

DatingAdviceGuy.com - Online Dating Guide

*Getting on Track with Online Dating:
From Signing Up to Success*

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About this Guide

Many, many years ago I started researching a technology and purchased a website to assist me with that. After a time, I had no use for the technology but I had a website.

Eventually, I decided to convert my site into a blog where I could describe my online dating experiences. Perhaps embarrassingly, I had kept notes on what was working and not working for me when I was dating. I was already married at this point but still felt a desire to share what I had experienced. Eventually this desire resulted in a fair number of posts on my site. This guide is a compilation of those posts as well as some additional thoughts I have now that I look back on the process many years later.

As time went by, I found it harder and harder to keep my website and guide up-to-date. In 2022, I convert all my content into a easier to maintain format and removed the blog portion of my website as I hadn't updated it for years.

My hope is this format allows the guide to continue to help people even though it won't be updated, possibly ever again.

Who is this Guide for?

Given most of the information is based on information from 2004 to 2014, it's pretty dated. Nothing in the guide ever hits on newer services like Tinder or Bumble. I still think there's a lot of value here, but if I had to guess, the guide is going to be most helpful for:

- People born before 1990 who have some experience dating online but want more information
- People born after 1990 but who may want to focus on some of the older dating services like Match.com or eHarmony
- People confused or frustrated by online dating and looking for any help they can find
- People who recognize that there will be a lot of details that are out-of-date, or will become out-of-date as time passes, but can value the core principles discussed here.

About Me

I started dating online in June of 2004. I hadn't dated for years prior to that, going on only a handful of dates in my recent memory. I was reluctant to using an online dating service and was only able to start once my loneliness outweighed my pride. I tried most of the big services at the time: Match.com, eHarmony, Yahoo! Personals (which is now a part of Match) and a few small niche dating websites.

In the beginning, I made a lot of bad decisions. I unintentionally gave women the wrong impression about who I was. In my first seven months of online dating I only a few first dates, and none that went particularly well.

Thankfully, I did begin to understand how things worked and my last five months of dating online were the opposite: I went on dozens of dates and frequently had two or three first dates scheduled in one week. I hated my first few months of online dating but loved my last few.

On June 9, 2005, one day short of a full year of online dating, I met the woman who would become my wife. It wasn't long before I knew I wanted to date Kate exclusively. Perhaps one of the strongest measures of my success was that when I made this decision, I had to contact six women and cancel pending first dates.

That's not to brag: I don't find myself particularly attractive or funny or anything else that would warrant this success. It really came down to figuring out how things worked best for me. After that the success came naturally.

Kate and I were married in April of 2007 and are as in love now (2022 at the time of this update) as we were in the beginning. We have two boys now. I am so grateful for the opportunity that online dating provided – an opportunity that has changed my life forever.

I do hope that you will give online dating a chance. Maybe it will change your life too.

Disclaimer

My opinions are just opinions. They are based on my personal experience and while I've seen my advice help many people, at the end of the day it's still just an opinion. I invite you to read my thoughts and make your own decisions on them. I hope that my thoughts and experiences can make your online dating experience more enjoyable.

Before We Get to the Guide

If you are going to be dating online and expect to have success with my guide or any other there is one thing you must absolutely do: you must be committed. You need to decide that you are going to do everything within your power to find a successful relationship.

The First Online Dating Mistakes I Made

Along the lines above, my first big mistake dating online was not signing up at all. It took me a full year of being lonely before I even signed up for a service to check things out. Even then, I didn't subscribe! I just looked around. Eventually, I did subscribe as I began to realize that the best way to stay single was to make no real effort at all. *Thinking* about dating will not solve your problems. Mr. or Ms. Right is not going to come knocking on your door (well, normally they won't). You need to make yourself available!

The second mistake I made was assuming that any dating service would do. I was very stubborn on this one. I signed up for one service and stuck with it for months, convinced that if it wasn't working there was something wrong with me. Eventually, I abandoned that service and tried eHarmony and it was so much better for my situation! But, I fell back into my old habits and started thinking if eHarmony wasn't working for me then there must be something wrong with me. Eventually I tried Match.com and it was even better for my situation. This service eventually led me to meeting my wife. Now I'm not saying that Match.com is the best dating service but for my personal situation it absolutely was and only by trying these different services was I able to discover that.

How Serious Are You About Finding a Relationship?

You need to answer this question right now. In all honesty, how serious **are** you about finding a great relationship? If it is important to you then I have a challenge for you which I will lay out below. In the rest of this guide, I will be assuming you have taken these steps.

1. Make a Commitment to Yourself

Make a serious commitment right now on how long you're going to put some real effort into dating online. It can be any length of time that you feel you would be able to complete. Online dating takes time and patience so think about this commitment and take it seriously. Committing to six months is a good place to start but make sure you can stick with whatever you decide on.

2. Sign up at OKCupid (or the most popular free dating site at the time you are reading this)

The next steps are all about getting you to stand by your commitment. First, if you don't have one, create an account at OKCupid. The service is free and you should be taking advantage of it even if you are using other dating services. If you are currently using Plenty of Fish and think that they are the same, I personally prefer OKCupid – but even using both would work.

3. Create an Account at Match.com

If you don't have a Match.com account I recommend signing up now. It is not important that you become a subscriber; free membership is all you will need for now. It is only important that you find out what the service has to offer and use its free features. A big problem is that many of us sign one dating service, perhaps one that we see an advertisement for, and then stop. This is NOT a good way to pick a dating service. You need to try different services to see what they are all about, even if you never subscribe.

Note: Readers should pick a popular service in their area (which very well may not be Match.com). For example, in the U.K. you might want to try a different service. The point here isn't that everyone should try Match or that they should avoid Match. The point is that if you are starting to date online you should check out several of the most populated services that are available to you. These services have become popular for a reason!

4. Create an Account at eHarmony

Another dating service?! Yes, another one. eHarmony and Match are very different in how they work. We shop around for everything in our life and the dating service you pick shouldn't be any different (this decision could potentially alter your life forever, after all). We often spend more time in the McDonald's line picking our lunch than we do a decision like an online dating service. If you've not caught on yet, I think you need to take online dating even more seriously than you do your Big Mac.

Again, there is no need to pay for the service. The point is to get a feel for what it has to offer. Be warned that signing up at eHarmony is something of a hassle because of the time it takes but it will be well worth it in the end. Better to spend thirty-minutes now signing up than finding out six months from now you wish you had been using this service all along.

Note: Again, readers should be selecting an option that works for them and that are popular, which may or may not be eHarmony as time goes by.

5. Consider Swipe Right Options

When this guide was first written, options like Tinder didn't exist. I have no experience with them at all so I can't offer good advice here. Second hand, most of the mobile options sound more like meeting someone at a bar to hookup more than they sound like apps to build long-term relationships. Still, the age of this guide shouldn't restrict you from trying the newest options – especially if they are popular.

If you're already doing these things, that's great! You're ahead of the curve. Obviously, no one has to follow this advice but as someone who made the mistakes, I can't recommend enough that these be your first steps into the world of online dating. If you really want success, you don't want to miss out on meeting someone just because you were unwilling to plan on how you were going to tackle this problem!

Finally, for any readers that are not taking this seriously: if you continue to put off the decision to actually try a dating service, you will never have success (at least not online). All the guides in the world won't ever do you any good unless you are willing to move the process forward.

The Online Dating Guide

Note: throughout this guide I mention how online dating isn't very socially acceptable. As I update this in 2022, I'm glad that times have changed!

A few years back, I was at the bar with some friends from work. This was at a time well into my online dating experience. By this point, I was sold on internet dating. Thanks to growing dating experience with online dating services, I was becoming very comfortable meeting new people.

On this evening, I had a very brief conversation with the girl sitting next to me at the bar and asked her out as I was leaving. Based on how briefly we had spoken, I suspected I was committing social suicide. However, since I had several dates planned for later that week, I wasn't too concerned. To my surprise, she agreed and we went out a few days later. It was a total disaster. I found I had nothing in common with the "bar girl". The conversations were uncomfortable and she had an unhealthy obsession with all things death (seriously).

What I discovered during the weeks after this event was that I gained an almost god-like status among my friends and co-workers. Even when I explain how painful dating her had been, to my new-found worshipers it didn't matter. I successfully got a number after saying six sentences to a girl who could barely hear me over the local band – success of the relationship at this point was irrelevant according to my friends. I found this a stark contrast to the mere mention of success with online dating which was often met with blank stares and uncomfortable silence.

So here's the truth of it: you can impulsively date strangers (and discover that they are even stranger than you expected) or you can be selective with who you date. Randomly dating people, from my experience, gains you respect and status. You are out there. You are going through all the hassle and pain that everyone who came before you also endured. You are socially acceptable. If you are dating to impress your peers, well, you should avoid online dating at all costs. If on the slim chance you are more concerned with finding a healthy relationship, the internet is a tool that should not be ignored.

I'm not going to go into all the details of why I like online dating here. There will be plenty of time for that. Instead I would ask this: why would a person who is looking for a relationship **not** use online dating? Concerns for safety aside, every answer I've heard has more to do with other people and what those other people think as opposed to the actual process of online dating.

People have the tendency to pick partners the same way they look for them. That is to say, someone obsessed with "status" will pick a person they believe others like. Those honestly searching for that special someone will pick the person they like. The question then becomes: Are you trying to date someone you like or someone who will improve your "status"? If you are afraid to date people from the internet because of what others will think, it's best to stop reading now. For everyone else: of course you should continue to meet people in more traditional fashions, but why not include online dating?

Why an Online Dating Guide?

I made my dating life very public throughout the whole online experience. I found that many of the dates either required venting or were simply funny stories (for example, my first online date *ever* featured a conversation where my date explained how she had once worked for a call-girl service).

I found that the single people I would tell the stories to were not only interested in “what” happened but also in “how” it all came about. That is, they understood how “regular” dating works, even if they weren’t particularly good at it. Online dating on the other hand, they didn’t know where to start or if it was even worth the time. Some people, I think, were using my stories as encouragement to start online dating – a sort of “if I’m not the only one doing it then it must be alright” mentality.

Eventually, people even began to talk to me specifically for online dating advice. I had gone out on enough online dates to have a valid opinion on most of the grey areas. While there is rarely an answer that is always right, I could still give some direction. Who contacts who? And how many emails before you meet? Or how long should the emails be? And exactly what belongs in a profile? Looking back, my original ideas to every one of these questions were incorrect when I first started online dating. I suspect I’m not alone.

That said, I’m not writing this to help people avoid every mistake but I would like to share what worked well for me. This is not intended to be some kind of “I went through this so you don’t have to”. You’re going to have to go through some of it no matter how much you read. There is a lot to be said for personal trial and error – my trials and errors can only get another person so far.

Another reason I created this guide is because every dating book I have read, and there have been several, seems over-simplified and very often written by people with Ph.D.s who, by their own admission, haven’t been on a date for decades. Several of these books suggested that men need to have nothing more than confidence and charisma for success. If things were as simple as these books make it sound the need for these books shouldn’t even exist.

For a moment, though, assume that these books are correct and all it takes to have tons of great dates is to be confident and charismatic. Now, try to apply this to online dating. Unfortunately, confidence in the wrong amount with online dating is going to come off as creepy. And how in the world is an email or profile to include charisma? Sure, these books have tons of value once you’re *actually on the date* but getting there is half of the work. Even the books that did mention online dating treated it as if it is exactly the same as meeting someone from anywhere else: just keep trying (and trying and trying) and when you are finally successful and actually go on a date, well, then apply all these rules the book gives you. Let me be clear: dating books have a lot of value. I just feel that the one paragraph many of these books offer

regarding online dating leaves a lot to be desired. I am hoping to supplement the dating books out there, not replace them.

The Rules

Here are a few important concepts everyone should bear in mind before getting into the actual guide (or online dating for that matter). These rules establish how I believe online dating should be approached. Awareness of these concepts can make the whole process a little less painful.

Rule One: Grain of Salt

First, nothing I have to say is “right”. As a matter of fact, I believe this applies to any dating material you might read. Everything I am presenting is what I found to work best in online dating. Every person and situation is different so if you feel something is not applicable, stick with your instincts. It is my opinion that all dating advice is just someone’s best guess. These guesses can be enormously helpful but should never be viewed as absolutely correct.

In the year I dated online, I went on approximately thirty-five first dates, had twice that number of semi-successful online conversations that never made it to the first date, and sent countless emails that I never received a reply for. Of the first dates I went on, well under half resulted in a second date or more. One more thing I should add to these statistics: almost *all* of my first and second dates came within the last three or four months of my year of dating. It took me *all that time* to finally understand what I was doing wrong and to *fix it*.

Rule Two: Everyone’s Favorite

Just be yourself. I think this is the one phrase I hated most while dating but the one I heard (and read) more often than any other. One reason I despised this phrase, particularly in dating books, is because this would be the first concept presented and then the remainder of the book is devoted to teaching a person how to act like someone else.

For example, in one book I read it started off with the ever-present “Just be yourself” chapter immediately followed by a chapter explaining how to develop a more outgoing nature. They recommended talking to strangers in public that you were not attracted to and working your way toward more attractive people. From what I’ve seen this is very common advice.

At any rate, as a shy guy, I can either follow the rules of the first chapter or the rules of the second. Quiet reservation is who I am and no amount of practice ever made “being outgoing” less of a farce for me. I really think this is unfortunate because right now, there is a guy or girl out there somewhere on a first date acting assertive because, according to several dating books, it improves their chances of getting a second date. Which leads me to this question: what if a man pretends to be assertive and this actually leads to the relationship being successful? If so, the poor girl thinks she’s dating someone with certain qualities when she’s

actually dating someone who can simply act. What's worse is the guy has bought into the idea that he is either going to have to act like someone else for the rest of his life or be alone.

The truth of the matter is being assertive is going to help many guys seem more attractive to many girls – I'll give the books that much – but this does *not* make it the only solution. The books do mean well: they are offering advice that will improve a man's odds when trying to get dates.

Something should be done to improve the odds, but I do not believe the answer is to do so by pretending to be something you are not. Instead, improve your odds by dating more and accepting the fact that in many cases "being yourself" is going to make finding who you want more difficult. There's a guy out there for the aggressive girl as much as there is a girl out there for the shy guy. This is the big reason I was drawn to online dating: I didn't have to stop being a little shy to meet people. Just send an email and if there was no response I would just convince myself she moved out of the country to help feed the needy in a third-world country.

Eventually, I did gain some assertiveness but it was because I was becoming more comfortable after a few dozen first dates, not because I was working on my assertiveness. It is unfair to tell someone to "be yourself" and then to tell them exactly what that person should look like. You may have personality traits that make you less attractive but is that really so bad? Even if you fail in the beginning just remember: you only have to be successful once. When you do find success, it will have much greater value if you do so while being honest with yourself and the person you are dating.

One warning on being yourself: don't feel like you need to get everything out there on the first date to successfully "be yourself". As a personal example, I didn't express my interest in online video games when I first started dating my wife. I didn't make attempts to hide this information. I just didn't bring it up or use it as a selling point. Now if you want to date someone who loves video game, of course you should mention it. But it wasn't core to who I was and I didn't want to discourage anyone who might dislike that.

This turned out to be a good decision because she had a very bad impression of video games. Fortunately, when I did bring it up she knew me well enough to question her beliefs, watched me play a few games, met a few of my online friends, and got over her fears. So being yourself doesn't mean pushing ever part of your life out there, especially if some of those parts are minor areas of your life.

Now, everyone isn't a geek like me but we all have something we just *know* might damage our second-date-chances so treat dating like a marathon, not a sprint. Being honest is one thing, revealing every detail about yourself is quite another.

Rule Three: It's Hard Work

I know of two types of people who have had success with online dating: those who worked at it and those who were lucky. So, if you're not lucky, don't think just because you follow some advice that your online dating life is going improve overnight.

You will need to accept that many of the people you try to contact will not write you back or that fewer people are contacting you than you would like. On rare occasions, someone will be rude when you try to talk with them.

You will have bad first dates and you will have bad second dates after thinking the first date was great. You will realize within the first few seconds of some dates that the picture on the profile was very old or misleading. You will meet people who come off great in emails but who can barely speak when you meet in person. The list goes on.

The point is that this is all part of the process. Getting frustrated with the people you are meeting or being hard on yourself is the worst thing you can do. If you accept that it will not be easy and that the process will not necessarily be quick, you will be doing yourself a great service.

If online dating were easy, the Match.com 6 month guarantee be a 6 week guarantee. So remember, online dating may not be easy but it is well worth the effort.

Online Dating Services

Let's get started by considering the different types of online dating services. Anyone who tries a single service and then decides that online dating is not for them is unaware of the vast differences that exist from one service to the next. I'll cover the basic types of dating services here but see Appendix A for a list of some of the more popular online dating services.

There are several different types of online dating services to consider. The following are not a comprehensive list but rather a general grouping of different service types to simplify the discussion: open, matched, and secondary purpose sites. I've coined these group names myself to make the discussion easier. By no means are these standard names. Also, there are new services coming out all the time but these three types are the main ones you will see.

Open Online Dating Services

Example: Match.com, Lavalife, DatingDirect (U.K.) and many more

An "open" online dating service refers to a service where you are not limited in who you can view or contact. You provide basic information about who you are looking for, such as location and age, and you are provided with a list of everyone who meets your criteria. All lines of communication are left for the daters to establish. There are no rules on who you can contact

or rules that say you must wink before you email (and no rules that say you can't do exactly that).

These services will provide you with a dozen or so boxes that you can choose to fill out or ignore. You can have a very long profile or a very short one and there are no limits on how few or how many people you can contact. This type of service can be overwhelming to someone new to online dating because of how open-ended everything is. That said, once the initial confusion is overcome, these services are very good for the active dater.

This service type is a great choice for someone who enjoys going on frequent first dates or who can comfortably communicate with several people at once. There are also "open" online dating sites which narrow down the participants by group or interest. For example, there are "open" sites for everything from senior citizens to those looking strictly for sex (not the type of site you want to visit if you are serious about finding a relationship).

In the case of the "open" online dating service, I think the greatest benefit is the number of people available to contact. However, this benefit is at times a detriment: the person you decided to contact may have received a dozen emails aside from yours.

Pros:

Very large number of potential dates to choose from

Communication can move along quickly

Cons:

Little structure; sometimes confusing for new users

The amount of competition can cause your profile to "get lost in the crowd"

Matched Online Dating Services

Example: Chemistry.com, eHarmony.com, MatchAffinity for the UK (in some ways)

A "matched" online dating service pre-selects or recommends what they determine are your best matches and only show you those profiles. This type of service normally has a strong, well defined structure. For example, when you sign up, you will first have to take a personality test. After this is complete, you will receive your "matches" and be encouraged to contact at least one of them. Once the communication has started, you will walk through a specific set of steps such as asking each other pre-selected questions and then emailing each other through the service. Eventually, you can move to communication outside of the service itself.

This service is great for someone new to online dating. There is very little to be confused about because everything is broken down into steps that everyone must follow. The drawback to this service is that there are two requirements to even get a match: this person must live within a range you specify and they must be a good match for your profile. For a moment assume that eHarmony gets the profile matching 100% correct: that still leaves the issue of available matches in your area. Due to this, a "matched" online service is likely to have more success in a

more populated area and less success in smaller areas. This was a problem I ran into when I lived in a rural area: it took 3 days after signing up to get a single match. However, I have talked to people who live in cities and they have more matches than they know what to do with.

Aside from a low number of matches, the only other issue I had was how very slowly some of the people I communicated with wanted to take things (i.e., meeting). Admittedly, I was the polar-opposite of aggressive at the time but the women I talked to were practically petrified to meet me! I think many users of these sites are the people who are brand-new to online dating. Many times they wanted to take things a little slower. On the other hand, everyone I met was serious about finding a meaningful relationship, something I can't say for the Open type services.

Pros:

Very structured
Matching based on personality
Members tend to be more serious about their relationships

Cons:

Population can affect success/usefulness
Communication can drag out at times

Secondary Purpose Sites

Yahoo! Personals, MySpace, Facebook

A secondary purpose site is a site that is not devoted to dating. Rather, it offers many services one of which can be dating. I have found these services the most difficult to use because most of the participants only have a passing interest in starting a relationship. For example, Yahoo! Personals was the first dating service I ever tried. What I discovered after about a month was that very few people were actively dating through this service. The profiles were always the same and profiles never disappear (so even if there was a lot of dating, there wasn't much success).

It appeared that many of the profiles existed simply because those people already had Yahoo! email accounts. I imagine a common case for this is that someone sees a link for Yahoo! Personals with the message that they can open one for free with their existing Yahoo! account. They go through with this, look around a bit and even uploaded their pictures but eventually get bored and stopped going back.

This is where the strength of Match.com or eHarmony shows: everyone that goes to one of these sites went there for a specific reason. Comparing secondary purpose sites to true dating sites is like comparing speed dating with going to the grocery store. Sure, there are people who are single at the grocery store, but that's not the reason why they are there. The speed date has people there for one specific purpose.

In my case, I did not have much success with secondary purpose sites compared to the pure dating sites. I am sure Yahoo! Personals has worked for many, many, many people but it felt as if there were too many “grocery shoppers” diluting the site’s usefulness for me. Other secondary dating sites, such as MySpace, are even worse and make Yahoo! Personals look like a dating gold mine. But that’s just my opinion. I occasionally hear of people having success with Facebook but I’m still inclined to believe that there will be additional hurdles to using Facebook for dating.

With that said, if you are looking to date casually and happen to have a Facebook account and want to reach out to a friend of a friend, I’d say go for it. I’ve listed some drawbacks here but giving it a try isn’t going to hurt your chances by any means. I’m sure there are happily married people who used Facebook or MySpace to meet who would disagree with my opinion.

Pros:

You may already use the service for other purposes

Cons:

The users of these services can often be less interested in finding a relationship and may not be using the service for that reason at all

Update 2011: Since I first wrote this Yahoo! Personals has closed and become a part of Match.com and MySpace seems all but forgotten in the wake of Facebook but the advice still applies to the many non-dating specific sites out there.

Specialized Dating Sites

Example: JDate, Christian Café, Black Singles

A specialized dating site concentrates on a particular type of person. For example, a service may be devoted to a particular race, religion or interest. These services often have fewer members but that doesn’t mean finding that special someone is harder, in many cases it could be easier.

For example, if someone were looking to date a strongly committed Catholic, finding them on a site like Match.com could be difficult. Many people will list Catholicism as their religion but many will associate themselves with this religion because that’s how they grew up. It may be that few of these individuals are strongly committed to any faith. This makes finding someone like a needle in a haystack. However, at a Catholic dating site, there’s just a pile of needles to pick from. There are a lot less users but the ones who are there should already have the desired trait.

Pros:

If there is a key area that you are interested in, a specialized service may make finding a potential partner much easier.

Cons:

There are normally far fewer members but that may be argued as a pro by some.

Additional Thoughts on Dating Services

There is no best service out there. Each service offers different options that make for an excellent choice for some and a poor choice for others. Early on, when I felt like every decision I made was “wrong”, a site like Chemistry or eHarmony was great for me. I became more comfortable with the idea of talking to people I didn’t know within their very structured system. The lack of matches I had due to living in a low population area is really the only thing that led me to try other services. I eventually settled on Match.com, mostly because it seemed to have the most members. There are plenty of services out there and some of them have unique ways of bringing people together – don’t be afraid to try a new service just because it doesn’t fall into a category here.

Think about what you are looking for and how you would be most comfortable finding your dates. If you want full control or are unconcerned about structure, an “open” service will fit you well. If you are new to online dating and want structure or perhaps you want to date people your personality test suggests you are compatible with, then a “matched” service will be better. If you are brand new to this and if your pocketbook can handle it, I recommend trying several different services. Often what people think they want and what they truly desire are not the same. No amount of writing here will offer as much as personally trying out a few weeks of different services.

Finally, I would recommend whichever service you decide to give a try that you sign up for a shorter length in the beginning. No need to sign up for a service for a year only to find out a month later you like another service more. If you’re committed to trying online dating, I think 3 months is a nice place to start as it typically saves you a lot over one month and it forces you to commit for more than 30 days. Six months is occasionally a good choice as well, especially if you can find a good deal by taking advantage of a promotion or a coupon. These options will save you money over the single month price (which is normally very high) but it won’t commit you for overly long.

The Numbers Game

Finding a person that you mesh well with can take time. Depending on how you date, it can take a very long time. When I first started online dating, I had this notion that dating more than one person simultaneously would be rude. I did my best to only talk to one girl at a time. There were times where I would end up talking to a few girls at once but this was always accidental.

With this approach, I went on no more than one first date every month. All of these dates were very stressful because of the time being devoted just to get to the date. Failure on the first

date, whether because she wasn't what I was looking for or the reverse, was difficult. It felt like starting over and was painful. Once I even continued to date a girl just to avoid "starting over".

Later in my online dating experience, I gave up on my "sincere" method of meeting girls and intentionally tried to meet as many girls as possible at once. For the first few weeks, things were similar to my old method but over time my dating life changed dramatically. I moved from one date a month to one a week and eventually was going on several first dates a week. There were side effects to this (aside from a busier schedule!) that make me now believe this is the best way to approach online dating:

Better Definition

As I went on more and more dates in a short time period, I realized that what I really wanted in a woman and what I had been willing to accept were very different. When I was only meeting one girl a month, there were so many qualities that I didn't like that I would ignore simply because I didn't want to have to start all over with someone else. I would continue to date someone negative or rude or conceited and just hope that things would eventually "work themselves out".

All this changed when my dating schedule became very active. Breaking off communication with someone I had nothing in common with, or at least who was missing qualities I was looking for, became easy. Honestly, it was often a relief because there were more first dates waiting and I would be able to remove someone from my list of potentials.

This freedom allowed me to finally be honest with myself about what I was looking for. I stopped defending the poor qualities my dates had and started moving on. Dating in numbers allowed me to make decisions based on what I desired, not based on how lonely I was at that time.

Greater Comfort

One great side effect to dating so actively was that I became more comfortable with dating itself. I was discovering which conversations worked better than others and was able to learn what conversations to avoid altogether. The confusion of first dates with someone I had just met was disappearing.

I actually started to have *fun*. I hadn't even thought that having fun could be a part of dating but as I grew more comfortable, I had more fun. I still wasn't the most confident guy (for example, I still wasn't regularly asking random girls out in public) but I was becoming very comfortable on dates, which gave the appearance of confidence.

Less Stress

There was always another first date on the horizon. Failure wasn't so horrible any longer. I lost my unreasonable desire to make every date go perfectly. When the stress lessened, I stopped paying attention to myself and started paying attention to my date.

On one occasion when things were going very poorly, instead of stressing out, I told my date I didn't think we were a great match but that we could still have fun over dinner. She seemed relieved and agreed to try to enjoy the dinner. We did have a nice time that evening and then proceeded to never speak to each other again. Failure became a part of dating, neither good nor bad; just a part that has to be accepted.

Better First Impressions

This was a direct result of having less stress. As the stress began to lessen, I started representing who I was much better. Early on I was always in a panic-mode: trying to make sure everything went perfect on every date, overly concerned about the happiness of my date, and so on.

Looking back, this only made my dates uncomfortable and left me looking either weird or desperate –a very unattractive trait. When I had multiple dates lined up, I found myself very relaxed on each date. Once I relaxed, I felt much better about the impressions I was leaving. Even when things didn't work out and my date was not interested in seeing me again, at least I knew we just weren't a match instead of wondering if I had only done "better" would she have liked me. When I was relaxed, there was no better or worse. There was only who I am.

Improved Odds

If you believe that you can get along with *anyone* out there then dating infrequently could work for you. For the rest of us, the biggest part of finding that special someone is opportunity.

To put it another way: imagine there is a room with 100 people in it and in this imaginary room there is one person who is a "match" to you. Using my original method for dating (one girl a month), my odds of meeting that special someone were very low and theoretically it would have taken a **very** long time to meet her (8+ years if I was particularly unlucky).

That's not the only issue, though. The problem with saying "it would take a long time" is that statement assumes that my "match" won't move on to something else: a new job that she wouldn't have taken had she been in a relationship, settling for someone just to not be alone, etc.

So I believe that dating many people improves your chances in two ways: you have a better chance of meeting someone who you are looking for and you also potentially avoid missing out on someone who may move on if you never got around to meeting in the first place.

Let's take the example above to the other extreme: imagine that after a maximum of five dates *everyone* meets their special someone, guaranteed. It's just the way the world works. Some may meet on the first date, some may meet on the third but no one ever needs to go beyond a fifth date.

Living in this imaginary world, my question is this: how quickly would you go on your five dates? Would you attempt to meet your special someone sooner or later? If later, why date online at all? You're risking meeting that special someone before the time you've appointed appropriate. If sooner, why wait by going on few dates? It seems logical that most people would go on their five dates as quickly as possible when desiring a relationship. I think the real world is similar, although clearly not so simple!

You also want to improve your odds against the chance of your competition beating you to (or scaring off) that special someone. And you do have competition out there!

Get Your Money's Worth!

If you are using online dating, chances are you are paying something. When I was meeting one person a month, it cost me exactly the same as when I was meeting seven a month. Why not get your money's worth and meet several people?

Not everyone agrees that this is the best approach to online dating but having personally taken the effort to "date in numbers", the benefits are very clear to me. However, sometimes when I offer this advice to people it has been rejected as "not for them". There seems to be a general aversion to this kind of dating. This is why I laid out all the benefits above: many people want some romantic, movie-like event to bring them into contact with the love of their life. It would be great if it worked that way but for most of us some actual effort will be required.

So just give it a try. Date as many people as you possibly can. You're dating too many people if you begin to confuse your dates with one another. As long as you're not getting confused on who you're talking to, I say date even more. For some of us, that might be three. Others may be able to date a dozen and keep everything straight. I had eight first dates planned once and found it was too much for me (fortunately none of the dates ended with me confusing one girl for another!). In the end, I found that five worked best for me.

Sometimes you won't be able to date a lot of people at one time. There may not even be two people you're interested in with the service you use! If this is the case, chances are you are too picky so try to be open-minded. Take a few risks – ask out a few no-picture profiles or accept a date from someone who contacts you that you are on the fence about. Yes, you'll be living on the edge and, yes, you may not be attracted but at least you'll be out there.

If all else fails, sign up for a second service or at least check out the members on another service. In the case where you are contacting people but getting fewer responses than you would like, understand that it takes time. I believe it took around five weeks from when I decided to date multiple women to when I **actually was** dating multiple women.

It takes a little guess work but you should be contacting people until you feel that you are at your max for “dating without confusion”. When you remove someone from your list of potentials, start contacting someone else to fill that spot. This is tricky so be careful: play your cards wrong and you may find yourself with an empty list or a list so large you can’t handle it!

Sharing Experiences

I would really recommend that you share your online dating experiences with close friends. I probably took this too far because I would talk to anyone who would listen, but it was one of the biggest helps with dating that I found.

People love to hear about dates, both the good and the bad. People enjoy hearing about others' relationships (turn on the television sometime) and they love to offer advice. Be open to listening to all advice but be slower on the advice you decide to follow. In my opinion, we're all lost to some degree when it comes to dating (this was clearest for me when girls giving me advice were baffled by the responses I got when following their advice). Still, it was always fun to hear what others thought would be the "best" move in a particular dating situation. Also, if you are able, try to share your experiences with both male and female friends. The difference in the advice I received was surprising, although perhaps it shouldn't have been! I found that frequently the best choice was somewhere in the middle of the advice offered by the guys and the girls.

For me, after I had been doing the multiple-dates-per-week for about a month, it was common for several people to stop by my desk at work to see how my weekend went. More often than not I had a funny story to tell them: either because I messed up big time and now found little else to do but laugh about it or sometimes because I met a "crazy" girl which made for even better stories.

I was also gaining confidence because I was learning that I wasn't the only person who thought dating was extremely confusing. It became clear that some people who stopped by weren't there for a laugh or to offer advice: they were confused just like me. They were just curious to learn how another "blind man" was trying to find his way.

Eventually a manager at work devoted one of her whiteboards to the girls I was dating. She developed a ranking system for how much I liked a girl versus how much that girl seemed to like me. She was just having fun but it made me feel very successful even though I hadn't met my future wife yet. In your search for that "someone", don't ignore all the people you already have. They will love trying to help you make sense of all the chaos.

Finally, one wonderful side effect of all my sharing was that I had several people setting me up on dates! Dates with zero work. You can't beat that!

Your Dating Profile

The Profile

Every service offers you a way to present information about yourself to the public. Most often this is referred to as your profile. Most literature I've read regarding online dating has put massive amounts of emphasis on the importance of the profile. I do think the profile is an important tool in online dating but I believe even someone with a mediocre profile can still be very successful.

For example, look at newspaper personal ads. Here is a real personal ad I found:

LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL

DWM, 49, 5'10", 165lbs, brown/brown, construction worker, fit, N/S, N/D, young heart, mind, body, has kids, lives alone. Seeking fit WF to enjoy life's ups and downs

So in a few sentences you have read this gentleman's profile. Chances are he's getting dates. Someone using these ads *must* be having success because they've been around for so long and people continue to use them. It's the knowledge that this type of profile can work that causes me to question the amount of information that we are instructed to put into our online profiles. The profile *is* important. It is your sales pitch and it is necessary but when you go shopping for a car, the salesman doesn't explain every type of bolt used to hold the engine together: it is just not necessary. I think sometimes we are convinced we must share every "bolt" about ourselves without realizing this can do more damage than good. The following is what I think a good profile should strive for.

Avoiding Elimination

People look for two things when reading a profile: things that make the profile writer desirable (either similar traits or desirable traits) and things that make the profile writer worthy of elimination. Everyone should have a mental list of what they are looking for if they are serious about dating. Some people, however, take this to the extreme and will eliminate anyone who "does X" or "likes Y" regardless of how petty X or Y are.

It is my opinion that writing a very lengthy profile will improve your odds of unwarranted elimination. This elimination-leaning quality of online dating is partially created by online dating itself: there are 10,000 profiles to look at. If someone has a quality you don't like, just drop the idea of talking to them and move on to the other 9,999. This is a poor way to approach dating and I would encourage you to rarely eliminate anyone quickly for small differences.

Brevity

If you read enough profiles, you will notice it is hard for an individual profile to stand out. Sure, you might remember a profile with a pretty or handsome face attached to it but it isn't the profile itself that has captured your attention. For the most part, profiles aren't nearly as interesting as the people writing them, no matter how good the writing skills involved may be. It makes sense to want to have a great profile but the truth is profiles are very forgettable. All this is not here to discourage attempts at the "perfect" profile but to encourage avoiding an overly large profile. The last thing you want your profile to do is cause people to skim it quickly.

Chances are your profile won't be the first or last profile a given person will read on any given day. If you can express who you are and be as brief as possible at the same time, you are improving your chances of having someone get a better understanding of you. Better to express a few important details about yourself than lose people by explaining everything.

Many people list every single thing they love in the hopes that someone else may like it too. This makes sense as we all want to find someone we can share our lives with and sometimes we're afraid we might be missing that special someone because we didn't mention our love of peanut butter or the color yellow or whatever. It is a good thing to list specifics about yourself that you hope would attract others but keep in mind you can't be everything to everyone. There should be a limited number of interests you cover to avoid boring away potential dates.

A final note on brevity: remember that a lot of your "competition" may be absolutely, positively insane. The guy that calls three times a day for a week after the first date or the girl who, on the first date, talks about colors she'd like to use in "your" wedding. There are crazies out there and they affect you by causing your potential dates to be suspicious of you. Get too wordy with your profile creation and you may be labeled as "not worth the risk" because of the nuts who came before you.

Avoid Jokes

Unless you are that guy or girl that everyone describes as their "funny friend", it is best to avoid joking around in your profile. It's not that joking around is bad, it's that interpretation of meaning on the internet is often a tricky thing. As an example, most of us have written emails that we later had to explain because our meaning was misinterpreted.

If you feel you must make jokes because that's who you are, get someone to read your profile to make sure your meaning is easily understood. And for the love of all things pure and holy, please avoid sarcasm. You may be the most adept wielder of sarcasm the world has ever known but if there is anything that is easier to misunderstand on the internet than sarcasm, I haven't seen it. The problem with sarcasm is you are saying something that can lead people to believe you feel one way when in reality you feel the exact opposite. If you want potential dates to know that you enjoy sarcasm just say so.

Stay Positive

This is much different than joking as it pertains to the tone of your profile. Try to have positive spins on your personal facts. Do you enjoy your job? If so, when you talk about your job mention something you like about it. Are you close to your family? Say so and express how great you think they are. Be honest about what makes you happy in your life.

If positive isn't your thing, and for some of us it just isn't, that's fine. In that case, just avoid being negative. Avoid comments such as "I can't believe I'm doing this" or "I know this makes me look desperate" or "I've failed at every other dating method, may as well try this" and so on. You will see this in other profiles occasionally but make sure all comments in your profile are either neutral or positive.

I am not sure who is passing around the rumor that a good way to find a date is by generating pity but it is a lie. Complaining isn't attractive. Also, some seem to believe that being hard on themselves shows a very lovable quality. It doesn't. It does not come off as humble, it comes off as insecure. Don't do it. As the saying goes, better to say nothing at all than something bad.

What You Aren't Looking For

Do not, under any circumstances, list everything you are not looking for in someone. Don't list anything at all that you dislike unless it is an absolute deal-breaker. It will annoy people who read your profile even if they don't fall into any of your "don't even bother talking to me if you have X quality" categories.

The only people who can do this and get away with it are girls who are getting a dozen emails a day regardless what their profile says or guys who have never been turned down. This is because while they display a horrible attitude, they are attractive enough that people don't care. If you don't fall into this category, I think covering everything you hate is a very bad idea.

Be Honest

Yes, it's important.

Better that people date you based on who you are, not how active your imagination is. I am shy regardless of how many times I can type the word "outgoing". Overweight isn't "curvy" so don't try to sell it as such. If a night out for you is checking the mailbox to see if the Netflix came in, so be it.

Better to leave facts out than to lie about them. Did I title my profile "I AM SHY"? No. I didn't mention how out-going I was at all. Maybe I'm not the assertive guy but that isn't what I'm selling. Always keep in mind that people use online dating services because they *want* to meet someone. Chances are someone out there is looking for someone just like you, blemishes and all. Present who you are, not who you think others want.

Check Your Spelling!

Try to present yourself in the best light: not just in what you present about yourself but how you present it. If you're not the best speller, have a close friend review your profile. I've reviewed many profiles for friends and it's always felt like a privilege to do so.

As I revisit this topic over time, I will admit that for younger generations, proper spelling appears to be less important. I'd say if you were born before 1990, you should at least consider doing a spellcheck. If after 1990, I guess it depends on who you are and who you're looking for. Either way, this advice may be less important than it once was for certain people.

Include a Photo

All the statistics suggest that without a photo, your profile will attract much less attention. Even Match.com requires that you have a photo on your profile to take advantage of their 6 month guarantee (be warned you'll really have to be on top of things to take advantage of that guarantee, so read the fine print!)

There are services specifically geared to provide professional photos for your online profile. Or even a local photographer can do headshots. This is just an option though. A simple (and recent) photo of yourself from a phone will often work great.

Picking a Profile Heading

Selecting a heading can be more difficult than it sounds! I would recommend you not get too stressed out about this and just try to be honest. Make it personal if you can but more importantly, always stay positive.

I don't recommend being overly specific in your heading unless you are intentionally trying to limit those who contact you to those that have a specific quality. For example "Family Oriented Man Looking to Settle Down" is a fine heading but it might cause a woman to pass on talking to him if she is looking to date casually. If this same woman would have met and spent time with this man, she may be more than happy to settle down with him! I would recommend this man use this heading if he only wants to talk to women who are 100% sure that they want to settle down. If he's open to talking to women who are on the fence I'd recommend being less specific.

Finally, I think it is okay to try to be funny in your heading. I realize this goes against my "don't try to be funny" rule but headings get so...boring. Especially after you've looked at a few hundred of them. The heading is one area where I think being a little corny or silly is fine. No one is going to turn down a date because of a silly heading. No one is going to go out on a date because of a great heading alone either.

Final Thoughts on the Profile

I have talked to many people who have used online dating and never has anyone ever said that they were drawn to someone based on how "great" they created their profile. Specific data in a

profile obviously excites interest, but it is not the profile in and of itself that is going to attract people. It all comes down to this: no emotionally healthy person decides that a relationship is going to work based off of reading a profile, no matter how well the profile is written. So don't stress on getting your profile perfect. List what you consider important regarding who you are and error on the side of providing too little information rather than too much. Leaving a little mystery makes you more interesting, not less.

Step-by-Step Online Dating Profile Creation Guide

Here I will provide more specific steps on creating your profile. I will be using all the rules laid out in the previous chapter.

The Profile Recap

Rule	Description
Avoiding Elimination	Don't feel that you have to reveal every last detail about yourself.
Brevity	Your profile should only take a minute or two to read. If your profile contains screens full of text you'll want to think about slimming it down.
Avoid Confusing Jokes	Don't obsess with trying to be funny. You'll have plenty of time to win them over when you're communicating. Trying to be funny hurts far more profiles than it helps.
Stay Positive	Being negative in your profile can give people the wrong impression of your personality. Remember: your profile is their first impression of you.
What You Aren't Looking For	Don't list everything you <i>don't</i> want. Profiles written like that drive away contacts. Again, be concerned with the first impression you're providing.

The Profile Recap

Rule	Description
Be Honest	Don't use pictures that are 5 years old, don't lie about your appearance or height or whatever. You will meet some of these people and their first thought when they meet you if you do this will be that you lied to them.

Now that we've covered the basics of what you should be keeping in mind as you write, let's begin looking into a simple way to create your profile.

Step 1: Get Away From Your Computer

The first step is to sit down somewhere quiet and write the ideas I'll be presenting here down on paper. Trying to create your first dating profile or even trying to get it just right can be an intimidating process. So find a quiet place and grab a pencil and a piece of paper. Also, be prepared to put some time into this. Some people will only spend a few minutes creating their dating profile only to remain dating online for months with a sub-par profile. You should plan on setting aside some time so you can really think your profile through.

Step 2: Thinking About Who You Are and What You Like

Here you're going to need to think of at least 10 words or phrases that describe who you are and some of the things you like. This may be more difficult than it sounds. If you have trouble thinking of things, concentrate on how you've spent your time over the last week. What hobbies have you pursued? Have you looked forward to watching particular shows or are you reading any interesting books? If you didn't have any responsibilities for the next week, how would you spend that time? Take the time to think about these things and write each item down on your piece of paper. You should have at least 10 items here. Don't stop until you have that many!

As an example, I would write the following items down for myself:

Homebody	my dachshund	video games	reading
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Church	The Office	Blogging	computers
the Steelers	Counting Crows	Digg.com	Philosophy
my job			

Step 3: Fine-Tune Your Personal List

Look at your list. It’s time to identify the areas that will best reflect who you are and remove the ones that aren’t likely to help you find any dates. Review your list and underline any of the areas that you would like to expand on. I’d recommend at least two or three of the items. Be sure to pick the items that you think are most relevant to who you are and items that you can easily speak about. Next, cross out any of the items that you think won’t help your profile much. Don’t exclude anything that makes up the core of who you are even if you think it wouldn’t help your profile! Right now we’re just getting rid of some of the noise that could potentially clutter your profile (remember: brevity!).

From my list above, what I would end up having would look like the following:

<u>Homebody</u>	<u>my dachshund</u>	video games	reading
<u>Church</u>	The Office	Blogging	computers
the Steelers	<u>Counting Crows</u>	Digg.com	philosophy
<u>my job</u>			

I’ve eliminated video games and computers because they’re both a part of my life but by no means do I need them to be a part of the life of the person I meet. Additionally, neither of these areas is likely to help me have a connection with the women reading my profile. I also remove philosophy, not because it’s a bad thing but because trying to make yourself sound smart or funny in your profile can be a turn-off and I want to avoid even giving the appearance of this.

I've decided that I'll talk about being a homebody (that I prefer staying in over going out) because it is a very large part of who I am. I'll also talk about my dog and my participation in my church because of the role they have in my life and then I'll talk about the musical group Counting Crows for a little extra insight into who I am. I'll also include some about my job as it will provide me a good opening to my profile.

Step 4: Making Your List into Dating Profile Text

Now I'll take each of these areas that I've identified and I'll incorporate them into the beginning of my profile by writing out a rough draft. Here's what I would end up with:

Hello! My name is Brad and I'm a software developer in the Pittsburgh area. I work on an application that uses statistics to catch people stealing supplies so it's a very interesting job. I have a miniature dachshund named Brownie who is a ton of fun. I'm something of a Netflix addict and really enjoy getting comfortable in the evening and watching a movie or catching one of my favorite shows (like The Office or Modern Family!). I'm also very involved at my church and really look forward to getting together with my friends for our small group every week. I am a quiet person and much prefer intimate settings over a loud bar or club, unless I'm going to see something like a Counting Crows concert (who I've seen far more times than is reasonable). Aside from that, I really enjoy reading, blogging, browsing Digg.com, and watching the Steelers.

In this example, I've made an effort to expand on each of the important areas I identified in Step 3. Also, you'll notice I don't come out and say "I'm a homebody". I don't want to introduce anything into my profile that might be negative but at the same time I really do enjoy a quiet evening on the couch with someone I love over being out. Instead of bluntly stating this, I emphasize this fact as I describe myself throughout this section of my profile.

Step 5: What You Bring to a Relationship

The next section of your profile will be where you "sell" yourself. You don't want to sound like you're bragging but you do want to make the case for why you're worth that first date. Just as before, take some time to think and then write down the things that you'll bring to a relationship that others would like. This section can be significantly shorter than the first but that's no excuse to not put in time thinking about this! Identify a few areas of strength about yourself and briefly describe them. Below is my list (including the second step of fine-tuning my choices) and then the next section of my profile is created based on this:

<u>Loyal</u>	Patient	independent	playful
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<u>Caring</u>	emotionally solid		
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I'm very loyal, especially to my friends and those I care about. I value the idea of having standards and standing by your word, even when doing so becomes inconvenient. I believe that I'm emotionally steady and very little gets me upset or angry. I'm also very caring and as a line from one of my favorite movies says, it's just as important for me to love as it is for me to be loved.

Step 6: Thinking About Qualities You Want in the Person You Date

Just as was done with personal traits/hobbies, you're going to write a list of the most important things you would like to find in the people you date. This list doesn't need to be as long as the previous one but be sure to really think about what is important to you. Again, this list will be fine-tuned by identifying which areas are most important to you and which ones can be left out. Below will be the list of qualities I would like already fine-tuned and following that will be my next paragraph of my profile:

<u>Caring</u>	understanding	<u>creative</u>	willing to compromise
<u>Christian</u>	<u>intelligent</u>	long term relationship	

The woman I'm looking to date is very caring; she is someone her friends and family refer to as "sweet". She is intelligent and creative and helps me see the world in a new way. Because of my commitment to my faith, she is either a Christian or open to discussions on faith and learning about mine. If this woman sounds like you, feel free to contact me.

Here I eliminated the qualities that I thought might be misunderstood or, if I'm honest, the ones I had trouble deciding how to describe it.

At this point, you would take each of these sections you've written out and create the full profile on your dating site of choice. If you wanted to add any additional sections, feel free to. I realize this profile isn't very long but I actually think the length is fine. I was able to express what's important to me which is much more important than the length. If your profile is more than double the length of this sample one you may want to consider shortening it some.

The Right Way to Encourage Contact in Your Dating Profile

I've looked at my fair share of online dating profiles and I wanted to talk about one of the bad habits I see in many profiles: the plea for contact. There are many examples of this; some good examples but honestly most of the time when I see someone trying to encourage communication it isn't done in a good way. Here are some of the more common ways people will attempt this:

- If you decide to contact me, I'm very flattered.
- Please contact me if you would like to chat.
- I hope you decide to send me an email!

There are a few reasons this approach is a bad idea.

Reason 1: You Don't Want to Appear Desperate

You might not be desperate but often your words will tell another story. Perhaps the wrong story but they still say something. I talk about this later in the guide. In some cases, asking (or even begging) people to contact you might not hurt your profile. However, remember that you are always fighting the bad impressions the people who have come before you have created. If a woman has had to deal with a weird guy or three, she's going to be on the lookout for anything out of place. If a man earned himself an online stalker he's going to start taking the same precautions. Having dated online actively, my experience has shown that there are far more normal people than weird. That said, it only takes one bad experience to open our eyes to what *could* happen on these online dates. After that point, I can guarantee you'll be under the microscope.

Reason 2: People Know How Online Dating Works

You don't need to explain to people how to communicate with you. Everyone already knows. The idea that someone looked at your profile, thought you were great and wanted to contact you but just couldn't figure out how is not happening. "But what if they are nervous about contacting me or shy?" First, simply stating that you invite emails isn't going to give a nervous person courage. Everyone is inviting contact by the virtue of having a dating profile. Second, you can't write your profile for the minority of people at the risk of driving away the majority. In other words, do everything you can to remove anything questionable from your profile, including innocent statements that someone else might see as desperation.

Reason 3: Are You Selecting or Being Selected?

A cousin of desperation is low self-esteem. When you word your plea for contact the wrong way you might be telling your potential dates: "I'll take anyone!" Again, I'm not saying that you have low self-esteem by asking for contact but I would suggest that you might give that impression. Remember: you need to see online dating as an opportunity for you to find what *you're looking for*. Your goal should not be to provide someone else everything *they* are looking

for. Not only that, giving the impression that you'll settle for anyone is unattractive. No one wants to be that "special anyone", they want to be that "special someone".

Reason 4: You Don't Need to Prove that You're Nice

Some people want to include something nice or encouraging in their profile and see including a statement like "I hope you decide to contact me!" as the way to do it. Yes, that is a nice statement but as I've shown above it may do more harm than good. Just as you don't need to prove that you're funny in profile, you also don't need to prove that you're nice. Trying to prove that you're funny or nice can work against you.

A Better Way to Encourage Contact

I believe there are two better approaches to ending your profile. First, not saying anything at all about contacting each other is totally fine. That's probably the easiest approach as well. As I've said before, just coming off as normal can go a long way for your dating profile. Avoiding appearances of desperation or low self-esteem will improve your odds at being contacted.

The second method is more direct and while like the examples at the beginning of this post there is a significant difference. At the end of your profile, describe the type of man or woman you are looking for. After that, a comment stating that a person who fits the bill should be encouraged to contact you is fine. Here's an example:

The woman I'd like to meet loves to travel. She's excited to try something new and appreciates my quiriness. She loves learning and excited to share her experiences with the man in her life. If this sounds like you, feel free to contact me.

But why would this work so much better? Is it really that much different? I think so. In this example, there can be no confusion over desperation or low self-esteem. The point is clear: I'm looking for particulars in the person I date. If that sounds like you, we should talk. If not, I wish you the best of luck. There's no desperation. There's no low self-esteem. Not only is it a strong way to encourage contact it actually strengthens your profile as you're defining some things you're looking for. Not only will you encourage contact, you'll encourage contact from those who fit what you're looking for.

Does Your Dating Profile Photo Say What You Think It Does?

Studies have shown that your appearance in a photo reveals a lot about you. Newsweek covers one study in far greater detail in an article called [Making a Digital First Impression](#) and a part of the article covered a real-world example of this with online dating. One of the more interesting things covered in Newsweek's article was the fact that while other people are very good at judging us based on our photos, many times we're oblivious to the message we're sending. We might think we look content or confident but others see us as angry or shy. From the article:

Research has shown that people are often clueless about how they're viewed on the basis of their online profiles. "A lot of the time we think we come across a certain way, but we don't," says Simine Vazire, an assistant professor of psychology who runs Washington University's Personality and Self-Knowledge Lab and an author of the study. "On the Internet, that's multiplied by a million, so we should be careful about how we broadcast ourselves."

If that's true, it's probably a good idea for everyone who dates online to step back and look at their photos. Look at your photos as if you were looking at a stranger. What do those photos say about you? Make sure the story your pictures are telling is the correct one!

Some interesting points from the article included:

- People were able to judge others based on the photos in 9 of 10 personality traits which included: political orientation, outgoingness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, openness, likability, self-esteem, loneliness, and religiosity. Kind of crazy. Some of those are fairly surprising to me, like political orientation and religion.
- How you stand and how you smile (or don't) reveals the biggest clues about who you are.
- Social sites such as [Facebook](#) reveal even more about your personality. Out-going people have more friends, post more often and so on. The article suggests this might explain why these services are popular: we're online but we're still being ourselves.
- Even knowing this information, it's difficult to influence how people judge you. The article also suggests that a single dating profile photo isn't going to affect all that much.

Remember, having the right profile photo isn't about lying. It's about making sure that you're telling the truth about who you are. For a good article on what to go for, I'd suggest reading this: [Choosing Your Dating Profile Photo](#)

What is a Good User Name for Online Dating Services?

There are some online dating sites that will automatically assign you a user name but most of the popular dating services (including Match.com or eHarmony) will require that you create your own user name. I recently had some traffic coming to my site where the people were obviously looking for the answer to that question so I wanted to briefly speak to this.

First, you need to keep in mind that your user name is not going to be very important in the grand scheme of things. Because of that, please don't over-think this! No one is going to pick or reject you based on your user id and I personally can't remember any user ids that have really jumped out at me. Generally speaking, you should make your user id whatever you want it to be. That said, I would say there are a few rules on what you shouldn't make your user id.

Second, you should not reveal too much about yourself with it as others will see it. As an example, your first and last name or your home address would be *bad* ideas for your user name. Not that most people are going to use their home address but some people might enter their full name. Make sure that person isn't you.

Next, I would recommend against using your standard user id such as the id you use for your personal email account. Again, this is about protecting your identity and you would be amazed at what you can find with just an email address or a user id. The amount of data we post online about ourselves these days makes taking some extra caution worth the effort.

Finally, if you're a woman and you want to insert words like "sexxy" into your user id that's fine but be aware this may be an invitation for spam from many men that you may or may not be interested in. It's a pretty small risk and more of a minor annoyance, unless that's exactly what you're hoping for!

Aside from those issues, you shouldn't be worried about your user id. A hobby or an emotion or a nickname all work fine, although you may need to add a random number since many user names will already be taken. If you just can't think of anything you can use an "online handle" generator found online. Just use good judgment! When I tested out the name generator the first one it gave me was "QuicklyBiting" which *probably* isn't the best profile name!

Meeting and Communicating

Winks and Views

For those who are new to online dating, most online dating services, such as Match.com, offer a quick and easy way of contacting people without writing anything. This action has different names at different sites: when I was dating it was called a “Wink” at Match.com and an “Icebreaker” at Yahoo! personals. For the discussion here, I’ll refer to them as winks.

I always wondered why winks exist. They are normally free (this will vary by the site) so they do provide a way for a non-paying member to alert a paying member they are interested but then what? This scenario normally falls apart: a non-payer winks at someone, gets an email in response but then can’t communicate any further. To me, this makes winks look more like a marketing ploy to get additional sign-ups. Personally, I preferred to write an email over a wink. The “I like your profile” message that a wink offers is implied when I write an email, so why bother? I never found a good reason to wink at a girl. Having thought about this extensively I do believe winks serve one good purpose: they allow the internet to mimic real life. Take the following as an example:

A young woman sitting at a bar notices a man she finds attractive. While taking a drink, she looks his way. If he’s particularly slow, she will give him a small smile. This “invitation” gives the man some confidence to walk over, introduce himself, offer to buy a drink and have a conversation with her.

This interplay simply cannot exist on the internet. I think, perhaps, winks are an attempt to create it. So maybe the good reason for winks existence is for a girl to encourage a guy to start a conversation. Now, we can talk political correctness and women’s rights and equality until we’re blue in the face but how likely is the following:

A man sitting at a bar notices a woman he finds attractive. He catches her eye and gives a small smile. The woman approaches the man, introduces herself and offers to buy him a drink.

Believable? Happening every night at bars all across the world? Sure, it *can* happen but that doesn’t make it commonplace! If this seems so strange in the “real world”, why should a guy be encouraged to act in this way electronically? So guys: please don’t wink. Man up and talk to the girl. Send some real communication. Regardless of how many bras she burned last week, a girl is going to expect you to drive the process if you are initiating the contact. Yes, there are exceptions but an aggressive girl is going to email you if she likes you and will find winks unattractive so even the exception doesn’t allow for winking. Smiling seductively over your Rum-and-Coke isn’t going to work any better on the internet than it would in the real world. Let’s leave the winking to the ladies.

Ladies: wink all you want. Write emails if that's your thing too but if not, feel free to wink until people start to think you have an odd twitching condition.

Responding to Winks

Guys, if you get a wink, don't bring it up when you contact her. The "I couldn't help noticing you noticing me" may work at the bar if she's had enough to drink but let's assume you'll be dealing with someone who is sober. Treat wink responses as if you are initiating the conversation.

When a girl smiles at a guy at the bar, he will convince himself that he is taking some great risk approaching her. In reality, she has already decided how successful their conversation will be before he gets within ten feet of her. So take a cue from the bar guy and make the same wrong assumptions regarding your near-heroic levels of risk by pretending you're making the decisions. Any other response is breaking thousands of years of tradition.

Ladies, receiving a wink from a guy may not feel like something worth responding to when other guys are writing you full emails but try to give the "winkers" a chance. Shy guys can be great guys!

Also, while it is reasonable to wonder if you get a wink because the other person is not paying, don't try to account for this possibility in your response. In other words, don't include some line like, "Just in case you don't pay here's my contact information". I did this early on and it never worked. I now believe that this came off as a little desperate. If they really like your profile, they'll shell out the money to continue the conversation and if not they were wasting your time in the first place, and do you really want to play *that* game? Let's be honest here, most monthly online dating subscriptions cost far less than a single date would. It's not *that* much money if they really want to have a chat.

Who Has Viewed You

Many services allow you to see who has been looking at your profile and vice-versa. Last time I was dating online, this could also be turned off so others didn't know you viewed them (offering some protection to those people who are already getting more email than they would like).

Contacting those who looked at your profile is absolutely encouraged. If you can tell if someone has been looking at your profile repeatedly, this is equivalent to a wink so I would encourage making contact. On a personal note, I found that contacting those who were viewing my profile, even repeatedly, wasn't any more successful than contacting those who had never viewed my profile. Still, your results may vary.

One thing I liked about the "Who's Viewed" feature was that I would often know who I wanted to contact next but because of a busy dating schedule, wouldn't contact them for a few weeks. I liked the idea that they could see that I was viewing their profile and then contacting them a

semi-extended time later. Remember: some of your competition is scary and after a few bad dates many people will be on the lookout for any clues for said nuttiness. The fact that I didn't contact someone for a week or so after viewing them, in my mind, gave me an appearance of low-desperation and thus a lower potential-stalker factor. Clearly, I am an over-thinker but I still stick by this idea.

Finally, as with winking, don't bring up the fact that you saw they were viewing your profile if you decide to contact them. Again, we're trying to avoid the creepy factor here.

First Contact

For this discussion “email” refers to whatever method the service you are using allows you to write a message to another member. I write this more towards the guys but to any assertive ladies out there I think the advice is still valid.

This area is where I made the biggest mistake for the longest period of time when dating online. I would write overly long and, in my head, witty emails that very rarely received responses. Once, I wrote no less than two pages based on a girl’s heading to her profile. The HEADING! I thought I was making conversation but all I was making was a girl scared. I really did mean well. I just didn’t know what I was doing.

My rule here is very simple: keep your first email very short. Give anything longer than three sentences a good, hard look before sending. There are several reasons I suggest short first emails.

- Your profile is what you use to sell yourself, not your first email. While I feel that your profile should be a constant battle between brevity and substance, it should definitely hold enough for someone to make a decision about communicating with you. If it doesn’t, don’t try and fix that in your emails: go back to your profile and improve that first. The email should be the bait to get someone to view your profile.
- If they don’t like your profile, long-winded emails are a waste of your time.
- You have to keep your weird factor low. Never forget that you are battling the bad impressions created by every weird person who has come before you.
- For reasons beyond my comprehension, short emails can come off as confident. Worded wrongly they can come off as cocky but even that is more acceptable than psycho.

So what do you include in this short introductory email? First, try to include something that proves you read their profile. Many guys out there spam the same email to every girl they find attractive; most girls catch on to this and then look for it in other emails. Second, if you find something in a profile that you have in common with or if there is something you like about the profile, mention that (if there are multiple things you really like, just mention one). Finally, I’d recommend asking a question. Often this can be about a common interest but any question is better than none. If you can’t think of any questions, why not ask them out on a date?

One optional approach to emailing is something I call exaggerated excitement. That is, if I had something slightly in common with the profile I was reading, I would express more excitement about the similarity than truly existed. I wouldn’t flat-out lie but I would make a bigger deal of things than was true. For example, I enjoy an occasional day walking around a big city. If someone mentioned this in her profile I wouldn’t say “I like going to big cities, too.” I would say “I love strolling through the city too, although some days I think I must be the only one!”. Saying that I love walking through the city is a stretch but I would want to add some strength to

my statement. I feel that most emotion is lost in online communication (and anyone who has used a smiley face in emails agrees with me). To avoid this, I would try to show my true level of interest by exaggerating it. Also, I felt that making someone feel “liked” early on would help them feel more comfortable and more likely to respond.

Sample Emails

Let’s look at a few real profiles, albeit very short ones, and I’ll write a first email that I would send if I were interested in meeting the girl. The first profile is what I would consider a “normal” email where contact is made but not much else. The next two are special cases where asking the girl out occurs in the first email. In my online dating life, it was uncommon for me to ask a girl out in the first email but I felt that in both the second and third example, it was the best option based off of the profile.

I’ll be changing the profiles to avoid intruding on someone’s life but will keep the general ideas the same.

Profile 1:

I am a XX year old looking for a nice guy to get to know and have a wonderful time together. I am a very outgoing person and enjoy all types of activities. My friends say I’m very outgoing but I think I’m shy when first meeting people. I work full-time as a real estate agent. I am very sociable and enjoy being around people. If you would like to get to know me, just send me a message.

This young lady devoted half of her profile to talking, in some fashion, about being sociable. This seems like one of the better points of focus when writing the email:

Response:

Hi – I’d like to get to know you so here’s your message! I love being sociable too and liked what I was seeing in your profile. Have you ever gone swing dancing?

My approach here is to be positive but brief. I make it clear I read her profile and that I’m interested in who she is. I don’t ask her out but the swing dancing reference is there to say “if you write back, I just might”. I chose swing dancing because I’ve done it a few times and by mentioning it I’m backing up the statement that I enjoy social activity. The goal here is to get her interest, have her look at my profile and if she likes what she sees, move forward.

Profile 2:

I am crazy, unique and creative. Everyday boring life turns into an adventure along with me! Born and raised in [a city] looking for someone to curl up watch a movie with or football or just hang out. A little facial hair is a plus and someone with an awesome personality is key! I’m cute but of course not looking for a stalker so I choose to remain a mystery until you contact me! Hope to hear from you soon.

Now this is someone I would not likely contact but I'm trying to be fair by grabbing profiles at random, not just those I can write an email to easiest. She openly admits concern over stalkers (enough concern that she's included no photo of herself) so not coming off as weird is very important. However, something about her profile makes me feel like she may not respond to many emails, perhaps due to her confidence in what she wants, so I'm more willing to take a risk. The important parts again are to not come off as a stalker and to be brief. In this case I'm going to play off her professed "likes" by attempting to be unique and creative when I write my email:

Response:

*...gab dnuop evif a ni nuf fo sduop net ekil dnuos uoY
!em ot ecap fo egnahc taerg a ekil sduos euqinu dna evitaerc
?keew siht retal erutnevda na otni eeffoc fo puc a gninrut tuoba leef uoy dluow who*

I'd title the email something like "Mirror, Mirror". Would this work? Chances are no, but if it does she's really going to enjoy it. Even in the case where she decides it is horribly corny, she might appreciate the unique quality it had. I still keep the email short and include information that proves I've actually read her profile. I also ask her out in the first email because:

- someone adventurous doesn't want to email for long, they want to meet people
- I'm asking before I've seen a picture which may improve my odds of not being stalker material.

Profile 3:

Hi! I am XX years old I love living life to its fullest. I travel every chance I can and love being around those I share things in common with.

This is an example of how sometimes profiles are too short and give you no clues to who the person is. With this type of profile, I always felt like simply asking them out on safe date in the first email is fine. There's not too much to work with here aside from asking travel questions (and by looking at her profile this probably happens in every email she receives). In this case, I'd just flat out ask her out. I know this looks like nothing but I've had success with these types of emails (my wife being the best example):

Response:

Hello! I liked your profile – would you be interested in having lunch at [someplace safe like a local diner/bookstore/coffee shop]?

For all these examples, I've intentionally chosen profiles that were very short to keep the examples to a reasonable size. Most profiles should have much more information for you to work with but the same ideas apply. Keep your emails short and positive. Also, regardless what any book or person tells you, better to listen to your gut and break any "rules" (such as keeping the email short) when you think it would work to your favor. For example, in the Profile 3,

creating an invitation to have a drink that looked like a travel itinerary might work well if she had mentioned enjoying creativity or if her profile was very creative. Everything else aside, just coming off as normal goes a long way.

An Absence of Responses

Again, I envision more men doing the contacting than women so this is more for them. However, this advice does apply to women: both those who are contacting men and those who feel like they are not getting enough contacts.

There is a good chance you will want to be hard on yourself when after five or ten attempts at contacting people you've had no responses. Before you label yourself as the "Worst Profile Creator Ever" or anything else equally untrue, review *all* the reasons why you may not get responses. Do not assume there is something wrong with you or your profile. Below is a list of reasons I know occur simply from talking to the girls I dated or from talking to friends.

Not Paying for the Service

Sometimes people create profiles just to look around. These people may be at the bar every night or having dates all the time. At some point online dating may have sounded interesting and they created a profile but never really did anything more than upload their picture and look around. Now they check their account occasionally to make themselves feel good based on all the emails they are getting but they never respond to anyone. Other times, people create profiles and don't want them anymore but simply don't know how to get rid of them! So keep in mind that even on a dating site there are people who aren't looking to date.

No Longer Using the Service

I stopped using any dating services in the summer of 2005. In the winter of 2006, I received an email from one of the services I had used stating that such-and-such a person was interested in my profile. Now I know I removed my profile when I closed my account but somehow someone was still seeing it. Obviously, I'm not going to sign back up to tell this woman I'm married now but what is she to assume? She'll probably assume I didn't like her profile which will be incorrect since I've never even seen it! Remember: dating sites are like other businesses in that their goal is to make money. Part of this may be showing inactive profiles to encourage other people to sign up which, while not "right", may be well within their "rights" (that is, you create the profile but they technically own it). Knowing what I know now, I wish I would have removed my pictures and any text so that even if the service did try this at least there would be nothing to see.

They are Very Busy

That's all there is to it. Occasionally you may even get a response from someone you emailed months ago apologizing that they hadn't been online for a while or had been very busy (this

happened to me twice). Don't assume that no response is a rejection because there is a chance they've not even read it yet.

Email Box Comparison

If you know any girls who use online dating, ask them how many emails they receive regularly. It's going to be much, much more than guys receive. One topic I found easy to talk about on my first dates was how our experiences were going with online dating. I was initially surprised at the number of emails many girls were receiving. Much of it was worthless spam (the same guy sending the same email to every girl within 30 miles of him) but it still provided a lot of communication for the lady to go through. Just remember that your email is not the only one she's received recently, she may have received a dozen in the last week. Depending on how she dates, she may love your profile but feel uncomfortable contacting you because she's already talking to someone else.

Curiosity

Sometimes people sign up just to view other profiles. When I was dating, some of my friends signed up just to view my profile (because I asked them to). Additionally, I know a few couples who signed up for eHarmony just to take the test and see if it would match the two of them up. In all of these cases, someone signs up with no intention of ever using the profile. Many sites do show the last login for members which is helpful but many will not get more specific than "Has not logged in for 1 month".

General Reluctance

Never forget that while online dating is always gaining more acceptance it is still relatively new. I have to believe that some people, especially shy people or traditionalist, have the best intentions but once communication begins become fearful and cannot follow through.

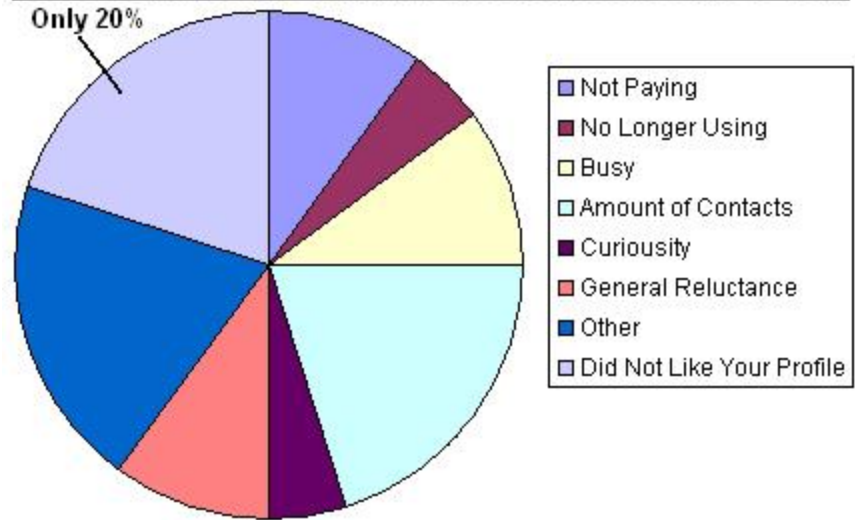
Other Issues

A friend who uses online dating will absolutely not talk to engineers because her ex-husband is an engineer. In most cases, being an engineer is a good thing (well-paying job, stability, etc.). I know she has been matched several times with engineers on eHarmony but does not respond to these men. I also know that if these guys had to create a list of why she did not respond to them "My well-paying job" would not be at the top of that list! So not receiving a response may occur because of a quality about yourself that is, in and of itself, quite good but that the other person does not like. There are many nonsensical issues that people make their decisions based on that have nothing to do directly with you or your profile so make no assumptions!

They Did Not Like Your Profile

It happens and it's nothing to get upset about. If you are honest in your profile and they see some things they don't like, they're saving both of you time by not responding.

A Pie Chart of Feeling Better About One's Self



Now I have taken all these reasons and assigned my best guess for values for each to create “A Pie Chart of Feeling Better About One’s Self” above. While this chart doesn’t have research to back it up, neither does assuming that every time you don’t get a response it’s because you are doing something wrong. Based on this chart, only 1 in 5 emails receive no response because they didn’t like your profile. I know there is no science behind these numbers but I also know these numbers are more likely to be correct than the assumption that every lack of response is your own fault. I also know I didn’t think of every reason a response is not written!

Keep All the Factors in Mind

Even when you’re not receiving the responses you would like, try to stay upbeat and never start berating yourself. There are more than enough hurdles to get over in dating without beating yourself up. If you still can’t shake the feeling that you are doing something wrong, have a close friend review your profile and a few of the emails you sent. Chances are they will think you are doing a good job so chalk it up to bad luck and keep trying.

These ideas are important to keep in mind if the person doesn’t communicate with you after a first date too. Try to stay positive and don’t assume you know why things happen the way they do!

The First Date

Actually meeting the person you are talking to is one of the most important steps to online dating. That sounds amusing but many online daters dwell on internet communication overly long. I made this mistake early on and now understand why a few girls, after several emails, would ask direct questions like “Is there anything else you would like me to answer?”. They didn’t want to answer more questions! They wanted me to get the show on the road and they were right to feel that way. There are times where you will feel like you are communicating with a “great catch” only to realize what a mistake that was 60 seconds into the first date. I think it’s important to meet early on so less time is spent talking to the wrong person and more time is spent trying to find the right one.

When to Ask

Sooner rather than later. The first date should be planned not long after communication has begun. It is personal preference on how long to wait but there are very few reasons to delay. After all, contacting someone is just a precursor to the first date. It’s not as if you’re hoping to “chat” with someone and end it there. You want to talk with them and if things go well meet them.

One common reason to delay a first date is due to an attempt to learn more about the other person. I don’t think this is a very good reason: I found the first few minutes of the first date are worth more than dozens of emails.

Another reason to delay would be if the person you are communicating with has expressed extreme reservations about meeting people from the internet. I once talked to a woman for two months before we met. She was very nice and we got along well so I was willing to communicate but let her know I’d be talking to others while she gained comfort with who I was. This reason is acceptable especially considering that women have to operate with more caution than their male counterparts.

In general, I think an invitation to meet should come by the third email you send. By this point you have talked back and forth twice and can measure how well you are getting along. You will be able to judge the situation better as you communicate: sometimes you’ll get a date on your first email, other times you may realize a few weeks of communication would be best.

I found that people will not be offended if you suggest a first date before they are ready. In my experience, the other person would offer an excuse but continue communicating with me. In this case, I suggest waiting a few days (continuing the email conversations) and then ask again. Unless reservations were clearly expressed about meeting someone from the internet, I would not ask more than three times. There are some people out there who are looking to make online friends or live fantasies out in their head without any intention of actually meeting.

Other times, people are just reluctant to meet you because they are still trying to decide if they like you. After a while, either of these cases is a waste of your time. A grown woman (or man if the lady is asking) can decide in a few weeks if they would like to meet – someone looking for a pen pal should do so somewhere else. Your time is valuable and should be used to communicate with people truly interested in meeting you.

Ladies, if you're talking to a guy and things are going great but he *just won't ask you out*, give him some encouragement or just go ahead and ask him. As I've said before, there are some really great guys out there who just struggle to make that move. If you get frustrated, don't start to ignore him! You might be throwing something really great away. Just throw him a simple "Hey I'll be over by such-and-such tomorrow – we should grab a coffee!" and things should get back on track.

What about the Phone?

I never went for phone conversations as a stepping stone from internet communication to meeting. I tried phone conversations early on but had a few bad experiences with "excessive calling" and one case where a girl took it as a personal offense every time I had to get off the phone. This type of problem is normally just a minor bother and likely rare.

Honestly, I have just never felt comfortable talking on the phone for long periods of time, even to close friends, so I prefer to jump straight from the internet communication to meeting.

If you enjoy talking on the phone or prefer to do so before meeting someone, treat this step like you would the first date by asking for the phone number by the third email. If you really hit it off on the phone (for example, did you talk for two hours without even realizing it?) ask for a first date as soon as possible. It is far too easy to fall into a routine of talking on the phone which, oddly enough, can make asking for that first date more difficult.

Regardless of the success of the first phone call, I still think the first date should come rapidly so don't wait too long to move from phone conversations to a real meeting.

First Date Length

Plan to keep the first date short. Hint or specifically state that you can only be out until a certain time. Most people will accept this or make a joke in an attempt to fish for more information ("Do you have another hot date after ours?" was the most common for me to hear). You can come up with a reason if you need to but most people will not press very hard to find out why.

Limiting the time of the first date is a safety precaution: if you end up on a nightmare of a date, you've already established an "out". If on the other hand the date is going excellent, suggest to your date that you extend it. Your date might remind you of your time constraint ("But I thought you needed to be home at 8?"). If so, tell the truth. People who are dating online

actively will appreciate your planning for a bad date and like the fact that you are saying to them “this is a good date”. If you would rather not let them in on your planning for the worst-date-scenario, just say that you’d prefer to cancel your previous plans and spend your evening with them. Either way you approach it, they won’t mind if they are having a good time. If they *insist* you not break your plans you may want to evaluate how well the date is going!

On my first date with my wife, I schedule a one hour date at a diner. After the hour was over, I explained that I only extend the good dates and since ours was a great date would she be up for miniature golf (she was). In contrast, many of my dates ended in the first hour we had originally planned for.

This approach is a cousin to the having-your-friend-call-you-and-faking-an-emergency act that some people think is so slick. I think planning ahead and bowing out gracefully is a much classier approach.

First Date Locations

The first date should be about each of you learning about the other so there should be as little distraction as possible. Coffee shops, bookstores, restaurants, parks, and bars will all provide a good place to meet where the object of attention is each other. A baseball game or a museum isn’t too bad but I think each makes for a better second or third date.

As always, listen to your gut. If you both establish you love ballroom dancing before meeting, you obviously have a very good non-traditional alternative. There are no rules written in stone but for your first date keep it simple and please make sure you go somewhere where you can hear each other! If you can only function properly on a date after you’ve had a drink then the bar is fine but try to select one where you’ll still be able to hear each other speak.

Movies are the worst first date idea in my opinion. I have some friends who like movies on the first date because “it gives them time where they don’t have to talk”. Well, I really do understand what they mean but they’re going to have to talk to the person someday! If it’s not easy from the start I find it difficult to believe that watching a movie is going to make the conversations flow much better. Oh, sure, you can talk about the movie afterwards but that can only last so long.

I settled on coffee shops and bookstores for most of my first dates. I found many of the other options were hard on my bank account, especially once I started going on multiple dates a week. I also found that women were very open to meeting for coffee (even when they didn’t drink coffee) because of how “safe” this type of date was.

Ladies, it is always within your right to suggest another location to meet if the man you are speaking to suggests something you don’t feel comfortable with. While online dating isn’t any more dangerous than any other form, you should still keep your safety a priority.

The Date Mindset

A friend of mine signed up for a dating service, worked through the profiles finding a few he liked, contacted several girls and ended up going on a date a few weeks later. Things were looking good with this woman during the email communication and even on their first date. For their second date, they met at a local art gallery and things went downhill fast. My friend could not get his date to say more than a few words in response to anything he said. He described how uncomfortable it was to walk through the entire gallery feeling as if he were talking to a wall. Then he said something I found interesting:

oh well, so much for that. i'm not sure if i was really boring or she was really boring or the museum was really boring, but we basically ended up saying about 50 words each the entire day.

My friend's response reflects how many of us view our dating failures: we are often inclined to attribute any and all dating failures to ourselves. In this case, a man had made an effort to meet a woman, selected an excellent and interesting (and safe) place to meet, discussed the art they were looking at together and when she failed to enter any conversations, blamed (or at least questioned) himself. My response to this is: why in the world would *anyone* want to date a woman who was incapable of even the smallest talk, especially when surrounded by walls full of conversation material. Whether she was just shy or disliked the gallery, to have a conversation is no heroic task. Even if she disliked the date, any intelligent person would realize that the date isn't going to go any better by not speaking. Those with some intelligence would know that this would only drag the date out.

The big problem here wasn't the fact that my friend ended up on a bad date. That is common enough for anyone. The big problem was that he saw himself as a possible reason for failure. Many people look at dating from the exact opposite view that they should be. Bluntly stated, you cannot approach dating as if you are the salesman (selling yourself) and as such think that if the "sale" doesn't go through, you were the problem. *Everyone* should be approaching dating as if they are the customer because when you go on a date you should be looking for something you desire. The very phrase "looking for someone" is stating that there are qualities which you are trying to find in a particular person. If people were not interested in specific qualities when looking for a mate, they would either:

- a) find anyone because it really could be anyone
- b) hope to be found by someone looking for what they have to offer

Clearly, option A isn't believable. I've never heard anyone say, "I'm looking for that special anyone". Everyone has a list, at least mentally, of everything they are looking for in a significant other: height, weight, religion, interests, intelligence, attitude, and so on. Over time, we may change some specifics we are looking for but we are still looking for particulars. With option A

aside, it appears that many people are taking the approach described in option B. This is a great way to end up in a bad relationship. Temporary happiness will occur if you accept anyone who will accept you but when the initial “newness” wears off, most will realize they don’t even like the person they are with. In this way, option B is as bad as option A.

This means that the only reasonable way to approach dating is by determining if your date is what YOU are looking for. Your date should be doing the same with you but neither party should be trying to force themselves into the mold of what the other person wants.

If any of the above sounds like you, you need to stop concentrating on yourself when dating. Stop thinking about dating as if you were the salesman and start looking for what you desire. You’re there to meet someone new so concentrate on him or her. Someone who measures a successful date based on how much they believe the other person liked them is doing themselves a disservice. How much your date liked you is only half of the equation. No one signs up for a dating service thinking, “I’m going to find someone who offers nothing of what I’m looking for but, boy, are they going to like me!”. It sounds silly when stated that way but many of us approach dating like this without even realizing it.

Does any of this mean you shouldn’t care about yourself at all and go on a date looking like a slob? Of course not. It means that you should look nice but because you respect yourself, not because you want to impress someone you may never speak to again.

Finally, once you are to the point where you are choosing to pass on certain dates (where you are truly looking for what you want) try to accept that it is a two-way street. If you meet someone you really like who in turn does not like you, accept it as part of the process. Don’t look at it as failure. Plain and simple, you just weren’t a match.

My friend should not have even come close to blaming himself. He should have said “She was a total bore. I’m looking for someone who can carry intelligent and fun conversations anywhere. If she couldn’t do that in the art gallery, chances are she wouldn’t have anything interesting to say anywhere we go”. This was a very important mindset for me to adopt which led to truly successful dating.

The Importance of Comfort

I differ from what most contemporary literature says in regards to successful dating. Much advice I read refers to playing “The Game”. That is, ladies play hard to get and guys appear uninterested. Rules like “don’t call for three days after meeting” apply here and I know this style of dating works (and for anyone in the know, I do love the movie *Swingers*). However, I don’t think it’s the best thing to do to improve your odds and it is a rather dishonest way to start a relationship. If you want a long-lasting, successful relationship, is feigning disinterest (i.e., telling a lie) really the best way to begin? I didn’t believe so.

Much of this was covered in The Numbers Game above, but it is worth covering again. The best thing I believe you can do to improve your odds when dating is to ensure you are as comfortable as possible. The more comfortable you are, the more comfortable your date will be, too. Remember: this has nothing to do with how confident a personality you might have. This is not about changing who you are. It is about removing variables that make you uncomfortable and about improving your skill in a particular area. So try not to give much regard to literature that says being who you are – even if that means being shy – cannot succeed. There are several ways to make sure your comfort level is high.

Date as Many People as Possible

I know a woman who will not drive on a major road near any major city. She drives on back roads and familiar highways all the time and, for all other purposes, has a normal degree of confidence. If she were forced to drive on a major interstate it would be a terrifying event for her. I suspect she would drive poorly because she would be so affected by her fears. I even suspect that no matter how often she drove on that interstate she would always have some degree of nervousness. Yet the more she drove on the interstate, the more comfortable she would become at doing so.

Similarly, for some people dating is uncomfortable because of how infrequently they do it. This is how dating was for me. I was frightened I was going to mess up and it affected how I was presenting myself. A frightened driver will often drive poorly, even though they are driving extremely cautiously. The same goes for dating. The less comfortable you are the less likely you are going to represent yourself in the best light. The more you date, the more comfortable you can be at doing so, the more you are likely to behave as you normally would. There are many other good points for dating as much as possible which I covered before but if for no other reason, it should be done to increase your comfort.

Second Dates

Unless you are already extremely comfortable dating, you should almost always try to schedule second dates, even if you feel like it won’t lead to anything beyond that. Again, this is about getting the experience to become more comfortable.

There are a few exceptions to this. First, if it was a horrible date, don't try going through it all over again. Second, if you feel like your date really liked you but you felt *nothing* in return, don't lead them on.

Ignoring those cases, second dates are great experience because you should be moving beyond the introductory small talk. You've now met your date and, seeing that he or she wasn't "scary", are more willing to have a fun date such as bowling or miniature golf or possibly a movie.

Additionally, when I knew I had no intention of a third date, my confidence was through the roof on the second. I was there to gain comfort and to have a nice evening with a new friend. The great thing about this high level of comfort is that it seemed to carry over onto other first dates.

Also, the more I dated the more refined my mental checklist for what I was looking for became. My top list of traits desired in a woman was drastically different at the end of my dating life than it was at the beginning thanks in large part to the number of women I truly tried to learn about.

One last plus to the second date: you're not the only one who is nervous. Your date may have been so nervous on your first date that they represented themselves horribly. The second date gives them some confidence that you accept who they are and allows them a chance to show what they are really like. You might even find out that you like who they are on the second date much more than the first! Oh, and looks shouldn't matter (at least not for one more date!). You may not like them solely because there is a lack of physical attraction but you're not going to start a serious relationship – just have another night out. For me, lack of attraction was no excuse to avoid a second date.

Location

Be sure to select somewhere you are comfortable. Because I tend to be a quiet talker, I've never been comfortable at a bar. However, I tried meeting several girls at bars in my early dating days. I thought everyone meets at bars so I have to as well or I'll come off as strange. Well, on those dates I came off as strange anyway so I found it better to just select a location where I could have a chance. Better to be comfortable at a diner than uncomfortable at the nicest restaurant in town. If the only thing your date enjoys is the location, chances are you're not going to make it far.

Initial Meeting

When you initially meet, greet in a fashion that you are comfortable with. Don't go for a hug if you know you'll go rigid as soon as you touch. Handshakes can be odd, but better a comfortable handshake than uncomfortable and possibly insincere hug. Any discomfort caused early on (and you don't get earlier than those first few seconds) is hard to shake off. I am not comfortable

with contact with those I've just met so normally if they approached me they might get half a hug (one arm around her shoulders briefly) but more often I would just jump right into conversation and make my first act holding a door for her.

A Plea to Those Uncomfortable with Dating

Recently, a friend expressed extreme loneliness to me and my wife. We began to talk with him about what he was looking for and discovered that he was a dating snob. He knew exactly what he wanted and anyone who didn't fit perfectly to his list, well, he wanted *nothing* to do with them. Please do not approach dating this way.

You must date many people or be very lucky to have success online.

You must gain comfort with what you are doing. This may mean contacting people who you suspect will not last past two dates. This may mean occasionally ignoring the suspicion that there will be a lack of physical attraction. It may mean ignoring the fact that they smoke but you don't. It means staying open minded and dating as frequently as your schedule allows. You must gain comfort dating or you will never express the real you and even in success may fall short of your potential. If you approach online dating with an attitude of, "I'm only going to date those who are exactly what I want", but then when meeting this perfect person only display enormous discomfort, you're in a very bad position. A child does not compose a musical piece after his first piano lesson. Do not fool yourself into thinking dating is so easy that you'll just get lucky and get it right. You should get out there and practice!

First Date Conversations

For all my shyness, I never found it very difficult to have conversations on a first date. It isn't that I gained confidence, I just planned ahead. As mentioned previously, I intentionally kept first dates short and only extended the "good" ones. Second, I would memorize topics that I could talk about. These two approaches worked very well together ensuring that (at least on first dates) there were never any awkward pauses.

The topics you choose should not solely be there to fill in empty space. You know qualities you are hoping to find in someone else and many of your topics should be used to discover if your date has these qualities. At the same time, you can't put your date "on trial" so you need to mix your conversations up between discovery, simple light-hearted small-talk, and sharing about yourself. Above all, you should be listening! Hopefully that goes without saying. I'll break down the first date conversations into three categories and discuss each. However, any good date won't require as much thinking. This preparation is more about getting a date into that "good date" zone. So just be familiar with what you want to know and what you want to share. If there is a connection, things will fall together on their own.

Discovery

This refers to parts of your conversation where you are discovering if who you have just met has what you are looking for. This is important to mention because you are looking for particular qualities whether you've admitted it or not. Early on, there may not be much you care to discover; this was the case for me. However, the more I dated, the more qualities I identified as desirable.

Be patient when trying to learn about the person you are dating. Don't turn a fun evening into an interview. If your date balks at answering some questions, just leave them unanswered and move on to lighter conversation. The only reason to learn everything about your date right away is if you are assuming there is only going to be one date.

Small-talk

It is important to be able to have light-hearted conversations to prevent your date from becoming too impersonal. It's up to you what you want to talk about but I would recommend being open to discussing your online dating experiences. I found this made for excellent small-talk and I also found that once I started, my dates had stories that they were excited to share. There were frequently "My dates have been worse than yours" competitions that were both friendly and fun. A good example of what I would use would be how on my first online date, my date told me that she had once been a call-girl.

Just be careful not to turn fun conversation into a complaint-fest. Start doing that and your date may be talking about YOU the next time she's discussing her worst online dates. You may not have any interesting stories but that doesn't make discussing online dating a bad idea. I

went so far as to share the horror stories that women shared with me on later dates. For example, even if I didn't have a good story to share I could still counter one of their horror date stories with one that a previous date had shared with me. "That's nothing", I would say, "one girl I met recently had been called by a guy she had just met three times before she even got home!" No one ever took offense that I was sharing others' stories: the truth is, everyone, myself included, just loves to hear that they're not the only ones struggling.

Also, I would ask general questions like how long she had been online dating, if she had any success, if she gets a lot of contacts, and other non-intrusive conversations. Aside from making excellent small-talk, these conversations also humanize you. You're no longer some (potentially weird) person they have just met. You're another person trying, just like they are, and finding things can be more difficult than anticipated.

Aside from the fun of discussing online dating, using their profile to fuel other small-talk is a great idea. Favorite television shows, hobbies, professions and most other specifics provided in the profile are excellent topics because, chances are, she will want to talk about these things. I would also recommend keeping up on current events (even though I found most of my dates weren't doing the same) and finding some other light-hearted conversation material. One example for me was a study about dating. I live in Pittsburgh and at the time my city had been voted the worst city for singles. This conversation always resulted in good discussion on my dates.

A final good small-talk topic I found was telling self-deprecating, but funny, stories. These types of conversations managed to turn a few uncomfortable dates into comfortable, or at least bearable, ones. For example, on some dates I would bring up favorite vacations and talk about a road trip I had taken with friends. I had it in my head that I could drive to Myrtle Beach from Pittsburgh in one shot – even after a work day. While I did make it, I was so tired I parked in a parking lot to sleep. It was raining but was also hot so for the next few hours everyone in the car was fighting over being hot or being wet. While this isn't a laugh-out-loud story, this type of conversation helped smooth out more than a few bumpy first-date conversations. I believe that willingness to share potentially embarrassing things can bring a conversation from formal to casual. These stories also show that you don't take yourself too seriously (and hopefully you don't).

Sharing

It is important to share with your date the things that you feel make you who you are. Anything that you would be unwilling to change about yourself but that you worry a mate may wish to change is a good candidate for sharing. Some topics, such as a love of travel, are very easy to bring up. Others, like a desire to move in a few years, are more difficult to just come out and discuss. One way I found to lead the conversation to these topics is to simply ask the question you want to answer. Once your date has answered the question just stop controlling the conversation – that is, stop talking. Most of the time, they'll ask you what you just asked them.

Most people will see through this (I was called out on it several times) but I never met anyone offended by the tactic. If anything, my dates seemed amused. On a good day, your date will be putting in effort to find out who you are, so this tactic will hopefully be rarely needed. On the other hand, if halfway through your date you realize you've only talked about them, this may be a red flag that your date isn't very interested in you! The one thing your date may like about you is that you give them a chance to talk about themselves!

A good conversation should be healthy amounts of both sharing and questioning. Don't feel like you need to explain in full detail who you are on your first date, though. It is okay to leave a little mystery about who you are! In my experience those dates who seemed desperate to share as much as possible on the first date shared **far too much**.

Developing a Script

Chances are you'll never be on a date where you can plan out the conversation in any large part. Still, it's a good idea to create a mental list of topics to cover. The dreaded "uncomfortable silence" that can happen on any date doesn't *normally* kill the date. However, if these silences come too early or too often they can make both daters very uncomfortable. Below is an example script pretty close to what I had mentally prepared when I was dating. These were items I would keep in mind to keep the conversation moving if it wasn't taking on a life of its own.

1. Initial meeting and introductions
2. Discuss success/failures of online dating (small-talk)
3. Is she a family-type person? (Discovery. Sharing if she returns the question)
4. Work life (Discovery/Sharing)
5. Entertainment small-talk (usually good topics are easily identified in the profile)
6. Current events (Discovery disguised as small-talk. I looked for someone intelligent and who cared about current events)
7. Vacations (Sharing – I went on several road trips that made for great topics)
8. Goals (Discovery – careful with this topic. Don't turn the date into an interview)
9. Profile based small-talk (Hopefully light-hearted; discuss something she enjoys)
10. End or extend date depending on how well it is going

Throwing Out the Script

For all my discussion of topic type and importance of knowing what you'll talk about, most conversation simply doesn't follow a clear cut model. On most of my dates I followed my script for the first two steps and then the conversation simply took off. Discussing online dating jump started many conversations to the point that there was no looking back. From there we would jump back and forth between topics talking about things I hadn't even thought of. As you experience this, the point of the script becomes clear: it's not for most dates. The script exists only for the dates where the conversation lags. Hopefully, you'll never need it. Never try to stick

by a script simply because you created one. Mentally tossing the script aside is one sign of a good date.

Taboo Topics

You'll find lists everywhere about what to not talk about on a first date. Sex, politics and religion are often at the top, although recently I saw an article that said talking about your pets would doom any date (don't ask me – I see no problem with this). I've found that lists like this are good general guidelines but that every situation is different.

For example, when I met my wife for the first time, a big part of why I contacted her was because of our religious similarities. This seemed like safe ground to cover to me at the time (it was). We also discussed politics on our first date but when I sensed she didn't like that we disagreed on some ideas I abandoned the conversation.

My advice would be to trust yourself more than some list of do's or don'ts. If your date listed being a member of the Rainbow and Butterfly Tree-hugging Club in their profile but you're the president of the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy Fan Club, hopefully you'll have the sense to count political discussion as being out (as long as you can accept views different from yours in your partner).

On the other hand, don't talk about something you're not comfortable with just because some *other* list says you should. Personally, I never brought up sex on dates because I would have been uncomfortable doing so. Healthy conversation is fueled by the comfort of both you and your date. Don't go and slow the conversation down because you think you need to cover certain topics. Use your head and remember that one topic will be great for some dates and horrible for others. Lists of suggested do's and don'ts aren't bad but it is bad to adopt a universal rule for every date.

First Date Questions and Conversation Starters

It's good to have some ideas on first date conversations. That said, don't get so obsessed with asking a list of specific questions that you end up putting you're dating on an "interview". Allow the conversation to have a life of its own. Also, don't assume you're the only one who should ask questions. Allow your date to ask questions as well!

Remember: these questions are just examples. If you are serious about finding a relationship you need to decide what's important and interesting to **you** and base your questions on those areas.

First Date Conversation Topics: Learning About Your Date

1. Do you believe in living happily ever after?
2. Do you believe in love at first sight?
3. How close are you to your family?
4. How old were you when you had your first girlfriend/boyfriend?
5. How do you feel about your job?
6. Do you enjoy spending time alone?
7. What accomplishment are you most proud of?
8. If you had a big problem, who would you go to for advice?
9. Would you consider yourself more logical or artistic?
10. If you were given a million dollars but couldn't spend any on yourself, how would you use it?
11. What are some things in life that annoy you?
12. Have you ever read a book that changed your life?
13. Do you like children? Would you like to have them?
14. What do you think is the biggest problem in the world today?
15. Do you think life is more about fate or chance?
16. What is your biggest regret from when you were growing up?
17. What is your strongest quality that you bring to relationships?
18. What in life makes you the angriest?
19. If you could ask God one question, what would it be?
20. What makes you feel the most loved?
21. Have you ever stolen anything?
22. Do you rely more on facts or feelings when making decisions?
23. What goals would you like to accomplish in the next five years?
24. Do your parents still have a strong relationship?
25. What are you most passionate about in life?

First Date Conversation Topics: Just For Fun

1. Have you enjoyed your online dating experiences?
2. If you could travel anywhere on vacation where would you go?
3. If you had a time machine but could only travel to the future or the past, which would you pick? Would you still go if you could never come back?
4. What's the worst date you've ever been on?
5. What would you do if you won the lottery?
6. Do you believe in aliens? Ghosts?
7. Do you enjoy exercising?
8. Do you think cheesy pick-up lines ever work?
9. What was your best birthday growing up?
10. If you could have one super power what would it be?
11. What are you most scared of?
12. If you could live in another country, which one would it be?
13. Do you stay in touch with your friends from grade school or high school?
14. What is your earliest memory?
15. Do you have any pets?
16. Have you ever changed the oil in your car?
17. Do you sing in the shower?
18. If you were a fruit, what fruit would you be?
19. If you had to pick a nickname for yourself, what would it be?
20. Would you ever appear on a reality TV show if you were given the chance?
21. What do you think technology will be like 5 years from now?
22. Do you have any personal conspiracy theories?
23. Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
24. Did you have any hobbies growing up? Any hobbies today?
25. Do you think it's silly to look up questions to ask on your date on the internet?

My Date Doesn't Ask Me Any Questions

A reader recently discussed his frustration with this: on dates he is able to get conversations going easily but finds most of the women he meets, while willing to answer his questions, ask no questions of their own. They often appear very interested in the conversation but are willing to allow it remain about them. He questioned whether these women, who often seem swept off their feet, are actually interested at all. His dates would also say things like “Gee, you seem really quiet” which frustrated him even further since they were barely taking a breath when speaking. Here's the advice I provided him which hopefully others will find useful:

Interrupting is Allowed

It's okay to interrupt your date while they're talking with thoughts of your own. Interrupting each other on a first date can actually be a great sign as you're both anxious to talk to each other. Obviously, it should be done only when you really do want to interject something. But that's the point: if you wait for some people to allow you to talk you'll be silent the entire night! For example, if I was on a date and she started to describe a TV show I also like I might interrupt her with: “I love that show! Did you see the one where Michael ran over Meredith?!” I know my date wouldn't mind at all.

Sometimes You'll Need to Answer Your Own Questions

Try this: ask a question, allow them to answer, and then allow them the opportunity to ask you a question back by remaining silent. If they don't ask a question, it's okay to start talking about yourself anyway. It should be about whatever you had asked previously to make the flow of the conversation go well. Just pretend that they asked you what you had asked them. Hopefully as you describe yourself they'll ask you follow-up questions. If you can't get them to ask you questions even with this effort, you might just be on a bad date.

Keeping the Conversation Going Isn't the Only Goal

Don't fall into the trap of asking questions just to make sure the conversation flows well. Ask questions you really care about and that you would like to learn about your date. If a date starts to feel like an interview it may mean that you're approaching the conversation like a problem that needs solved instead of something that should grow naturally between the two of you as the date progresses. As a side note, a date feeling like an interview isn't a bad thing as long as both people are asking questions.

A Second Chance is Often in Order

People get nervous. It's often a good idea to give them a second chance with a second date. Some people lock up when they're nervous but others can't shut up. You might find that these poor conversationalists become better at sharing the discussion as they become more comfortable spending time with you.

Excitement after a Good Date

If you show actual interest (i.e., are a good listener) and your date is attracted to you, many times they will get excited and that will cause them to talk even more. I would say the more attracted the woman was to me when I was dating online, the more likely she was to end up ruling the conversation. It's not that she was trying to, it's as if she temporarily lost control. If I'm honest, I had similar responses when I felt that I was on a great date, too. That's why on the best of the best dates, we talked over top of each other all night long. If you're concerned that they're not interested in you just because they're doing all of the talking, that's not always the case. As a matter of fact, it might just mean they're more interested in you than you are in them! If they are saying things like "Gee, you seem really quiet", that might be another way of saying "Am I doing something wrong?" The fact that they want you to talk is a good sign (even though they don't recognize all their talking is the reason you haven't been).

My reader's thoughts were that something was going wrong but I feel that he was extremely close to having a ton of great dates based on what he described. Remember: sometimes when someone does all the talking it's not a bad sign but a good one!

Being Boring on a Date: How to Avoid or Correct It

A post at Slate.com discusses [eight ways to tell whether you're being boring](#). While the article wasn't written for online dating specifically, I think the article is very applicable. Some of the tips might even be a little surprising to some, such as why interruption is actually a sign of healthy conversation.

I think the article provides very good tips on recognizing if you're being boring. And the truth is, many times we can't see that we're not being very interesting. We're excited about our topic and so make the assumption the other person must be also, never picking up on how bored they are.

Turning Around a Boring Conversation

If you keep the tips from the Slate article in mind on your future dates and realize you are boring your date, that's great! I don't mean it's great that you've bored someone but it is great that you're picking up on it. This recognition will provide you with the opportunity to turn things around when you may have otherwise never even realized there was a problem. Here are some tips that I would use if I felt I were boring my date:

First, who has been doing most of the talking? If it's been you the first step I would take is to simply allow your date to chime in. Sometimes the other person may become bored not because of the topic but because they realize they're not being given a chance to speak. The

conversation has become a monologue or, even worse, you might be preaching. Take a breath! See if they have anything to say.

If the problem doesn't seem to stem from talking too much, you should try to think of a topic they are interested in and see if you can get them talking about it (the more excited they are about it, the better). Assuming you've met through an online dating service and they filled in their profile well, you should have *some* idea of what they are interested in. If you are using a service like eHarmony where the profile may contain less information, when you reach the stage in the service where you ask each other open-ended questions, you may want to ask: "What are you most passionate about in life?" This way if you do end up meeting, you'll be prepared for the worst case scenario.

If it's your first date, it could be possible to confuse boredom with nervousness. If you suspect your date might be nervous I would recommend telling a funny story about yourself, even if it is mildly embarrassing. The goal here is to help them loosen up, to let them know that you're not taking yourself too seriously (which will hopefully encourage them to do the same). If you've been dating online for a while, you probably have some funny stories to share. In my experience, these were the best stories to share as most of the women I dated also had funny stories to share as well. Even if they were actually bored and not nervous, this approach isn't a bad idea.

Finally, even before you meet you should be prepared to keep the conversation moving, as I've already discussed in this guide.

Knowing When to Walk Away

Sometimes your date may be bored due to no fault of your own. He or she may have decided early on that they aren't interested in you. Some people lack class in this situation and will simply "lock up". *These people are not worth your time*. It basically comes down to the fact that you should just end the date as quickly and as gracefully as you can. If you've put an effort in to be cordial, kind and interested in them but they refuse to contribute to the date, it's time to end it.

Who Should Pay on the First Date?

I was discussing online dating with a friend recently and she explained how she has twice ended an online dating relationship with men due to the fact that they didn't even offer to pay for her on the first date. These dates weren't anything expensive either, just coffee. These men had also established that they had well-paying jobs. I'm surprised that this happened to her twice in a few months so I think this topic is worth covering.

Guys, the rule is simple: you really should offer to pay. Just as dressing nice is important on your first date because you want to show her respect, paying for her coffee or meal sends the same message. Many women are looking for a man who will take care of them and I know quite a few who are more than willing to admit it. Don't have a great date with a real connection and then blow it by not following through.

Rules for the Guys

- If you've established that you are having money issues prior to the date, it's fair for each of you to pay for yourself.
- If you offer and she declines, that's fine. I don't think it's necessary to force the issue. It is fine to try to convince her but don't be stubborn. Just say, "I'd really like to do this for you". If she wants to pay for herself, allow her to. Remember: it's about respect.
- Active dating, especially online dating, can get expensive. Unfortunately for you, this isn't an excuse to avoid paying for her. My approach when I was having several first dates a week was to always try to make sure we did something like coffee or meeting at a bookstore to keep the costs down. Save the dinner dates for when you suspect there's a real connection prior to meeting.
- First dates are a sensitive event. Not only are you analyzing her every word and action, she's doing the same to you. Don't ruin a great date by sending her an unintentional message when it comes time to pay.

Ladies, I think each date should be measured on its own merits. Just because my friend broke things off when the men didn't pay doesn't mean everyone should. If things are going great aside from this single fact, I would ask that you consider to give the man another chance. He may just have temporarily lost his mind talking to you. After my first date with my wife, I forgot to ask for her phone number. Not because I didn't want it but because I was on cloud 9 and simply wasn't thinking. Things aren't always as they appear.

I actually tried to convince my friend that she should give one of the men a second chance since there seemed to be some connection between them. She could not be moved, though. She said she'd been down that road before and she had no interest in dealing with it again. She wanted someone who is truly interested in her and she wanted him to be willing to show it.

Staying Safe

Whenever dating, whether online or not, you need to keep your safety in mind. This is especially true for the ladies out there. However, don't think that online dating is somehow more dangerous than other forms of dating. Any time you are dating someone you don't know very well you should exercise extra caution. This is true of blind dates, newspaper ads, speed dating, or just meeting someone at a bar. I believe online dating gets more attention because of how new it is but all dating like this deserves some caution.

Next I'll discuss some a few of the common scams associated with online dating so you could spot the scammer early on.

The Romance Scam

I would consider this the “main” scam with online dating. This scam involves the scammer posing as a potential love interest with the goal of making money off of their target. It's amazing how many people are fooled by this one but the bad guys are good at what they do and can be very convincing.

The Romance Scam in Practice

1. You're contacted by someone who appears genuinely interested in you. If you're a man, she's probably very beautiful. If you're a woman, he may seem either very successful or extremely caring. Other times, though, there may be nothing remarkable about them.
2. Time will be spent growing the relationship but there will always be something that hinders actually meeting. Most often this will be due to their being in another country (this fact often plays into the scam further).
3. As the relationship grows, the scammer will introduce some type of problem they are dealing with. For example, a relative may become ill or some issue will arise with their arrangement for staying in the country. In the beginning this will likely be treated as nothing more than a frustration. The whole point is to prepare you as they move into the further stages of this scam.
4. Once the scammer feels that you are both convinced of their honesty and emotionally attached to them, they will move into the next phase of the scam. Some type of problem will occur that will desperately require your help. The frustrating issue has now become an emergency: the sick family member is now dying and they are in desperate need of money or they must leave the country at the risk of death but haven't the money to leave. The initial request for money may be quite small and may seem very reasonable. They will persist in their request for money if you hesitate and they can be *very convincing*.
5. You will only reach this point if you've given money in the step above. At this point, the scammer's emergency has become even worse. For example, the money you gave to help with the operation was successful but now if they aren't able to buy medication to help with the recovery all will be lost. Whatever the emergency was, it will have only become worse. At this point, more money will be requested in a larger amount. This step will be repeated until you run out of money or realize you've been taken.

Tips for Spotting the Romance Scam

Did they ask for money?

This should never happen in online dating. No matter how well you think you know someone, if money ever, ever, ever comes into the conversation you need to exercise extreme caution.

Stop and think: if you were in need of help, where would you turn first? Online dating? Not likely. The number one rule here is easy to remember: that at any point in time if someone asks for money there's a good chance you're talking to a scammer.

Are they in another country?

They'll normally be up-front about this because it's all part of their plan. Being contacted by someone from outside the country is strange. All foreign contact may not be scam related but I suspect most of it is.

Do they make sense?

Many of these scammers are flooding the same email to many people. They want to build a large base of people to talk with as every person represents another source of potential income. Because they could be sending hundreds of messages, their emails may seem generic or they may not be able to stay on topic with your discussions. They may also struggle with the English language.

Guys: does she look like a model?

Chances are the photo you are looking at is a model. Chances are the person who sent it to you is not her. The money scam relies on getting someone to *want* to believe that the person that they are talking to is the real deal. With this in mind, the scammer will find a pretty girl somewhere on the internet and will then use this in their profile.

Ladies: did he fall in love with you amazingly quickly?

The scammers may play to men's eyes but they'll play to a woman's heart. Most men are unwilling to throw words like "love" and "forever" around quickly. Most men prefer to meet before making a commitment (and even then we often struggle!). I'm not encouraging pessimism if you've found a man who's crazy about you before you've even met but I am advising you that if this perfect man suddenly needs a little money chances are he's anything but perfect.

Did a small problem turn into a catastrophe?

If so, looking back, were you "prepped" for this emergency? Was the topic frequently touched on?

Time is of no consequence

Many scammers live in another country and doing this is their job; it's what they do for a living. They're more than happy to put in the time. Do not assume that because you've built a strong relationship over a month or two that they are who they say they are.

The 419 Scam

The Romance Scam is often mentioned in relation to the 419 scam (also referred to as the Nigerian scam). The standard 419 scam involves the scammer offering you a large sum of money if you help them move that money out of the country they are currently in. For example, they may want to send you a check for \$50,000 and will allow you to keep \$10,000 of it if you will cash it for them. They will then create a fake check and send it to you. You deposit the check and then wire them their portion of the money. They will request that you send their share back to them by a wire service such as Western Union because money wires cannot be cancelled. Once the bank realizes that the funds were fraudulently entered all of the funds will be removed from your bank account. You will owe the total amount you deposited to your bank, regardless of how much you wired back to the scammer.

Generally speaking, the 419 scam isn't specifically related to online dating. So why mention it? Many times perpetrators of the Romance Scam will move from one scam to the other. For example, they may ask you for a small sum of money for a family operation. They offer to repay you ten-fold if you will just lend them the small amount. You send them \$1,000 and good to their word, they send you a check for \$50,000 and allow you to keep \$10,000 of it. You cash the check and wire them their \$40,000. A few days later, your bank informs you that you are now in debt to them for a sum of all \$50,000 (plus you're out the original \$1000 you sent).

Spotting the 419 Scam - Are they offering you money for something in return?

Don't do it. Just as discussed in the Romance Scam, your potential date should neither be asking for nor offering money. The scammer is playing to your desire to believe that something too good to be true really is true. Don't fall for this! If it feels too good to be true, your instincts are trying to warn you to be careful!

“Married Men Looking to Cheat” Scam

This one is pretty self-explanatory. A married man is interested in an affair and has decided to use online dating to find it. It's something of a mystery why men use standard dating sites to cheat when there are many services that cater specifically to cheating (such as the Ashley Madison website). It would appear that many men like to cheat without revealing they are married.

Spotting the Married Man

Did they post a picture?

Someone looking to cheat needs to make sure they don't get caught and posting a crystal clear picture of themselves on an online dating site is a big risk for them. If a friend of their wife uses the service, which is a very real possibility with the popularity of online dating, he'll be ruined. Many of the married men will not post a picture at all or if they do it will be in a large group or it will be difficult to make him out (the picture may be very dark or very bright).

Do they hide strange details?

Are they unwilling to share their last name with you or are they reluctant to reveal certain details about themselves? Normally with online dating, revealing details about yourself is a part of the process. If you're talking to a man who is open about some areas of his life but clams up about others, something strange is going on. It may not even be that you're dealing with a married man but it's not a good sign regardless. Proceed with caution when dealing with anyone who seems selectively secretive.

Do they have strict rules on communicating?

Once the communication moves beyond the dating service's email system, are they extremely particular about when and how they communicate? Are they unwilling to give you their phone number even though they have yours? Will they only meet in areas where there are very few people? Again, they may not be married but something odd is going on and you should proceed cautiously.

Married men can be hard to spot and even a man who falls into all the categories above may not be cheating. Regardless of being married or not, someone like this is acting strangely which is cause for extra caution regardless of the reason.

Email Spam Scam (or the Stolen Credit Card Scam)

This scam is a personal theory based on some activity I saw when I had a credit card stolen. This scam has nothing to do with someone stealing your credit card. Rather, it deals with someone else's credit card being stolen and that stolen credit card then being used to open an online dating account. When my credit card number was stolen, it was used to open an account at an online dating site. I'm not alone – you can find people discussing this with a quick Google search. The thief in my case used my information for opening the dating account and nothing more. This screams the question: why steal a credit card only to use it for one specific purchase? A relatively small purchase at that. Why go through the trouble of stealing an account and then doing so little with it?

Many sinister ideas come to mind. What does this person plan to do to his date that would require he remain anonymous? Scary. However, I do not believe that this is the real reason behind using a credit card for online dating accounts. What is the main reason, then? My suspicion is this: spam.

The account is opened so the scammer can contact as many people as possible in an attempt to get their personal email account. Once they've collected a batch of personal emails, the massive amounts of spam begin. Why do I suspect this is the goal and not something more evil? Most credit card fraud is recognized quickly these days. This means that in most cases the scammer only has a few days to use the account before it is closed due to the fraud being recognized. The account which was opened using my credit card was only open for a few days

before I contacted the dating service and had it closed. Also, in my case the dating service was willing to give me details on the account that was opened: it was opened as a middle-aged divorced woman. Seems unlikely to be the approach a scammer would take if they were looking to trick someone into meeting them. It seems far more likely that the scammer posed as a single woman and emailed hundreds of men with an email similar to the following:

My account at this site is running out in a few days but if you give me your personal email account I'd love to talk to you some more! Please contact me quickly, I only have a short time left!

Occasionally, you can even see this suspicious activity while simply browsing a site. Not long ago while reviewing a dating service I noticed that there were a few scantily clad women shown as some of my best matches. They stuck out in a big way because the site is geared towards those serious about meeting someone. The profiles, especially when compared to the others around them, were very suspicious. Not long after I noticed that both of the half-naked profiles had been removed. Now I have no idea what actually happened here but it's within the realm of possibility that these accounts were being used to mass mail all the members of the site to harvest personal email accounts. I realize that it seems like a lot of work just to get emails for spam but I believe it is happening.

Spotting the Email Spam Scam

Are they extremely attractive *and* extremely interested in you?

There's nothing to say that beautiful, rich, successful people wouldn't be interested in you but be aware that when it happens you need to exercise a little extra caution. I realize that this may be unfair to all the beautiful people out there, but I'm sure they will find some way to weather through this discrimination. Beauty is a burden they must learn to bear!

Did they ask for your email quickly?

Don't give it away when someone asks for it right away. Easy as that. You're worth the small fee the dating service charges if they are interested in you. If you're both paying for the service, you can communicate with each other fine. Using your personal email account does make communication easier but this should occur after some period of time, not after the first email they send.

Are they new to the service?

Most dating services flag members as being new. This is mainly to help current members recognize the new possibilities in the dating service membership. However, this flag provides you with some information that allows you to exercise extra caution. Someone that is both new to the service and also wants your personal email address is a major suspect. If you find yourself convinced that this beautiful person really does desperately want to talk to you via

your personal email, give this a try: wait one week. In most cases, I suspect you'll see the profile disappear before that week is out.

Try to Keep it Simple

In almost every scam above, there is some complication that the scammer needs you to buy into. Whether it is money, the inability to post a photo or a new online data service member who needs your personal email *right away*, the scams have some complexity normal communication doesn't.

There will always be new scams so these few examples aren't exhaustive. However, a good general rule when dating online is things should be simple. Not necessarily easy, but simple. There should be communication that leads to first dates. Simple as that. Anything that doesn't follow that simple pattern should be viewed with some suspicion.

Always exercise caution when things don't feel right (or when money is introduced, regardless of the reason). Online dating is a great way to meet people but, just as in the real world, you need to take precautions to keep yourself safe.

Tools for Identifying Online Dating Scams and Liars

As online dating grows more popular so do dating scams associated with them. There are many good resources online describing dating scams but not very many give concrete ways to defend or combat them. Because of this, I want to offer some actual methods to detect if you're dealing with a dishonest person. I'll try to cover the tools in detail so you can perform your own detective work if it is ever required.

Just a little warning before we begin: using some of the tools I'm going to cover can be considered a little rude. All information discovered is publicly available but sometimes taking actions like this can be viewed as distrustful (and rightfully so). However, your safety should come first. By no means would I suggest these tools be used for every person you meet online. In a healthy relationship, you allow your partner to reveal details about themselves, you don't go digging! However, if you ever have any suspicions at all that you are being scammed or lied to or that your safety is at risk, you should be aware of these options.

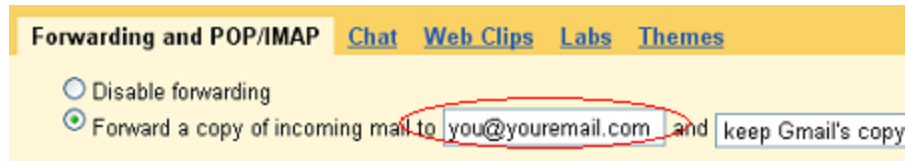
Protect Your Personal Email

This step won't help you identify if you're being lied to or scammed but it could protect you from spam or someone who is a little *too* interested in you. In this step, I'm going to walk you through the steps of setting up a new email account at Gmail and then setting up that account so it will forward all email received to your main email account. This way you are protected but can still receive communication in your preferred email account (although replying should be done through Gmail if you want to avoid revealing your main address).

1. Browse to gmail.com and click the "Create an account" button
2. You will now be required to fill in the standard sign-up information such as first and last name, a login name for your email account and so on. When selecting your login, best to select it in such a way that it doesn't reveal anything about you. Don't use something like "Sarah301Preston" when your name is Sarah and you live on 301 Preston Avenue! Hopefully this goes without saying!
3. Once all the boxes are filled in, click "I accept and create my account". You may then need to click on "Take me to my account". Now you're all set up with your new email account.
4. Now that you're in your new email account, click on the Settings link in the upper right.

bradlrr@gmail.com | [Settings](#) | [Help](#) | [Sign out](#)

5. Now, click on "Forwarding and POP/IMAP"
6. Select the radio button labeled "Forward a copy of incoming mail to" and then enter your primary email address in the text box. In the example below, you would replace you@youremail.com with your actual email.



Save the settings and that's it! You're all set up. Now when you give out an email address when online dating, you'll give this address. Any email sent to this address will also be forwarded to your main account so you'll never miss a beat.

Gently Requesting For More Information

Technically this is not a tool but rather some advice when you're looking for more information. If you're dealing with a scammer or a liar they'll probably find a way to avoid giving you the answers you want and this is the point where you would start using the other tools we'll discuss. If you're becoming suspicious, ask specific questions and see how hard they work to avoid answering. Changing the subject or outright ignoring the question are not good signs. Additional methods for gaining more information aside from directly asking could include:

- If you are concerned that someone is not who they say they are or if you suspect they are lying about their appearance, suggest a webcam. Pay careful attention to how they react. Webcams are cheap and easy to use so any excuses about the webcam being broken or not being able to afford one should be viewed as suspect. Ladies, most men will buy a webcam after 7 words from you: *I really want to show you something*. Then when they buy the webcam show them that beautiful smile!
- If they won't go for a webcam, ask for more photos. If they refuse or provide more photos but you are still suspicious, you may want to share your concerns with them. Let them know, in a kind way, that you want to be careful with online dating and some of their actions are causing you concern. If they are truly interested in you they will understand. If they still offer convincing excuses why they can't provide you with more information or if you are still suspicious, look into the remaining tools.

Searching the TinEye Image Database

[TinEye](#) is a service like Google but instead of searching keywords you search with images. Using this service is actually similar to the process you go through when uploading your photo to online dating services. The main point for using this service is when you suspect photos you are being given are just visual lies. For this example we'll assume that I've received an email from an attractive woman who is unbelievably interested in me. Conversations with her have been very strange and I'm starting to suspect the picture that she's provided is not really her. Here are the steps to search the TinEye database (I'll be using Firefox to describe some of these steps but all modern browsers will support these steps):

1. Browse for the photo on your computer then click search

OR

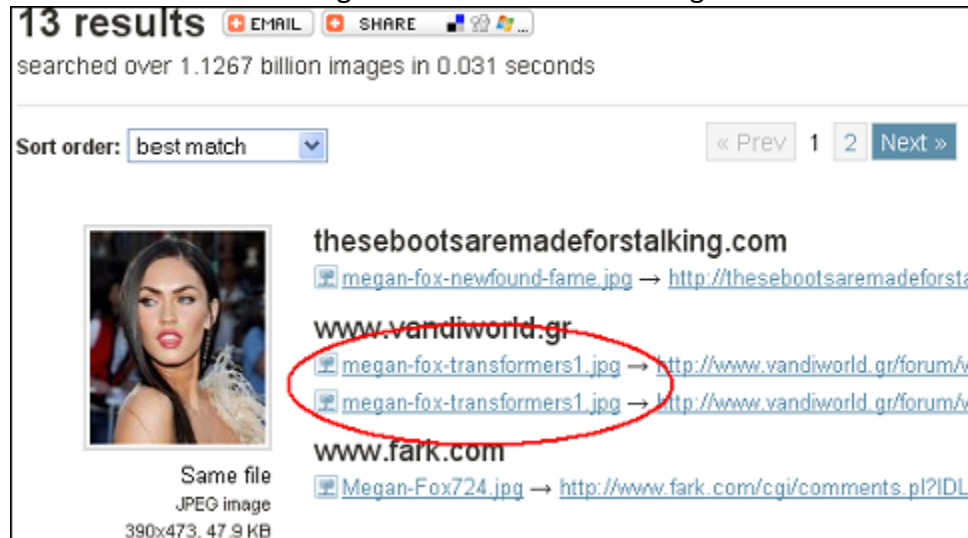
1. Right click the image you want to search and select “Copy Image Location”. You can do this directly from your online dating service.



2. Now browse to TinEye.com and right-click on the search box on the right and select paste. This will paste the location of the image into the search box. Now click search.



Well, look at that! It looks like Megan Fox has been contacting me all this time!



Obviously I'm being scammed here. Megan Fox is probably not the best example for this since she's recognizable but you get the idea. If someone is grabbing pictures of models off of the internet and using them as their own this process can help you identify that. TinEye may not return any results when you do your search but in many cases that's good. However, just because TinEye doesn't have the photo you're searching for in their database doesn't mean the photo is legit so exercise your best judgement!

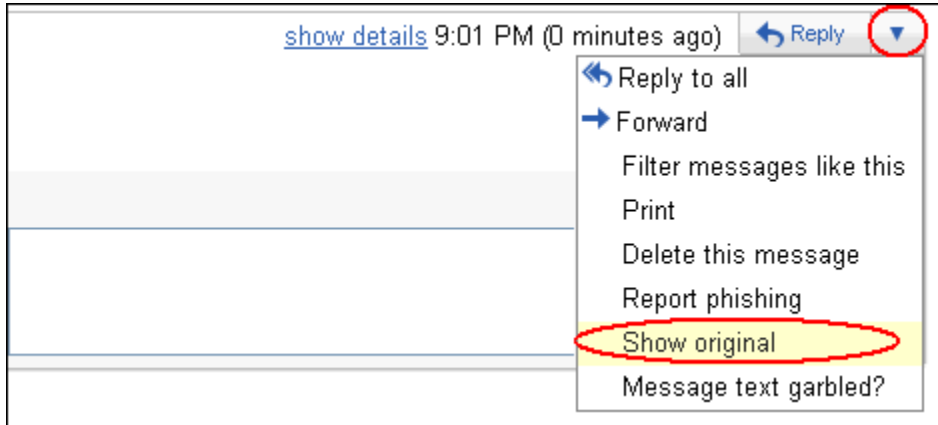
Locate Their Location by Email They Send You

To follow these steps you'll need a Gmail account but if you followed the first recommendation that shouldn't be a problem!

Once I had a woman I was dating tell me she was leaving town for Texas for a few weeks and I was 99% sure she was lying to me. I used these steps to discover that, indeed, she was still in town...spending her time with someone other than me! These steps can be used when you suspect someone is lying to you about where they are located. This can be used with both 419 scams and the married man scam (since the married men are likely to claim a different location when creating their account).

Please note that the results of this process are not an exact science and you can mess up if you use the wrong number. Also, this will display where the person's internet service provider is, not their address. For example, when I search myself using this process I'm shown an address about 10 miles away from my house. If I received my internet over satellite or if I sent emails using my phone on a 3G network, the IP address could show me in any number of places that I don't actually live in. Basically, use this process to help you research any suspicions you may have but don't start making accusations just because things don't look perfect when you use it. Hopefully this process will help you verify that they are telling the truth anyway!

1. Browse to your Gmail account and open an email from the person you are suspicious of.
2. On the far right there should be a down arrow. Click this and select “Show Original”.



3. This will display the full header text of the email. In this text, look for the last instance of “Received: from”. Next to this will be an IP address, a number separated by periods. Write down this number. In the example below our number is 24.131.241.24. Keep in mind there may be several “Received: from” sections and you want to select the last one (I’ve removed most of the text from my example below to save space, yours will contain much more information). Be aware that if you select the wrong numbers, you’ll get the wrong location. If you are unsure if you are selecting the correct number you may want to test this process by sending yourself an email from a different account.

```
To: bradlrr@gmail.com
Date: Thu, 15 Oct 2009 20:22:45 -0500
Subject: Test Email
Received: from [24.131.241.24] by ws1-7.us4.outblaze.com with
  gmail-smtp-inbox; Thu, 15 Oct 2009 20:22:45 -0500
X-Originating-Ip: 24.131.241.24
X-Originating-Server: ws1-7.us4.outblaze.com
X-Ob-Auth: bmiller@mail.com@mail.com
Message-Id: <20091016012245.0007E11581F@ws1-7.us4.outblaze.com>
```

4. Browse to whatismyip.com and enter the IP address in the IP box. So in this case I would enter 24.131.241.24. The results would then show where that IP address is located. In this case, it shows Pittsburgh which is correct!

IP Address	Host Name	
24.131.241.24	c-24-131-241-24.hsd1.pa.cor	
City	Region/State	Postal Code
PITTSBURGH	PENNSYLVANIA	-
Country Name	Country Code	Time Zone
UNITED STATES	US	-04:00
ISP	Latitude	Longitude
COMMUNICATIONS HOLDINGS INC	40.4444	-79.9791
Domain Name	Net Speed	IP Decimal

Get a Background Check Run on Them

I really do think this type of activity is excessive but there is one case where I could see it being used. If you're about to make some huge commitment, like buying plane tickets to visit them or give them a large sum of money (please don't do this!) then running a background check first could actually save you a lot of money and heartache. Aside from being an offensive thing to do to someone, background checks also cost money. Still, if you're spending \$20 (or whatever it is) and end up saving \$700 it would be worth it. Intelius is a popular choice for background checks and they have contacted me a few times in the past when I've discussed online dating safety.

As long as people are using online dating, there will be other people looking to take advantage of them. Knowledge of these scams will help you protect yourself but the bad guys are always looking for new ways to trick people. If you feel like something strange is going on but it doesn't fall into a scam category listed here, I would recommend the following:

- Listen to your gut! If something feels wrong, it probably is. I would recommend ending any relationship where you don't feel safe or you feel like you're being lied to. There are many, many people using online dating services and your time would be better spent talking to someone you can trust.
- If you're not ready to end a relationship just because things don't feel right at the very least *take things extremely slow*. Exercise extra caution and patience. Time may reveal why your gut was telling you something wasn't right.

General Online Dating Questions and Thoughts

The next few sections are popular articles I've pulled from my website that cover more specific areas of online dating which I felt would be helpful to include here.

Should I Lose Weight Before Dating Online?

Some people think about dating online but put it off because they want to improve something about themselves before they start. I don't have any statistics but I think it's safe to assume the number one reason for this is to attempt to lose weight. Do I believe this is a good idea? Should a person lose weight before subjecting themselves to online dating?

In my opinion, the answer is no (with one small exception). Why is waiting a mistake?

- First, going on a diet is hard work and sometimes the only thing that keeps us going is whatever motivates us. I believe being a member of an online dating community is far more motivating than looking from the outside in. It's a constant reminder that there are opportunities out there.
- Second, you might actually find someone who likes you regardless of your weight. You can't expect this to happen every day but it still *does* happen. Some sites even cater to those who are overweight and those who don't mind dating someone who is.
- Third, the more you date the more comfortable you'll become on your first dates. This is more important than you might think. If you're not comfortable, it can send unintended messages.

The one exception is based on a question: how well do you handle rejection? Because you're going to have to deal with it. Even if you were thin as a rail you would have to deal with it. For those people out there who are hyper-sensitive to rejection, and especially those who are this way because of their weight, you may want to lose the weight before dating. One of the worst feelings with internet dating is not being contacted by anyone for an extended period of time. If you think this will depress you and only drive you away from dating, then better to not put yourself in that situation. You're going to have to accept that online dating is often difficult and rejection is a real part of it.

As a side note, I did take my own advice when dating online. When I first started online dating:

- I was extremely thin (135 pounds at six feet tall). While women are more forgiving than men when it comes to looks, there are plenty of women who find this look unattractive to the point that they wouldn't date me (I had one woman explicitly state this – ouch). Many women would prefer to date a man who is overweight than underweight so I am familiar with the idea of being rejected based on the frame of my body.

- I had braces and looked like I was 17 even though I was 25. This was a bigger problem than it might seem. When you want to date women your age but you look like you're still in high school, the women are understandably hesitant.
- I was pasty white.

I suppose I was more “not” than “hot” and the number of women contacting me (or, more correctly, not contacting me) showed that. However, I wanted to give myself every opportunity to meet someone, so I started dating immediately. Did I have a lot of success in the beginning? No. Did I stick with it? Absolutely. I took weight gainer, got the braces off about half-way through my online dating life, and worked on getting a tanner complexion. As I improved these areas, my online dating success improved as well.

It's worth mentioning that my looks weren't the only thing improving: my online dating skills were as well. Had I waited to start dating until I was happy with my looks, I still would have been lost when it came to dating online. By dating actively, even though I wasn't thrilled with my looks, I was giving myself both opportunity and experience. I believe that this approach was a big part of what led me to meet my wife.

I understand the desire to be your absolute best when dating online but the truth is, none of us are truly satisfied with how we look. If you're not careful, you'll always be finding a new reason to not put yourself out there.

Is eHarmony Worth the Price?

Note: pricing information here is out-of-date but other thoughts remain relevant.

This is a common question and could be applied to any dating service really. However, because eHarmony expensive, even compared to other online dating sites, I'll use them as an example. My opinion is that as long as you are getting a reasonable number of matches, eHarmony is worth the price. I think too many people look at the price tag of eHarmony as money they don't have to spend. Many wrongly believe that the other ways they are meeting people are costing them no money. I think this is unfortunate as these people will continue to pursue previously unsuccessful methods of meeting people while for a relatively small price tag they could be meeting the person who is right now waiting for them online.

The following chart shows very basic information on common ways to try to meet singles:

How People Meet and Costs Meeting This Way			
Method	Est. Cost per Week	Odds of Getting a Date	Odds You'll Match Well
Staying at Home	\$0	None to Low	n/a
Going to the bar once a week	\$10*	Moderately good, depending on personality	Not that great but occasionally people get lucky
Church or Temple or Mosque	\$0	Moderately good but lowers the longer you have been attending (unless frequently gaining new membership)	Good odds considering you'll already share some core beliefs
Through Friends	\$0	Good	Low**
Meetup.com Singles Group	\$10	Moderate to very good	Fairly good if you're selective
eHarmony	\$9.98***	Very good odds given that's the focus	Very good odds

* Assuming you are very frugal with your money

** If your friends are like mine, anyway

*** Assuming you are using the 3 month plan which is a total of \$119.85

You Might Be Spending More and Getting Less

I think I'm being very fair in my chart above. Whenever I go out with friends to a bar, I can't remember a time where I spent as little as \$10. Still, to try and be fair I'm assuming my readers are able to spend this small of an amount. Still, even if you were able to spend as small an amount as eHarmony would cost you, what about how well you get along with someone? At a bar, you're gambling with any relationship you'll find. Not only that, while at eHarmony you can know who is looking for a serious relationship, at the bar it won't be nearly so clear.

You might be saying, "But what about other places aside from the bar? Having my friends set me up is free!" That's true, it is free to have your friends match you up with someone but most of the time that doesn't seem to work out all that well. Not only that, your friends are only going to know so many single people they can match you up with. They'll eventually run out!

How Much Time Are You Getting Out of Your Method to Meet People?

Also, consider this: if you go to the bar to meet people, or church or even a meetup group, how many hours a week are you able to actively try to find a relationship? Three hours? Four? At eHarmony you'll be able to be much more active in your attempts to meet people. If you live in a well-populated area, you may have the opportunity to speak to new people every day not just a few hours one day a week. Now you could argue that you could go to the bar or a singles group more often than once a week but now the original argument that eHarmony is too expensive has been shot down! You're spending more than you would at eHarmony if you go out more than once unless someone is buying the drinks for you!

Reasons eHarmony is a Poor Choice for Some

Still, eHarmony won't work for everyone. This service will not be a good choice if you live in a low population area. I had this happen to me when I lived in the country and after a month or two I just wasn't getting enough matches any longer. This is when I tried Match.com and the ability to contact whoever I wanted worked much better in my case. Again, this option was still cheaper than going to the bar and was providing me with more opportunity to meet other singles.

Overall, eHarmony is actually a great choice for meeting singles and when you break the numbers down, the price is very competitive with the "normal" methods used to meet people. I recommend that anyone who is on the fence give it a try. You only live once and it's painful for me to even consider what my life would be like right now if I hadn't turned to online dating.

OKCupid Dating Guide

I've been bothered lately by Plenty of Fish. I don't mind that the site has been successful but I do hate when I talk to someone and they say, "Yeah, I tried online dating at Plenty of Fish. I guess internet dating just isn't for me. The problems were [insert a list of issues here]". Here's

the thing: in my opinion Plenty of Fish is a far better example of successful internet marketing than it is of online dating. If I knew someone looking to make money on the internet, I imagine Plenty of Fish would come up in our conversation. However, if someone were looking for finding love online this site would not be a part of the conversation, not from my end anyway. I believe that the motivation of Plenty of Fish becomes very clear after spending a few minutes on the site (that motivation is not providing its users with a good chance of finding love, by the way).

So if this service isn't good, what free dating service is? If you've read the title of this post you already know where I'm going. As you'll see, I really like OKCupid. Why? To be honest, I didn't even look at the service seriously until a few months ago. Regrettably, when people would ask me about a free dating site I would recommend Plenty of Fish because it was the only one I knew of. I also assumed all the free services would basically be the same and since Plenty of Fish had the most members, I thought I was giving good advice. After looking into OKCupid because of their repeated release of dating statistics, I realized not all free dating services are the same (not even close).

So what makes OKCupid so great? When using OKCupid I feel that their goal really is to help singles meet each other (as opposed to the goal of getting advertisements in your face). The site is well-designed and has many excellent features that even the pay sites don't have. Here are some of the features I love:

- The fact that you determine what is important to you within the matching system is brilliant. Instead of a predefined list of questions to answer to define your personality, you answer as few or as many from a list of thousands and you determine how important each of those questions are in regards to providing you with matches.
- The site creates a community of singles that are looking to date but are also having fun (when using the site, see the Journals section for examples of this).
- They actually give you an indication of how often people respond to emails. This is brilliant. So many times when I was dating online I would become depressed when I didn't receive as many responses as I thought I should. I now believe an absence of responses is just another part of online dating and this feature helps prove that.
- When viewing a profile, you will be shown similar matches but with an explanation on how they differ from the current profile. Some examples include things like "more compassionate", "more selfish", "less interested in sex" and so on.
- The Tests help lighten the mood and encourage people to open up. They're fun too.
- Interaction is encouraged. You can even buy a monthly subscription for other people. I'm not sure why one would want to do this but when even the subscription page includes interaction with other people, it's hard to deny their commitment to interaction.
- You can save notes about other people. This would have been a wonderful feature for me when I was dating many women simultaneously. Fortunately, I never had one of

those embarrassing moments where I confused one woman for another but I was always paranoid I would.

- You can link your OKCupid account with your Facebook account.

There are a few downsides to the site:

- They don't have as many members as other services (Plenty of Fish has more). This doesn't matter much in my opinion. You reach a point where enough is enough. The fact that a service has 5 million members versus another with 10 million really doesn't matter that much.
- The service is only free up to a point. There are limits on the number of emails you can have in your inbox and some of the features, such as giving other users prizes, are limited to paid accounts. You'll also see advertisements unless you pay for the service. The good side is the monthly service fee is \$10 which is a third the price of some monthly fees, and one-sixth the price of some of the more expensive sites.

Using OKCupid – Four Simple Steps

Signing up for and using OKCupid is a painless process. If you've been using one of the other free sites or if you're just looking to give online dating a try, take the following steps. Each of these steps will be described in greater detail below.

1. Fill in your profile which is straightforward. Be sure to include photos. This is one of the most important things you can do to improve your success.
2. Once you have your profile created, it's time to start answering questions. The more the better!
3. After answering some questions you could now take some tests. These are more fun than anything else and not required by any means.
4. Start contacting people!

More Details on Using OKCupid

Creating Your Profile

The profile questions are fairly standard. Some stand out such as "You should message me if". A few profiles answered this question in such a way that would have affected my decision to contact them (were I single, obviously). Other sections are unique such as "I am good at" and "The six things I could never do without". The heading for the profiles is also a nice change of pace from other dating sites. Instead of creating your own heading they have you enter three words to describe yourself. This removes some of the pressure of trying to have a heading that stands out (which I think is difficult to do sometimes). Again, include a photo if you're serious about meeting people!

Answering Some OKCupid Questions

OKCupid's matching system is unique and in my opinion quite good. Where services like eHarmony and Chemistry.com have pre-defined personality questions they use to decide who to match you with, at OKCupid you can choose which questions to answer and how much they should matter when being matched to others. The basic process is as follows:

1. You're presented with a question that you will answer via multiple choice answers.
2. You then answer the same question as you would want an ideal match to answer the question.
3. Finally, you rank how important it is to you that your matches meet your requirements for them. Your choices here range from irrelevant (how they answer won't affect your matching score) to mandatory.

As you answer more questions, you will be provided with a score for your highest possible match. I answered questions until I got to the high 90s. Obviously the more questions you answer the better your matches will be. After answering 40 questions I had many women ranking in the high 90 percentages for matching me but I think I still needed to answer more questions after viewing a few of these profiles. Also, you should answer the questions honestly. Don't mark everything as irrelevant just because you want to be as inclusive as possible. There are a ton of people using the service and you'll do yourself a favor if you're actually finding the people with the traits you want. After you fill in a significant number of questions you can do a Match Search and see who you're matching well with.

You will also notice that some people will have an Enemy score for you. I didn't see any clear definition on what raises the Enemy score but I have a pretty good guess. When you mark a Question answer as being mandatory but they answer the question differently, your enemy score will go up. It may only go up when you both mark the question mandatory but with different answers. I believe this also will be the case, to a lesser degree, when your potential match marks a particular answer to a question as having high importance but you answer differently. When you see someone with a high Enemy score this means that there will definitely be conflict between the two of you on some areas that you both consider important. For example, if you want children and mark this as mandatory but they don't want children and also mark that as mandatory, you're enemy score will go up. As you can see, having a higher Enemy score doesn't mean you wouldn't get along but it could mean big problems once you're in a relationship together.

Here are some sample questions I answered:

- How important is honesty?
- What has been your primary motivation in life to this point?
- To you, which adjective best describes hopeless, unrequited love?
- Do you generally smile at little kids who cross your path?

- If you were to die, would whoever goes through your personal belongings be shocked by what they find?
- Would you date someone if you knew they were a current drug user?

There are over 3,000 questions to answer. If you can answer a hundred honestly I think you'll find some very strong matches. How you answer the questions defines your "Personality Traits" which are another fun feature that also reveal more about you and your matches. The more questions you answer, the more personality traits you'll be assigned.

OKCupid Tests

From what I can see, Tests don't help finding a match much. OKCupid is more than just a dating site, it's something of a social community. You'll find people who love taking these tests and many of these tests can reveal things about them (even if that might be how obsessed they are with a particular movie). Taking tests isn't very important to getting better matches but they can help others know more about you once they're viewing your profile.

Contacting Someone

Again, this is fairly standard. As I mentioned above, one feature I love is that as you start to write a message you're shown the frequency at which the person replies to emails. This is really helpful in my opinion. The site also has winks which I've discussed above.

Final Thoughts

I think that pay sites will always have an advantage in the clients that use them. I believe that at a strictly pay site you will find people far more serious about a relationship. Sites like eHarmony a much higher percentage of like-minded individuals committed to finding a relationship. As great as OKCupid is, the women there still get bombarded with "Want sex wit you?" emails where men seemed convinced that the inability to use the English language and the ability to get laid are tightly linked.

Women can then get desensitized to being contacted and just ignore communication, which in turn hurts the men who are serious about relationships. In some ways, a free service can never fully get away from the fact that many of its members will not take things seriously and will adversely affect other members. Still, for the things which are in OKCupid's control, I think they do a fantastic job.

Moving Forward

I hope you have found this guide helpful. My intention has always been to help others get through those often elusive first online dates.

While I felt like an expert at "getting" dates near the end of my internet dating experience, I never felt like an expert once I was actually on the date. Many people are quick to label

themselves “dating experts” but I’m not sure I buy into that. I don’t think there are dating experts because, to me, dating is about understanding other people more than it is about understanding dating.

Why do I mention this? Because as you continue on your journey you are likely to read other dating advice. I think that’s a good idea. However, many “experts” offer advice as if it is 100% correct. Exercise caution when receiving advice like this in any form. I don’t believe there is any right advice for every situation. Be open but always be willing to throw out advice regardless of who it’s from when your gut tells you otherwise. If dating were so black-and-white someone would have figured it out long before now!

Guide Recap

Often after reading any guide, I’m overwhelmed if the document was of any significant length. For those out there who are like me, check out [Appendix C](#) which summarizes most of this guide into a printable checklist. Here’s a list to go along with that:

- Listen to your gut before you listen to anyone else’s advice on any kind of dating. Most of us who offer advice are just better at hiding our confusion.
- Be yourself! It’s a cliché but important – anything else is a lie to yourself and your dates.
- Be sure to try more than one service if the first one doesn’t work out. There are enough differences to warrant another try.
- Contact and date as many people as you possibly can. In my opinion, this is the **most important** advice I have to offer.
- Try to be clear in your profile and as brief as you can be while still providing substance. Include a photo. Many people won’t even open a profile without one.
- Guys: My experience shows that winks from you only slow things down.
- Your first email/contact with someone should be short and concise. It should serve as bait to view your profile.
- Don’t be hard on yourself over a small number of responses. There is a lot more going on than you think.
- Ask for that first date sooner rather than later and establish solid parameters around how long you will be meeting just in case things get interesting/scary.
- Do not look for reasons for failed dates. They are what they are. It’s better to think about your next date than dwell on your last.
- Plan things in such a way that your comfort level is high! You want to represent yourself as well as possible, especially early on.

Finally, picking up a book on dating in general is a great idea. I gained insight from everything I read (even the books I wasn’t thrilled with).

I Hope You Found the Guide Helpful!

By now I hope you have come to the realization that this guide *really is 100% free*. I know it's hard to believe. I hate when someone tries to trick me into buying something by giving me part of it for free or when they pull some type of bait-and-switch tactic, and I don't blame you if you expected that to happen here. Hopefully it is clear now that I really do want to help people.

If you found this guide helpful, feel free to tell a friend about it.

Best of luck and I hope you find that special someone soon!

Appendix A: Online Dating Services

There are hundreds of online dating services out there. Below I've documented those sites I've interacted with, although at the time of this update many of these websites may no longer exist. Please note that the statistics shown below were found in late 2009.

Site	Discussion
eHarmony	The biggest of all online dating services, eHarmony provides their users with personality matching to try to find just the right person. I used eHarmony and liked it but eventually found the fact that I had to wait for new matches frustrating. I lived in a low population area and my matches kept getting further and further away. Still, those who have had success with eHarmony swear by it. The personality test is interesting too (although very time consuming).
Match.com	I think Match.com is a great site. They have all the standard features you would expect for an online dating service along with some more that most other sites are missing (the phone calling feature is the first that comes to mind). I think of Match.com as the measure for what an online dating service should provide (yes, even though eHarmony is bigger). I suppose I'm a little partial since I met my wife using this service.
Chemistry.com	Chemistry.com is a lot like eHarmony but less strict. By strict, I am referring to the fact that eHarmony will reject people (i.e., won't let them use the service) if they feel they can't match them. There are several reasons eHarmony will reject people and Chemistry has tried to address that by offering a matching online dating service that is more inclusive.
Lavalife	In many ways, Lavalife provides exactly what you would expect from a dating service. They do provide interesting features like online speed dating and online parties. The site is also unique in that it has three sections: dating, relationship and intimate. By default your profile will show in all three sections so if you're not interested in sleeping around be sure to remove yourself from the intimate section.
Matchmaker	Matchmaker.com is the longest running dating service on the internet (it was created in 1996). This service is intended for a more mature audience of 35+ serious singles focused on finding long-term relationships and those who are marriage minded. The service matches similar to eHarmony and Chemistry.
Dating Direct	Dating Direct is one of the largest (the largest?) dating sites for the U.K. The service is also popular in Europe. If you're in the U.S. I believe you can still use the service but the number of members is rather limited here. I get a

	surprising amount of traffic from the U.K. so I would be remiss to leave them out of this list!
Friends Reunited Dating	This is another United Kingdom based dating site. The site claims that 50% of adults who use the internet use Friends Reunited. I'm assuming they mean 50% of adults in the United Kingdom? Regardless, Friends Reunited Dating is a sister site for Friends Reunited. One note though: the service is not intended for finding old friends and then dating them. It's intended for meeting new people. It just happens to be run by the same people who run a service for finding old friends.
Parship	Think eHarmony but for the United Kingdom. The site claims to be #1 for those looking for serious relationships. One interesting thing about the service is that they offer live over-the-phone dating advice to their members for free. I know Match.com will offer profile advice but that will cost you \$30. It is interesting to see a dating site that provides free advice along with their service.
Spark.com	Spark.com (formerly Date.ca) is one of Canada's premier online dating sites. They have members from all walks of life, backgrounds, professions and ages from all across Canada. <i>Also: Just about every dating site in the US has a Canadian version.</i>
SugarDaddie	This site is for beautiful women and rich men. It can seem shallow but if that's your thing more power to you!
Silver Singles	Apparently the most growth in online dating occurring today is for those over the age of 40. Silver Singles aims to bring these singles together.
BBW Personals	This service is designed for BBW and BHM (and their admirers) and provides the standard features you would expect: profiles, chat rooms, instant messaging, message boards and so on. The site says that they create a community for creating relationships ranging from friendship to marriage and everything in between.
Catholic Match	CatholicMatch allows those of the Catholic faith to expand their social circle and meet other singles just like themselves. As a member, you'll be welcomed into a community with others that share your faith and with whom you can express your views and share your thoughts about relationships, religion and other topics relevant to single Catholics.
JDate	JDate is the premier Jewish online dating community. JDate has been around for a long time (at least a decade) and has been building the Jewish single community online during this time. Knowing very little of the Jewish culture, it was interesting for me to learn that there is still a strong traditional Jewish matchmaking process happening today. JDate offers itself as an alternative

	to this traditional matchmaking.
Christian Cafe	Christian Cafe is one of the top online dating services for Christian singles. One really nice thing about this site is that they offer a 10-day free trial. The free trial includes emailing other members and chatting. This is nice considering most dating sites will only allow you to create your profile and browse other profiles for free. Obviously it only lasts 10 days but that's still plenty of time to decide if the service is right for you.

Appendix B: 2013 Online Dating Service Pricing Overview

Below is a chart listing online dating site prices in 2013. Obviously your reading this at some point long, long after 2013. I almost removed this from my guide as I don't plan to update the values, but decided it might still be interesting. Plus, even though the numbers are out of date, it gives you a feel for one service versus another and how pricing has changed over time.

Service	1 Month	3 Months (per mo.)	6 Months (per mo.)	12 Months (per mo.)
OKCupid	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
eHarmony	\$59.95	\$39.95	\$29.95	\$19.95
Match.com	\$34.99	\$19.99	\$16.99	n/a
Lavalife	\$34.99	\$19.99	n/a	n/a
Chemistry	\$44.95	\$33.32	\$26.65	n/a
Spark.com	\$24.99	\$13.33	\$9.99	n/a
Matchmaker	\$34.95	\$23.32	\$16.66	11.66
Catholic Match	\$24.95	\$14.98	\$12.49	n/a
BlackSingles	\$14.99	\$8.99	\$6.99	n/a
ChristianCafe	\$34.95	\$16.65	\$13.33	\$9.16
JDate	\$36.99	\$23.99	\$19.99	n/a
BBW Personals	\$24.99	\$16.99	\$13.99	\$8.33
Prime Singles	\$19.99	\$12.99	\$9.99	n/a
Sugar Daddie	\$24.99	\$16.66	\$14.16	\$10.41
MatchAffinity	n/a	£29.00	£19.00	£14.00
Dating Direct	£29.00	£19.99	£25.98	n/a

Appendix C: 30-Point Online Dating Checklist

As You Begin	Comments
1. Mentally Prepare Yourself for Real Work	
2. Try the Free Version of Several Sites	
3. Be Open to Dating Many People at Once	
Your Dating Profile	
4. Create a Profile that is Both Concise and Informative	
5. Avoid Excessive <i>Attempts</i> to Be Funny	
6. Stay Positive	
7. Include a Photo in Your Dating Profile	
8. Do Not “Beg” for Contact	
9. Your Profile Heading – Don’t Worry About It	
10. You Need to Be Honest	
11. Check Your Spelling	
12. Get a Profile Review	
Communicating	
13. Keep Your First Email Short	
14. Use Winking Appropriately	
15. Respond to Winks Appropriately	
16. Accept that Responses Will, at Times, Be Lacking	
17. Ask for the First Date Sooner Rather than Later	
18. Seriously, Meeting Matters	
The First Date	
19. Keep Your Safety in Mind	
20. Review Your Date’s Profile Shortly Before Your Date	
21. Schedule Your First Date to Be Short	
22. Extend Your Good Dates	
23. You Need to Be Comfortable	
24. Prepare Your First Date Conversations Ahead of Time	
25. Do Not Insist on Sticking with a Script	
Continuing to Date Online	
26. Be Aware of Online Dating Scams	
27. Share Your Online Dating Experiences with Friends	
28. Read Additional Advice	
29. Be Wary of Advice Too Good to Be True	
30. Commit to Your Dating Life	

Again, good luck out there and stay persistent!