive on this earth, seeking out new experiences. Love, music, art, conversation, poetry, books, knowledge, wisdom. They want me to give up reading, and learning, and people. The more isolated we are, the harder it is for us to fight back. I really feel that, even though tech will always be an important tool, that we have to pledge solidarity to each other while looking each other in the eye, and then follow through on that promise.

And I know it is so hard for so many of us who have to be online for our work. I am very lucky and privileged to have someone who can help me digitize things and post for me, and who I can pay for that time and labour, so I can have the opportunity to divorce myself from online spaces. That is not a privilege everybody has. That being said, not everyone is quite as severely addicted as I am and I know a lot of people have effectively introduced balance with screens into their lives without needing to be completely offline. There is something we can all do to resist and get back to each other.

I'm so grateful for the life I have and the opportunity to live it as best I can. This is one way that I am trying. I will update you as I go and hopefully share more music than ever. Happy 2026, you'll be seeing me but I won't be seeing you (unless we see each other at a show in the new year,) so SEE YOU IN A YEAR! Goodbye for now!

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