

May 25, 2025: Media study
Apple TV +’s *Severance*, season 1, episode 1: “Good News About Hell”

Severance, which premiered in 2022, immediately captivated audiences with its innovative approach to the concept of work-life balance. The series centers on Mark Scout, who opts to undergo a surgical procedure to separate his memories between his professional and personal life—a process termed “severance.” His colleagues at Lumon Industries have also undergone this procedure; the workers’ “innies” represent their work identity, devoid of any recollection of their “outie” personas, which remember only their external life. The specific nature of their tasks at Lumon remains enigmatic, and this central mystery has continued to develop through the two seasons aired to date.

We will consider the first episode of this series. Winner of a Peabody Award and two Writers Guild of America awards, *Severance* is generally agreed to have set a new standard for television. Why is it a cultural phenomenon? What is the philosophy inherent in the show? What does it have to say about the dark side of the workplace, human identity, and which beings have a soul?

Severance is available to stream on AppleTV + (including via a free trial, or, if you have an Apple device, three months of the service free). Here is some material to guide your viewing and our study:

To train yourself to watch closely, try using this “opening shots” exercise for the initial scene (up to the title card):

- What did you see? What did you hear?
- Where and when is this story set?
- What happens? What is this story going to be about? How do you know?
- Who is present? What do you learn about them?
- What is the mood of the scene(s)?
- What questions do you have? What would you like to know?

A filmed story is a type of text. How do choices in the following tell the story or represent values?

- Cinematography/color palette
- Wardrobe
- Music/sound
- Editing
- Set design/locations
- Dialogue

How do the following spiritual matters relate to the filmed story?

- Healing
 - Identity
 - Meaning
 - The soul
 - Wholeness
-
- What power relationships exist in the story?
 - Are there patterns of dependency among certain groups? On whom are they dependent? Does this seem to be a problem, or simply a matter taken for granted?
 - How do we experience life? What is the world like? What kind of story are we in?
 - How do the storytellers convey their vision of right and wrong? What is the source of the moral code in the world of the story? How are we to live our lives? What has value?
 - Having finished watching the episode, did a particular portion speak to you personally?

Severance is rated TV-MA for strong language, mature themes, psychological intensity, and mild violence.