

# Dating



## Get an A+ in chemistry.

You meet new people almost everywhere you go, but for some reason, meeting the right person is one of life's most elusive challenges. Master the dating scene and get the romance results you want by picking up:

- Information on the best places to meet dates online and in person
- Tips on how to arrange a first date and make the best impression possible
- Advice on how to work up the courage and confidence to date successfully

### Dating Basics

To some, the word **dating** conjures images of laughing couples clinking wineglasses as they watch a spectacular sunset. The reality many people experience, though, is more often about sweaty palms and dread. But it doesn't have to be that way. Dating is a numbers game: the more people you meet, the more likely you are to meet someone you'll like. And the more you date, the better you'll get at it.

There are many avenues through which you can meet potential dates:

- **The internet:** If you're new to meeting people on the internet, it can feel a bit awkward at first. But the web has actually become one of the most popular ways to meet people. (*For more information on internet dating, see Online Dating.*)
- **Group activities:** Community groups, neighborhood sports teams, dining clubs, and other group activities allow you to interact with people who share your interests. (*For more information on group activities, see Meeting People Through Traditional Methods.*)
- **Social events:** Parties and gatherings offer a fun, pressure-free environment in which you can get to know people who are often within your social network. (*For more information on social events, see Meeting People Through Traditional Methods.*)

### Online Dating

Almost a third of Americans say they know someone who has gone online to look for love. Online dating is easier than traditional methods because, essentially, it lets you view people from a distance before meeting them in person. Signing up is quick. All you need is a computer and sometimes a credit card. Plus, you can conduct your online search in the comfort of your home.

The most popular places to meet people online are:

- **Social networking websites:** The primary purpose of social networking sites is to help you stay connected with friends and colleagues or meet new ones. But that's precisely why these sites are a great place to meet potential dates. You may feel more comfortable interacting with people who are in your existing social network and can be vouched for by people you know.
- **Dating websites:** These sites exist exclusively for dating and allow you to search for potential dates who fit your particular criteria. Most dating sites require

people to become paying members, and some sites even screen potential users. These criteria help to weed out people who are not serious about dating or who are not a good fit for the site.

#### Social Networking Websites

**Social networking websites** provide an easy and fun platform for users to get and stay connected. You can share photos and messages with people you know who also have an account on the site, and you can "meet" new people as well. Social networking sites have been around since the mid-1990s but gained steam in the early 2000s, when the general public started becoming more internet-savvy. They are free to join and use, though some require that you receive an invitation from another member in order to sign up.

Social networking sites can also be a great place to reach out to new people as potential dates. They allow you to communicate with strangers or acquaintances in your social network—even former classmates or old flames—in a casual, nonthreatening setting. The most popular social networking websites include:

- **Facebook.com:** Facebook claims to have more than 61 million active users. Facebook lets you build up a community of friends made up of other members you know. Facebook users are allowed to view any member's list of friends. That way, you can see who your friends' friends are, and so on. You can then reach out to someone who interests you by sending him or her a message through Facebook's internal email. Members can view a limited version of your profile before replying to any messages you send.
- **MySpace.com:** One of the largest social-networking sites, MySpace claims to have more than 100 million active users. The site began as a platform for musicians to attract a broader audience, but quickly grew into a general-interest social networking site that encouraged users of all types to join. Like Facebook, MySpace allows members to build up a community of friends, view their friends' friends, and reach out to other members via internal email messaging. Members can view your profile before replying to any messages you send.
- **Friendster.com:** Founded in 2002, Friendster was one of the earliest social networking sites, and, reportedly, it still has 54 million members. Friendster offers many of the typical social networking website features but has become somewhat outmoded in recent years with the emergence of newer social networking sites.

- **Meetup.com:** Meetup claims to have more than 2.5 million members. It's a departure from more popular social networking sites, as its primary service is to help people with shared interests find each other and organize gatherings in various cities. Though Meetup doesn't have the same types of interactive features as Facebook, MySpace, and Friendster, it does have a large community of interest groups, so it's easy to find one that suits you.

#### Dating Websites

**Dating sites** provide an electronic platform for members to meet, allowing them to view each other's pictures, read about each others' interests, and, of course, communicate. The internet offers dozens of dating sites, which vary in size from a few thousand to several million members, and each site caters to varying demographics and tastes. But most dating sites share certain basic features. When you join, you generally:

- Agree to the site's terms of service.
- Complete a profile and, for best results, submit photos of yourself.
- Pay to contact members, even if membership is free.
- Receive a private mailbox from which you send and receive internal emails. You can often communicate via **instant message** as well.

#### How to Create an Internet Dating Profile

When you first sign up for a dating website, you are prompted to complete a **profile**—the internet equivalent of a personal ad. The profile often consists of multiple-choice questions about your background and interests as well as essay questions that allow you to speak in your own words. Your goal in designing a profile should be to make the best first impression possible. Though a good profile may not guarantee you a date, a bad profile can sabotage your chances. Use the following tips to create an online dating profile that gets noticed:

- **Be expressive yet brief:** Though everyone expresses themselves differently, it's a good rule of thumb to aim for 2–3 sentences per paragraph and 2–3 paragraphs total when describing yourself or the type of person you're looking for. Avoid generality. Include details that interest and intrigue people. For hints on composition, read other members' ads and note what appeals to you and what doesn't.



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|---|--|
| <p><b>ChristianSingles</b><br/>www.christiansingles.com</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targets Christians looking for marriage.</li> <li>You must be Christian, but membership is open to a wide variety of denominations.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>eHarmony</b><br/>www.eharmony.com</p>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members must be approved.</li> <li>Matches heterosexuals only.</li> <li>Claims that "90 eHarmony members marry daily."</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>FastCupid</b><br/>www.fastcupid.com</p>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Affiliated with www.nerve.com.</li> <li>Has as many as 1 million members.</li> <li>Has fewer multiple-choice questions and more emphasis on self-expression.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Geek2Geek</b><br/>www.gk2gk.com</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses a special "scoring system" to match up singles with similar degrees of "geekiness."</li> <li>Members answer questions about preferred video-game controllers and upcoming conventions.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>JDate</b><br/>www.jdate.com</p>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is the premier dating site for people of the Jewish faith and those who want to date them.</li> <li>JDate's Your Click! matches members who mutually express interest in one another.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Lavalife</b><br/>www.lavalife.com</p>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most of its 1.2 million members are 18–34 years old.</li> <li>Includes a special service, LavalifePRIME, for members 45 and older. Has a phone-based personals platform.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Match</b><br/>www.match.com</p>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Claims it has 15 million members.</li> <li>Offers testimonials from friends of members.</li> <li>Offers matchMobile, a phone platform.</li> <li>Offers Windows Live alerts, which notify Windows Live members instantly via email or text when someone has messaged or winked at them.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>MillionaireMatch</b><br/>www.millionaire.com</p>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Matches "millionaires"—those making more than \$150,000 a year (you need not be a millionaire to join).</li> <li>Has a one-to-one premium service for celebrities.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>OKCupid</b><br/>www.okcupid.com</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses an algorithm that asks members about themselves and allows members to indicate how their ideal match would answer the same question.</li> <li>Has a large number of member-created quizzes on a variety of subjects.</li> </ul>  |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>PlanetOut</b><br/>www.planetout.com</p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Caters to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.</li> <li>Offers news stories and information on local events.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>The Right Stuff</b><br/>www.rightstuffdating.com</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targets single graduates and faculty of a select group of top-notch universities and colleges (requires that members provide proof).</li> <li>Also has an off-site (mailed) component.</li> <li>Has an international presence.</li> </ul>                                     |
| <p><b>True</b><br/>www.true.com</p>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Runs background checks on applicants and does not accept felons or married people as members.</li> <li>Offers a compatibility test that is endorsed by <i>Psychology Today</i> magazine.</li> <li>Hosts local singles' events.</li> <li>Has a video-dating option.</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>VeggieDate</b><br/>www.veggiedate.com</p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Targets Adventist, Buddhist, Bahai, Taoist, Hindu, macrobiotic, raw food, and vegan singles.</li> <li>Database is small, with about 16,000 members.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Yahoo</b><br/>personals.yahoo.com</p>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offers free "Icebreaker" messages, personality tests, and dating advice.</li> <li>Offers Matches by Mail, a service that sends you profiles that fit your requirements.</li> </ul>  |

**Offline Options for Dating**

**Personal ads** in newspapers and magazines may seem old-fashioned, but they're still a great way to meet someone if you're seeking people who live in a certain area. Most media that publish personals also offer a voicemail component, so you can record a greeting and listen to other people's ads. Contact your local paper for more information.

**Meeting People Through Traditional Methods**

For those who prefer to meet without the aid of a computer or an ad, there are lots of options, including:

- Work
- Hobbies
- The social scene
- Singles events
- Support staff

**Meet Dates at Work**

Most people spend a good portion of their day at **work**, and relationships can form and flourish on the job. It's easy to meet and get to know a coworker because you're both reporting to the same place every day and interacting with each other.

**Drawbacks of Meeting Dates at Work**

One drawback to dating a coworker is that if you break up, you still have to work with each other while maintaining a professional demeanor. Think carefully before you start to date a coworker. If you are only seeking casual companionship, you might want to save the romance for someone who doesn't sit a few cubicles away.

**Meet Dates Through Hobbies**

Going to the gym, book groups, sporting events, and volunteer activities allows you to meet someone who shares your interests. Activities also provide built-in conversation starters (such as "Didn't they play well?" or "What did you think of the book?"). Most of these activities take place in relaxed, social environments, where conversation comes a little more naturally.

**Drawbacks of Meeting Dates Through Hobbies**

The downside of meeting dates through hobbies is that these activities are not intimate. You're surrounded by like-minded enthusiasts, so quiet conversation (or flirting) may be difficult. Also, because socializing is taken for granted, it may be difficult to indicate your attraction or gauge a person's interest in you.

**Meet Dates on the Social Scene**

Take your friends with you to bars, parties, alumni events, and other types of mixers. When you're with people you know and the mood is convivial, flirting is easier.

**Drawbacks of Meeting Dates on the Social Scene**

Many social events are not particularly private, and it can be difficult to talk to someone one-on-one, let alone show romantic interest.

**Meet Dates at Singles' Events**

Speed dating, group dinners, and events sponsored by religious organizations attract people who are available and enthusiastic. **Speed dating** is great if you're short on time but want to meet many people. Events sponsored by local religious organizations provide a spiritual context. **Group dinners**, organized by introduction services, allow you to meet potential mates in a more leisurely manner.

**Drawbacks of Meeting Dates at Singles' Events**

Singles' events can be competitive, with many people contending for the attention of a particularly charismatic or attractive guest. It's also hard not to feel as if you're on display when you first arrive.

**Meet Dates Through Professional Services**

**Matchmakers** and dating coaches are great resources if you want a lot of guidance, have no time to look for yourself, or prefer personalized dating help. Matchmakers and **introduction services** will usually run a background check on you and set you up with people they think you'll get along with based on your stated goals and interests. **Dating coaches** work one-on-one with you to help you make good first impressions and get dates.

**Drawbacks of Meeting Dates Through Professional Services**

Professional services are often expensive, and the quality varies. There is no state licensing exam for dating coaches, so do some research before you sign a contract. Ask friends for recommendations and contact the Better Business Bureau to make sure there have been no complaints. Also, be sure to ask the company for references from satisfied customers.

**How to Approach People**

It's easy to be bold when you're interacting with people online, but in real life, the idea of approaching a stranger can be unnerving. But public places are rife with potential dates, as long as you have the confidence to meet them. To approach a stranger confidently and nonthreateningly:

1. **Be visible:** Stand close enough to make eye contact but not so close that your object of interest can't walk away. Leave at least four feet between you. Catch the person's eye, smile, and then look away.
2. **Read the signals:** Does your crush return your smile or avoid your eyes? Is he or she in the midst of a conversation? Look for evidence of approachability:

1. a few physical indicators are a wide-foot stance, relaxed shoulders, and a smile. Though it's okay to approach someone in a group, you should never interrupt two people in conversation. If the person appears to be available, walk on over.
2. **Say something genuine:** Start with a simple "Hello." An opening line such as "I don't know anyone here, do you?" is disarming and friendly. Start the conversation by commenting on something or someone in the room.

## How to Ask Someone Out

It takes a fair amount of confidence and courage to ask someone out on a date. You'll get much better results if you're genuine and considerate. Once you've got the attention of your object of desire:

- Engage him or her in conversation.
- Gauge his or her interest in going out with you.
- Exchange contact information

### How to Engage Someone in Conversation

Honest admiration shows that you like the person and are confident enough to show it. If you are drawn to someone, indicate it in the following ways:

- **Pay a sincere compliment:** Statements such as "You're really funny!" or "That makes a lot of sense!" indicate your appreciation. If you notice and remark on someone's good qualities, the person's bound to appreciate it and will probably respond in kind.
- **Solicit your potential date's opinion on a subject:** This suggests that you think highly of the person.
- **Smile:** The theory of **facial feedback** posits that when you smile, you actually feel happier because your muscles' memory associates the smile with pleasure. Plus, smiling shows that you're nonthreatening and you find the person you're smiling at attractive.
- **Agree on something:** If you don't agree on something, don't pretend to. But if you genuinely feel the same way about a particular basketball team's prospects or a film you've just seen, for example, say so. It creates intimacy of experience.

### How to Exchange Contact Information

If you don't want to ask for a date right away, dip your toes in by getting the person's contact information at the end of the conversation. After you've expressed your pleasure at meeting, say something like "I'd love to talk some more. Can I have your number?" or "I'd love to talk some other time." A few tips:

- **When exchanging phone numbers:** Don't ask for someone's phone number if you don't plan on calling, and do not give out your number if you don't want to. Though it may feel awkward to refuse, it's perfectly fine. Most people prefer to soften the blow by making the rejection situational rather than personal: "I'm not dating now" or "I'm sorry, but I'm not really available" are both fine.
- **When exchanging email addresses:** An alternative to giving out your number is giving out a card with your email information or an office number. If you don't have a card, scribble your address on a napkin or a piece of paper.

### How to Request a Date

According to your comfort level, you can ask someone out:

- **In person:** This method makes you seem brave and self-assured, which are both appealing qualities. Plus, it usually guarantees an immediate answer. The drawback, of course, is that you may face rejection in a more public and potentially embarrassing manner.
- **On the phone:** Though asking someone out by phone allows you to make a quick exit if you're rejected, you

can't see or respond to facial expressions and body language, which can make the conversation awkward.

- **Via email:** An electronic invite minimizes the nerves that come with real-time interaction, but you may face a delayed response or no response at all.

### How to Deal with Rejection

Don't take a no as evidence that you are destined to remain single forever. Rejection is part of dating, and the sooner you accept it, the better off you'll be. If you get "no" as an answer:

- **Keep your chin up:** Try not to take it too personally. Odds are, this person didn't know you very well anyway. Don't let his or her decision get you down or scare you away from future encounters.
- **Spin it to your advantage:** If you can pinpoint the reason he or she declined—maybe you were being too aggressive or timid, or your timing was bad—try to learn from it.
- **Back down with integrity:** If someone says no, respect his or her decision. Don't harp on it, get angry, or demand an explanation. Wish him or her well and move on.
- **Jump right back in:** Don't dwell on rejection. Instead, give it hardly any time to register. Go to a party or other social event and mingle with people. It will put the situation into perspective: that person was just one in a sea of many.

### How to Say No to a Date Offer

Rejection feels bad for both parties involved. Don't say yes to someone you don't want to go out with just to spare his or her feelings. To decline with class:

- **Be polite but firm:** Say something along the lines of "I'm flattered, but I don't think I'm interested."
- **Tell a white lie:** If it's more comfortable for you to tell a little white lie, keep it innocuous—for example, "I wish I could, but this just isn't a good time for me." Of course, this type of reply may lead to the inevitable question "Why not?"—at which point it's okay to confess "You're great, but I think we'd be better as friends" or something else equally straightforward and inoffensive. Don't tell a lie that you are likely to get caught in.

### How to Plan a Date

When planning a first date:

- **Suggest an actual activity:** For a first date, go for a structured activity that can help jumpstart the conversation if things get awkward.
- **Time it carefully:** Ask for a date about a week in advance. This lets the person you're interested in know that while you both have busy schedules, the date is a priority. Since weekend nights tend to be booked well in advance, for a first date, ask someone out for a weeknight.
- **Be specific but flexible:** Be sure to offer different days or activity options to maximize your chances of appealing to your would-be date. For instance, you may want to go to dinner, but if your crush has some dietary restrictions, offer to meet for a drink or dessert instead.

## How to Get Ready for a Date

The person you're going out with will appreciate the time and effort you put into preparing for the date.

### What to Wear for a Date

Once you've picked a place to meet, plan your outfit accordingly.

- **Dress appropriately:** Dress either casually, formally, or somewhere in between, depending on where you're going.
- **Look put-together:** Aim to impress your date. Your outfit should be tailored enough that you don't look

like a slob but not so tight that you can't breathe. If it involves torn clothes or is suitable only for sleeping or exercising, skip it.

- **Flatter your figure:** Draw attention to the parts of your body you like. For instance, if you've got great upper arms, wear a short-sleeved shirt.
- **Dress to maintain your confidence:** Wear clothes that make you feel attractive, polished, and comfortable. In other words, wear the clothes you feel best in.
- **Err on the side of formality:** If you're not sure what to wear, go with a blazer and button-down shirt or a knee-length skirt. It's better to be overdressed rather than underdressed for a date.
- **Obey the time of day:** Dress more formally in the evening than you would for a daytime date.

### Mind Your Manners Before a Date

When getting ready for a date, pay special attention to:

- **Grooming:** It may be what's on the inside that counts, but a well-kept outside is important. Remember to:
  - Shower or bathe
  - Shave, if necessary
  - Comb your hair
  - Brush your teeth and run your toothbrush across your tongue to kill bad breath
  - Trim or pluck any stray hairs from your ears, nose, and chin
  - Make sure your nails are clean
- **Timeliness:** Promptness is common courtesy and shows you understand that your date's time, like your own, is valuable. Calculate exactly how much time you'll need to get to your meeting place and give yourself another half hour for travel time, just in case. If you're running late, call as soon as you can to let your date know you're on your way.
- **Turn off your cell phone:** If you're expecting an important call, let your date know in advance. Otherwise, turn off your ringer and don't accept or make calls or text messages while you're on the date. Doing otherwise is rude.
- **Your attitude:** Start off the evening (or day) determined to have a good time. Think to yourself, "I'm going out, and this should be fun," and then go into the situation with an open mind. Banish thoughts such as "Oh, no, I've got to make small talk with someone I barely know." Negative thoughts will only sabotage your date before it even begins.

## The Date

Spend some time planning your first date. There will be plenty of opportunity for spontaneity later on, but certain factors can, and should, be controlled. A first date should be:

- **Brief:** You don't know how compatible you'll be, so plan to stick to two hours or less. If you want, indicate beforehand that you'll have to be somewhere else at a specific time. If the date goes badly, it hasn't taken much time. And if it's gone well, your date will be left wanting more.
- **Inexpensive:** Regardless of who is planning to pick up the tab, it's considerate to choose a place with reasonable prices.
- **One-on-one:** Save the introductions to parents, children, and siblings for another time. You don't want to worry about what his or her relatives think of you or vice versa. That's too much pressure.

### Places to Go on a Date

A first date should allow you to get to know one another and do something you both enjoy. So if you don't ski, be sure to let your date know if he or she suggests you hit the slopes. Here are some popular first-date options and the pros and cons of each.

| Venue                                     | Pros   | Cons   |
|---|--|--|
| Bar                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relaxing atmosphere.</li> <li>Alcohol (consumed responsibly) can ease your inhibitions.</li> <li>Usually inexpensive.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you drink too much, you may embarrass yourself.</li> <li>Bars can get crowded and loud—especially during happy hour and on week-ends—making conversation difficult.</li> </ul>                 |
| Coffee/tea bar                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Casual atmosphere.</li> <li>Inexpensive.</li> <li>Often features live musical entertainment.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be noisy.</li> <li>The ambience isn't always romantic.</li> </ul>   |
| Restaurant                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meal gives you something to occupy yourselves with as you talk.</li> <li>Time to get to know one another.</li> <li>May provide an intimate setting.</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be pricey.</li> <li>Can be loud, especially on weekends and in popular places.</li> </ul>   |
| Theater or Movie                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built-in entertainment.</li> <li>No pressure to make conversation during a movie.</li> <li>Provides something to talk about afterwards.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not the best venue for getting to know someone you just met.</li> </ul>   |
| Sporting event                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Built-in entertainment.</li> <li>Cheering for a team or player together can be a bonding experience.</li> <li>The sport can occupy you as you get to know each other.</li> </ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can be loud, depending on the sport.</li> <li>Can be too quiet to encourage conversation, depending on the sport.</li> <li>Not intimate.</li> </ul>   |
| Party                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Casual, friendly atmosphere.</li> <li>Usually inexpensive.</li> <li>Often includes food and cocktails, giving you something to occupy yourselves with as you get to know each other.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The number of people present can keep you from getting to know each other.</li> <li>Even the most decent person can become unbearable after too many cocktails.</li> </ul>                        |
| Activity (museums, cooking lessons, etc.) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a topic of conversation.</li> <li>Provides a physical distraction.</li> <li>Often inexpensive.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If you don't like the activity, you probably won't enjoy the date.</li> <li>If you don't excel at the activity, you can feel insecure about the impression you're making on your date.</li> </ul> |

### Safety Issues on a Date

Whether you're going on a **blind date** (with someone you haven't met before) or an ordinary first date, follow these safety tips:

- Meet in a public, well-lit place where you can expect other people to be present.
- Let someone know where you'll be and when you'll be home.
- Know exactly how you'll get home.
- Carry a charged cell phone.

### Financial Issues on a Date

You've both had a great time. So who pays for the date, and what does the question of payment mean?

#### Who Pays for the Date?

The asker, whether a man or woman, should pay for the date. The asker functions as the date's host, and as the host, the asker is responsible for costs incurred. Paying shows your date that you take your time together—no matter how brief—seriously. Remember that a date that's paid for by one person, no matter how expensive, does not obligate the other in any way—sexually or otherwise.

#### Common Courtesies Regarding Money

When you're on a date as an invited guest, rather than the host:

- Order from the middle:** If you're dining out, choose food from the middle of the menu's price range. This applies to all food, drinks, and treats ordered on a date. But if the host orders filet mignon, the guest should feel free to order something similarly priced.
- Offer to contribute:** An offer to pay the tip or car fare is a nice gesture. And, of course, a desire to reciprocate is a great excuse for another date.

## How to Interact on a Date

You've said hello, greeted your date by name, and shaken hands or exchanged a quick kiss. So far, so good. Now it's onto **conversation**—the part when you really get to know one another. Don't worry too much about impressing your date. Instead, concentrate on making your date feel comfortable and sociable, and let your date do the same for you.

### Be an Active Listener

Even more important than being a scintillating conversationalist is being a good listener. Listening attentively and offering feedback lets your date know that you're really interested in what he or she has to say. To be a better listener on a date:

- 1. Make eye contact:** If you have a hard time holding someone's gaze, look away briefly, then refocus on the person. Or try looking at one eye rather than both—it's easier.
- 2. Raise your brows slightly:** This makes you look wide-eyed, alert, and interested.
- 3. Nod:** A nod says "Go on, I'm interested in what you have to say."
- 4. Don't interrupt:** You may feel compelled to interject "Me too! I feel exactly the same way!" when your date says something, but don't do it. It's discourteous. Instead, signal your agreement with a nod or a smile.
- 5. Lean toward the person when he or she is talking:** You don't have to get too close. Just angle your upper body toward your date. It shows that you're paying attention.

### What to Talk About on a Date

It's possible to keep conversation general and light but still interesting when you first go out with someone. A few subjects to consider include:

- Your favorite things:** Talking about something you enjoy is relaxing and comes naturally. To put your date at ease, ask about his or her favorite food, movie, vacation spot, book, or something else you think might be of interest to him or her.
- Your background:** Your personal story—whether you're an only child from a big city or you grew up on a farm in a family of eight—is what makes you interesting. Share some personal (but not too personal) anecdotes, and prompt your date to do the same.
- Current events:** Is there a popular story you've been following in the news? Your date might be doing the same. Bring it up.

### Ask Open-Ended Questions

**Open-ended questions** are questions that require a more elaborate answer than just yes or no. When conversation flags, open-ended questions can spark it back up. Examples of open-ended, date-appropriate questions include "So what brought you to...?" and "What made you decide to become a...?"

### Avoid Taboo Conversation Topics

On a first date, don't talk about:

- Politics:** Political beliefs bring out strong feelings. Your first date should involve getting to know one another, not proving you're right in an acrimonious debate.
- Religion:** Like politics, religion is very personal, and the same warning applies.
- Money:** Your funds are no one's business but your own. Never ask or offer information about your financial status, as it can make you appear shallow, arrogant, or nosy.
- Sex:** No matter how comfortable you feel with your date, discussing sex at length is inappropriate. It can make your date feel uneasy, even if he or she is not letting on.
- Ex-flames or ex-spouses:** Discussing your ex can lead to trouble. Complaining makes you look hostile, whereas rhapsodizing about a former mate's good qualities makes it clear you're not over the breakup. Focus on your current date, not your old ones.

### Dating Conversation Pitfalls

Avoid putting your foot in your mouth or regretting what you've said later.

- Don't reveal too much too soon:** The first few dates are not the time to discuss your personal issues. A certain amount of reticence shows that you have well-defined boundaries and that you understand that your date is not your therapist.
- Don't complain:** It's true. We like being around people who make us feel good. You may just be letting off steam, but your complaints, no matter how witty, deflate the mood and are best saved for people who know you well.
- Don't insult your date:** That's unacceptable. Unintentionally insulting someone is also unpleasant. What you think of as lighthearted teasing may be misinterpreted, and even innocent comments ("I didn't know they awarded degrees in that!") can be offensive. So be mindful of your sense of humor.

### Be Upfront and Honest on a Date

If you want to date but don't want a serious relationship with any one person, say so early on. There's no shame in playing the field, as long as you're honest about it. But realize that some dates may be looking for an exclusive relationship and may not want to invest their time with someone who is dating many people.

## Flirting and Body Language

**Flirting** is about indicating appreciation and interest. Done properly, it is flattering and sincere. You flirt by:

- Paying thoughtful compliments
- Being an active listener
- Being a good conversationalist
- Smiling

A lot of flirting is also done through **body language**—a powerful method of communication that’s achieved through gestures and body positioning. In fact, you may not realize how much you give away without speaking. Successful dating requires attention to these kinds of unspoken tactics.

### Personal Space

The measure of **personal space**—the comfortable distance people keep from each other out of courtesy—varies according to the situation:

- Personal space in a typical social situation is 4–12 feet
- Personal space in a more personal social situation is 1 1/2–4 feet
- Personal space in a more intimate social situation can be 18 inches or fewer.

Be aware of and respect your date’s personal space. When in doubt, take your cue from your date: does he take a step back whenever you try to get closer? Does she inch toward you as you talk? Follow his or her lead.

### How to Mirror Your Date

One of the best ways to make a connection with someone is by **mirroring**, or mimicking the other person’s posture, volume, and gestures. Mirroring is something that often happens naturally, but if you’re conscious of it, you can control it too. If your date speaks softly, respond in a low voice. If your date is standing with arms crossed, he or she is probably feeling shy and vulnerable, so copy the person’s stance to make it clear you’re not a threat. Eventually, when the person relaxes enough to unfold his or her arms or to stand with his or her weight on one foot, you should follow along. This isn’t Simon Says, however. You don’t want your date thinking you’re mocking him or her.

### The Ritual of Approach, Retreat, Approach

Many successful flirts follow the ritual of **approach, retreat, approach**.

- **Approach:** With the approach, you start off by showing a lot of interest in the other person by talking and encouraging him or her to do the same; making eye contact, smiling, facing the person with an open stance; and touching the person on a “safe” body part such as a clothed shoulder or arm.
- **Retreat:** After 10–15 minutes, retreat. Excuse yourself, making it clear that you’ll be back. Offer to get the person a drink or say you need to use the restroom.
- **Approach:** When you return, it’s back to the approach. But be less aggressive this time. Now you’re asking the person not only to respond but also to participate actively in the flirtation. Continue the conversation, and make sure your date makes an effort too.

### How to preen on a Date

Though many of your behaviors involve making your date feel comfortable, flirting should also include a little judicious physical boldness. **Preening** draws attention to the body parts you want your date to notice. You probably preen without even knowing that you’re doing it. Some classic preening behaviors and seduction signals are:

- Straightening and brushing your clothes
- Stretching your arms
- Running your fingers through your hair
- Stroking your neck

Some well-timed preening not only lets your date get a look at your best features but also illustrates that you’re receptive and interested. Like mirroring and other types of body language, preening tends to occur naturally, but you can use it consciously and to your advantage as well.

### Opening Up Your Body

Nothing says, “Don’t come near me!” like a protective, hunched stance. If you’re having a good time, make sure your body indicates it:

- Uncross your arms and legs
- Sit (or stand) up straight with your shoulders back and chest forward

## How to End a Date

You’ve met, gotten to know each other, and hopefully enjoyed yourselves. When the date’s winding down:

- **Say “thank you”:** Even if you were bored, your date took the time out of his or her day to spend time with you, just as you did.
- **Feel free to end it early if you’re not enjoying yourself:** If you’re not in the midst of an activity (a meal or movie, for instance), wait for a lull in the conversation, excuse yourself for a minute, and when you return, say “Well, it’s getting late...” If your date has offended you, a simple “This has been interesting. Goodnight” should do it. You’re not obliged to spend time with someone who has insulted you.
- **Don’t sweat an awkward goodbye:** You’re both probably wondering if you should kiss or whether you made a good impression. When saying goodbye, go with what feels right, be it a hug, kiss, or handshake.
- **Kissing isn’t obligatory:** Again, body language provides clues. Are you both making eye contact and leaning toward each other? Or does one of you have hands in pockets or eyes downcast? If you want to kiss your date and you think you’ve got the green light, go for it. Start with an embrace and see what happens. If your date stiffens up, back off. But if you get a reciprocal hug, or if your date moves a little closer or holds your gaze, you may lean in for a kiss.

## What to Do After the Date

Whether it was the greatest date of your adult life or the worst date since your junior prom, the fact remains: it was just one date. Either way, keep it in perspective and give some thought to how you want to proceed from here.

### How to Follow Up After a Date

If you’d like to see your date again, let him or her know. After you’ve recovered from the date’s highs (or lows), send an email or call to say you’d love to get together again. But don’t wait more than a few days because you run the risk of offending him or her. If the person responds quickly and enthusiastically, suggest another date.

### How to Read the Signs After a Date

Look for reciprocal feelings after a date.

| Good signs: your date...   | Not-so-good signs: your date...                               |
|--|---|
| Contacts you without prompting and maybe even suggests that you get together again | Waits for you to initiate contact and suggest activities      |
| Introduces you to friends or family members  | Pretends you’re not there when family members or friends call |
| Is rarely late and lets you know if he or she will be delayed                      | Cancels a date at the last minute                             |

### How to Move On After a Date

Rejection feels terrible, but it’s a part of life, unfortunately. The most difficult part of dating isn’t a bad date, but a good first date that doesn’t lead to a second one.

- **If you don’t want to see the person again:** It’s best to make that clear. There’s no shame in not being attracted to someone. “I thought you were great, but I didn’t feel a spark” is polite and to the point.
- **If your date doesn’t want to see you again:** Tell yourself that feeling sorry for yourself is a luxury you can’t afford. Some of the dates you go on will be with people you won’t see again, and being on your best behavior can be exhausting. So if you’ve gone out with six different people in the last two weeks and none of them were for you, take some time off before you start feeling cynical and disappointed.

## Dating and Sex

**Sex** is an important component in romantic relationships, but it can also raise explosive issues about intimacy, personal comfort, gender roles, and expectations. Since the potential for confusion is so high, postpone sex until you know you’re both on the same page.

Before anything happens, have an explicit understanding of what you expect from each other. Before you have sex with someone new, be prepared to discuss:

- **Relationship status:** Are you serious or casual, monogamous or nonexclusive? If your status is uncertain, are you comfortable with that uncertainty?
- **Birth control:** Whether you’re looking for a one-night stand or marriage material, you must be prepared with an effective form of birth control. What method will you use? Who will provide it?
- **Sexual health:** When were you last tested for sexually transmitted disease (STDs)? If you have an STD, are you contagious? Do you have any other medical conditions or personal problems that may interfere with your sex life?

These are all important and potentially embarrassing topics, and you probably shouldn’t be having sex until you’re ready to discuss them.