



The Professional Matchmaker's Guide to Dating (*Issue 1*)



www.LoveAndMatchmaking.com

How to Start and Keep a Conversation in Online Dating

Starting a conversation in online dating doesn't require a perfect line. What matters more is whether the other person feels like replying is easy and enjoyable.

The best messages are simple:

- They show you actually noticed something
- They invite a response without pressure
- They feel like a real person wrote them

Start With Something Specific (Not Generic)

“Hey” isn’t wrong — it’s just forgettable.

A small upgrade is referencing something real from their profile, then asking a light question.

Real-world examples:

- “That photo in Rome is great — what was the best part of that trip?”
- “You mentioned you’re into jazz — do you have a go-to album?”
- “Your dog looks like a character. What’s their name?”

Those messages work because they’re easy to answer and they show attention.

Keep the Rhythm Comfortable

Here's the honest truth: people aren't looking for a texting "robot". They're looking for someone who feels normal to talk to. Mix that with curiosity about someone new and you have a strong connection opportunity and not one that's fake, one that's real. You find the topics that are mutual. As you read their profile, you see things that you have in common (the things that make you interested in them beyond looks) and right there is a menu of conversational topics that are totally safe and of interest to you both. Call them openers but they're still interesting to you both.

If someone sends something thoughtful and you reply two days later with "lol," that creates distance. If you send three messages in a row before they reply, that can create pressure.

Don't think that you need to find the "Goldy Locks" zone, or the "just right" amount. Change your perspective totally. The real goal is not to "time" your replies perfectly. It's to keep the back-and-forth feeling balanced. When you're comfortable and at ease and interested in the topic that the other is, then you're golden. That's what sparks that light in the eyes and the ease of conversation, and jokes...and laughter and mutual appreciation are really strong builders of attraction!

It's even backed up by science. Research supports the idea that people respond well to shared interests and the pace of engagement.

"People tend to like others who express a similar level of liking and engagement."
— **Journal of Personality and Social Psychology**

Source: <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1968-09328-001>

OK, here is the big "give away"... the magic reveal of the Magician's trick! You don't need to fake anything. Just pay attention to the flow and keep it mutual.

Curiosity Is "Date-Hacking" (In a Good Way)

Most people try to be *interesting*. The better move is to be interested!

Let's start the Date-Hacking... Hack #1...A simple follow-up question makes conversations feel natural and makes people feel seen, heard, and appreciated.

Harvard U. research found that asking more questions — especially follow-up questions — increases likability.

“People who ask more questions, particularly follow-up questions, are better liked by their conversation partners.” — Harvard Business School Working Knowledge

Source:

<https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/asking-questions-can-get-you-a-better-job-or-a-second-date>

Real-world examples:

- “That’s cool — what got you into it?”
- “What inspired you to choose that career?”
- “That sounds like a good potential. What’s something you’re looking forward to if you get it?”

It's simple, but it's powerful. And it's beneficial to both of you in a real way. This is the key to it all; be real and focus on the things that you have in common while learning the things you don't and seeing how you handle those things you don't. Trust builds at its own pace so you just keep telling yourself, like Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius who had a page follow him and whisper in his ear "you are just a Man, Sir, you are just a Man"; I can feel relief in knowing that we are just ourselves and we're looking for another who is just their-self, and I'm looking for the one who is looking

for me!

Don't Make Online Dating Harder Than It Already Is

Online dating can feel mentally tiring (exhausting!) because there are so many options and so many micro-decisions (and tons of doubts, questions and worries).

The easiest way to stand out is to make it feel easier, not harder.

The APA has covered the idea that too much choice can make decisions more difficult and less satisfying.

“Too much choice can actually lead people to take less positive risks... and to use simplifying strategies.” — American Psychological Association (Monitor on Psychology)

Source: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun04/toomany>

So keep messages light, easy, and human. When messaging feels like work, people check out. And, really, are you being yourself? The same self that they're gonna eventually get to know? That's why being yourself upfront will lead to a much better chance of success and a much clearer and quicker idea of whether or not you're a good match (which is great for you to know and it may just end up a fun date or an amazing evening!). But, of course, not spilling everything about your life right away (taking the time building your confidence in the them), and stay at a cool, easy pace that is comfortably set by the conversation and interest itself. When you're focus is on the conversation and the fun things about it, the click starts spinning and time flies. Enjoy your date.

A Simple “Do / Don’t” That Helps Immediately

- **Reference something specific**

Instead of a vague opener, mention something real you noticed.

Example:

“You mentioned you’re into hiking — any favorite spots lately?”

It feels casual. It shows attention. It doesn’t feel rehearsed.

- **Ask one light question**

Keep it simple and easy to answer.

Example:

“That concert photo looked fun — was it as good as it looked?”

One question. Easy reply. Natural flow.

- **Keep it short and warm**

You don’t need a paragraph.

Example:

“That made me smile. You seem easy to talk to.”

It’s friendly. It’s human. It leaves room.

- **Follow their lead on tone**

If they’re light, stay light. If they’re thoughtful, slow it down.

Example:

If they say: “I’m a big reader.”

You say: “Same here — anything you’ve read lately that stuck with you?”

Not dramatic. Just in sync.

Avoid This

- **Sending a generic opener**

Not great:

“Hey.”

Better:

“Your dog looks like a character — what’s their name?”

Small effort. Big difference.

- **Writing a paragraph right away**

Not great:

“So I’m originally from Chicago but moved for work and I travel a lot and I...”

Better:

“I’ve been bouncing between cities for work lately — where are you based?”

Short. Conversational. Easy to respond to.

- **Turning it into an interview**

Not great:

“What do you do? Where are you from? What are you looking for?”

Better:

“What’s something you’ve been enjoying lately?”

It opens the door without grilling someone.

- **Trying to be overly impressive**

Not great:

“I run three companies and just got back from Monaco.”

Better:

“Work keeps me busy, but I try to make time for good food and good company.”

Let them discover you. You don’t need to announce it.

This version feels like someone who:

1. **Has nothing to prove**

2. **Isn't overthinking**
3. **Is comfortable**
4. **Is interested**

That's EXACTLY the energy you want!

Frequently Asked Questions

- **What should I say first?**
Start with something real from their profile. One small observation and one easy question is enough.
- **Should I ask a question in the first message?**
Yes — but just one. Make it easy to answer, not something that requires a paragraph.
- **How long should we message before meeting?**
Long enough to feel comfortable. Short enough that you're not building a whole relationship over text.
- **Is humor important?**
Light humor is great. Just don't force it. Warm beats witty every time.
- **What if they give short replies?**
Mirror the effort. If it stays short, that's information — not something you need to fix.
- **How do I keep the conversation going?**
Stay curious about what they share. Follow their thread instead of jumping to a new topic.
- **Is it okay to move toward a date quickly?**
If the energy feels mutual, yes. Clarity is more attractive than hovering.
- **Should I double text?**
If it's to add something natural, fine. If it's to manage anxiety, pause.
- **What if I'm not sure they're interested?**
Keep your tone steady and direct. If interest is there, it will show up.

- **How do I know if I'm overthinking it?**

If you're rewriting messages three times, you probably are. Send the kind, clear version and move on.

And remember this... the chances are.. .they're doing most, all or more of the things you're doing and thinking the things you're thinking and feeling the anxieties and doubts you are. So, help you help them help you by just being relaxed, interested, and enjoy it!

Closing Thought

You don't need to be perfect. You just need to be easy to talk to, interested, and engage with them. Talk about the things that interest you bot, get to know them, ask questions and always remember, the more relaxed you are, the more they are. This goes both ways... when you see them relax, you can even more.

When your messages feel warm, balanced, and curious, you'll stand out naturally — and you'll attract people who actually want to engage.

Who Wrote This at Love & Matchmaking

“Globally renowned for their work on Bravo TV’s “Millionaire Matchmaker,” the

dynamic matchmaking duo of Destin Pfaff and Rachel Federoff have over 20 years of combined experience helping singles find love, teaching people how to navigate online dating, and advising couples through rocky patches of their relationships.

With a success rate of 95%, Love and Matchmaking is one of the nation's foremost matchmaking services. The company offers its services nationwide to clients who are seeking personal attention and hand-selected matches”.

(Source: DatingAdvice.com)

That experience informs an approach centered on discernment, discretion, and realistic relationship outcomes rather than volume-driven matching.

Photos and First Impressions in Dating: What Actually Makes Someone Lean In

Let's start with something real:

A dating profile photo isn't just a picture.

It's the *first impression* before there are any words.

And science tells us first impressions form fast — really fast.

First Impressions Happen Almost Instantly

Research in social psychology shows that people make judgments about others in a fraction of a second — often before they consciously think about it.

**“First impressions of faces can be formed within 100 milliseconds.” —
Psychological Science (Princeton research)**

Source:

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/how-many-seconds-to-a-first-impression>

That's the blink of an eye.

And in online dating, that blink often decides whether someone clicks “like,” “match,” or keeps scrolling.

Photos Are Often the First Thing People See

In online profiles, photos tend to attract attention *before* text does — and they influence how the entire profile is perceived.

One academic study found that pictures are significantly more likely to attract initial attention, and more attractive pictures receive more attention across the board.

Eye tracking results show pictures grab attention before text and influence impression formation significantly. — T. van der Zanden et al. (2022)

Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0093650221995316>

That means your photo is **not just one element** of your profile — it **sets the tone**.

What Makes a Photo Feel Good to Others

Research on online dating profile photos consistently suggests that:

- People are more likely to click on profiles with natural expressions and approachable poses.
- Positive emotions in a photo (like smiling) are linked to positive impressions of personality.

Profiles with expressive, positive photos are more likely to be viewed favorably.

— Academic review of social media profile cues

Source: <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/revel/2025/07/10/profiles/>

In other words:

A friendly photo isn't just visually appealing — it signals warmth, confidence, and approachability.

Photos and Overall Impression

Earlier research on online dating found that photographs were the *strongest predictor* of how attractive a profile was judged overall — even more than bio text.

Photographs are key predictors of perceived attractiveness in online dating profiles. — University of California, Berkeley study

Source: <https://people.ischool.berkeley.edu/~hearst/papers/chi2008.pdf>

That means:

- A good photo boosts overall appeal
- A poorly chosen photo can *undercut* the rest of your efforts

In simple terms: your photos *matter more* than you might think — and they work with your text to create a complete picture.

Real-World Example: What Works

Here are photo traits that consistently generate positive responses:

- Clear lighting (faces visible)
- Natural expressions (real smile, relaxed posture)
- Eye contact with the camera
- Context that feels real (activities you enjoy)

And photo traits that tend to create hesitation:

- Blurry or dark images
- Sunglasses or obscured faces
- Group shots where it's not clear who you are
- Highly filtered or heavily edited pictures

Because *visual clarity* leads to *positive impressions*, showing your face clearly makes it easier for someone to feel comfortable initiating a conversation.

A Matchmaker's Perspective

When we review profiles professionally, we're thinking about:

- "Does this photo feel like someone you'd enjoy spending time with?"
- "Does the body language feel open and authentic?"
- "Does this image support the rest of the profile's personality?"

Photos aren't about perfection.

They're about *presence* — a sense of who you are.

And that presence starts the moment someone looks at your profile.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How many photos should I include?**

A small variety is better than one perfect shot — aim for 4–6 that show different facets of you.

- **Is a professional photo worth it?**

It can help if it still feels like you — too polished can sometimes feel distant.

- **Should I use candid shots?**

Yes — they often feel more relaxed and natural.

- **Are group photos okay?**

One is fine, but make sure the main image clearly features *you*.

- **Do photos really influence matches?**

Yes — research shows photos often drive initial attention and impressions before profile text.

- **Can a good bio compensate for a weak photo?**

Photos attract attention first. A strong bio helps keep that attention — but it doesn't replace the impression your pictures make.

Closing Thought

Your photos aren't just images — they are *first impressions in action*.

When they feel clear, warm, and authentic, they invite others to learn more about you. That's the start of attraction — and the start of conversation.

Designing a First Date That Actually Works

Great first dates don't need to be extravagant.

They need to be comfortable.

They need to feel easy.

And they need to give both people enough space to show up as themselves.

This page is about planning a date that feels natural, confident, and inviting — not high-pressure or performance-driven.

Short and Sweet Beats Long and Tiring

Long dinners, marathon plans, and intricate logistics often make first dates feel heavy. Science shows that decision fatigue — when a person has to make repeated choices over time — can make social situations feel exhausting rather than enjoyable.

“When people are faced with too many options, decision-making becomes harder and less satisfying.” — American Psychological Association (Monitor on Psychology)

Source: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2015/07-08/decision-making>

A well-designed first date:

- Has a clear beginning
- Has a planned midpoint
- Has a natural ending

- This keeps energy high without draining either person.
A good rule of thumb: **60–90 minutes**.

Pick a Setting That Supports Talking (Not Performing)

Not all date environments are equal.

Places that tend to help conversation include:

- Quiet coffee shops
- Casual wine bars
- Art galleries with seating
- Walkable parks with benches

- What most folks underestimate is how background noise and ambience shape comfort.

When it's too loud, too chaotic, or overly formal, people tend to withhold parts of themselves.

A Federal Communications Commission (FCC) public report on environment and communication shows that loud noise interferes with conversation processing.

“Excessive background noise reduces speech intelligibility and increases cognitive load during conversation.” — FCC Scientific Advisory Board

Source: <https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-347987A1.pdf>

Translated for dating:

If you can't talk comfortably, you can't connect easily.

Timing Matters More Than You Think

Early evening dates tend to land well because:

- They don't run so late that fatigue shows up
- They let conversation feel relaxed without urgency
- They feel natural for both work and weekend schedules

- Day dates work too for high-energy, activity-based outings (short hikes, museum strolls, casual brunch).
The key is that the timing fits *your energy* and doesn't leave either person worried about blocking off a whole evening before they're sure there's chemistry.

Have a Plan — But Let It Move

Confidence on a first date comes from *clarity*, not rigidity.

Instead of:

“Where do you want to go?”

Try:

“I enjoy [place/activity]. If that sounds good, we could try it Thursday afternoon.”

This offers:

- A direction
- A choice
- A sense of ease
- And it avoids the common “back-and-forth planning loop” that drains momentum before the date even happens.

Conversation Goals — Explore, Don’t Evaluate

On a first date, the goal isn’t to check boxes.

It’s to explore.

That means:

- Asking follow-ups that invite stories
- Touching on interests lightly
- Letting curiosity guide, not interrogation
- Harvard Business School research shows that people who ask genuine follow-up questions are typically seen as more likable.

“People who ask more follow-up questions are better liked by their conversation partners.” — Harvard Business School Working Knowledge

Source:

<https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/asking-questions-can-get-you-a-better-job-or-a-second-date>

That applies just as much to dates as it does to any shared conversation.

Real Examples That Work

Here are easy, real-life ways this plays out:

Instead of:

“So what do you do?”

Try:

“I saw you’re into books — what’s one that blew your mind recently?”

Instead of:

“We should do something sometime.”

Try:

“I’ve really enjoyed talking with you — would you be open to coffee or a hike this weekend?”

Clarity feels confident. Vagueness feels unsure.

A Matchmaker’s Perspective

Most people *think* a great date is a matter of chemistry.

But chemistry without structure often fizzles.

A good date gives room for:

- curiosity
- ease
- shared moments
- narrative flow

- And that's what makes someone *remember* the night.

Once clients understand this, their approach changes from hoping for magic to *creating the right conditions* for connection.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How long should a first date be?**

Aim for about 60–90 minutes. Enough to connect, not enough to get fatigued.

- **Is dinner too formal?**

Dinner can work — but it's often longer than needed. Something shorter and more casual usually feels easier.

- **Should I plan everything or collaborate?**

Have a suggestion ready, then let them help shape it.

- **What if they suggest somewhere loud?**

It's OK. Just be mindful that conversation will be harder, and that can influence comfort.

- **Is activity-based dating a good idea?**

Yes — if it feels natural and allows you to talk and move at the same time.

- **If the date goes well, when should I suggest a follow-up?**

When you end the date — be clear, simple, and positive.

What Happens on a Great First Date (And Why It Works)

Most great first dates don't feel electric.

They feel easy.

There's laughter.

There's curiosity.

There's just enough spark to want more.

What separates a “nice” date from a great one usually isn’t chemistry alone.

It's comfort!

First Impressions Happen Immediately

Before you've finished saying hello, impressions are forming.

Research from Princeton shows that people make judgments about trustworthiness and warmth extremely quickly.

“Impressions of trustworthiness can be formed within 100 milliseconds of seeing a face.” — Princeton University (Willis & Todorov)

Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022103106001634>

That doesn't mean you're stuck with a snap judgment.

It means the first few minutes matter — especially your energy.

Relaxed posture.

Natural eye contact.

Genuine smile.

Those are quiet signals of confidence.

Conversation That Flows Feels Better Than Conversation That Impresses

Strong first dates don't feel like interviews.

They feel like exploration.

Harvard research shows that asking follow-up questions increases likability.

“People who ask more follow-up questions are better liked by their conversation partners.” — Harvard Business School Working Knowledge

Source:

<https://www.library.hbs.edu/working-knowledge/asking-questions-can-get-you-a-better-job-or-a-second-date>

That means instead of moving through checklist questions, let the conversation build naturally.

Example:

Instead of:

“So what are you looking for long term?”

Try:

“What made you decide to start dating now?”

One feels evaluative.

The other feels curious.

Curiosity builds connection.

Great Dates Have Rhythm

A strong first date usually moves between:

- Light humor
- Personal stories
- Shared experiences
- A touch of future curiosity

It doesn't stay surface-level.

But it doesn't dive into intensity too early either.

It unfolds.

And when it unfolds naturally, people feel safe opening up a little more.

Comfort Is Attractive

Here's something people rarely say out loud:

We're drawn to people who make us feel calm.

When someone:

- Doesn't rush
- Doesn't overtalk
- Doesn't overcorrect awkward pauses

It signals steadiness.

And steadiness reads as confidence.

That doesn't mean you have to be perfect.

It means you don't need to panic when things are quiet.

Silence isn't failure.

It's breathing room.

Real-World Example

Two versions of the same moment:

Version A:

There's a pause.

Someone jumps in quickly with a random question to avoid silence.

Version B:

There's a pause.

Someone smiles and says, "I was just thinking about what you said earlier about traveling..."

Version B feels grounded.

Small moments shape big impressions.

The Ending Sets the Tone

Great first dates don't end ambiguously.

If you enjoyed it, say it.

"I had a really nice time tonight."

If you'd like to see them again:

"I'd love to do this again."

Clear. Simple. Adult.

Ambiguity creates doubt.

Clarity creates momentum.

A Matchmaker's Perspective

When first dates go sideways, it's rarely because someone isn't impressive.

It's usually because they're:

- Overthinking
- Trying to perform
- Protecting themselves too tightly

When clients learn to:

- Relax into the moment
- Stay curious
- Move with calm confidence

Everything changes.

Often dramatically.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **How do I know if a first date is going well?**

If conversation feels natural and time moves quickly, that's usually a strong sign.

- **What if there's an awkward silence?**

Smile, breathe, and pivot lightly. Silence is normal.

- **Should I talk about past relationships?**

Brief mentions are fine. Deep emotional unpacking can wait.

- **Is instant chemistry necessary?**

Not always. Comfort often comes first.

- **How do I avoid sounding like I'm interviewing someone?**

Follow their stories instead of moving to a new category.

- **When should I suggest a second date?**

If it felt good, clarity in the moment is usually appreciated.

Closing Thought

A great first date doesn't feel like an audition.

It feels like ease.

When someone leaves thinking,
“That felt comfortable. I’d do that again.”

That's when something real begins.

Closing the Date with Confidence (And Following Up Well)

The end of a date is where momentum either builds — or quietly disappears.

Most people focus on the beginning.

Some focus on what happens during.

But very few pay attention to how they close.

And that's often where confidence shows most clearly.

Say What You Actually Mean

If you enjoyed the date, say it.

“I had a really nice time tonight.”

It sounds simple, but many people avoid being clear because they’re trying to protect themselves.

Clear communication reduces uncertainty.

Research in communication science shows that ambiguity often creates more discomfort than directness.

**“Ambiguous messages can increase uncertainty and relational anxiety.” —
Journal of Social and Personal Relationships**

Source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0265407514525882>

Clarity feels mature.

And maturity is attractive.

Don't Manufacture Mystery

There's an old dating myth that says you should wait to follow up.

You don't need a stopwatch.

If you had a good time, sending a message that evening or the next day is normal.

Something like:

“I enjoyed tonight. I’m glad we did that.”

That doesn’t feel eager.

It feels grounded.

Playing hard to get rarely builds trust.

Consistency does.

Be Specific About Next Steps

Instead of:

“We should do this again sometime.”

Try:

“Would you be open to dinner next week?”

Specific plans create real momentum.

Vague plans create maybe.

And “maybe” is where good connections drift.

If It's Not a Fit, Close It Kindly

Not every date leads somewhere.

And that's fine.

What matters is how you handle it.

Instead of disappearing, consider something like:

“I really appreciated meeting you, but I don't think this is the right fit for me. I wish you the best.”

Research on social rejection suggests that unclear endings are often harder to process than clear ones.

“Uncertainty following rejection can intensify distress compared to clear rejection.” — American Psychological Association (rejection research summary)
Source: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/01/rejection>

Clarity can feel uncomfortable — but it's respectful.

Real-World Comparison

Two endings.

Version A:

“Text me when you get home.”

Then silence for two days.

Version B:

“I had a great time tonight.”

Later:

“Made it home — I’d like to see you again.”

Which one feels confident?

Which one feels uncertain?

Momentum is often lost in hesitation, not incompatibility.

What Confidence Actually Looks Like

Confidence isn’t pressure.

It’s:

- Expressing interest without forcing outcome
- Following up without chasing
- Accepting silence without spiraling
- Being direct without being dramatic

It feels steady.

Steady wins.

A Matchmaker's Perspective

When we coach clients, this is often where we make the smallest but most powerful adjustments.

Not changing personality.

Just refining:

- Tone
- Timing
- Directness
- Emotional steadiness

Often that's the difference between confusion and clarity.

And clarity changes everything.

Frequently Asked Questions

- **Should I text the same night or wait?**

Either is fine. What matters is that it feels natural, not strategic.

- **What if I'm unsure whether they liked the date?**

You can still express how you felt. Their response will tell you what you need to know.

- **Is it too forward to suggest the next date right away?**

Not if the energy was positive. Clear is confident.

- **What if they don't respond to my follow-up?**

That's information. Let it be information.

- **Is ghosting ever acceptable?**

It's common, but clarity is almost always more respectful.

- **How do I avoid sounding desperate?**
Keep your tone calm, simple, and direct.

Closing Thought

Ending well is about leaving things clean.

Clear signals.

Calm follow-up.

No games.

When you close confidently, you don't just increase your chances.

You increase your peace.

About LoveAndMatchmaking

Love & Matchmaking is led by Destin Pfaff and Rachel Federoff, professional matchmakers with extensive experience working with relationship-focused clients, including public-facing work on Millionaire Matchmaker, which informs a thoughtful, discreet, and compatibility-driven approach to matchmaking.

Learn More About Our Elite Matchmaking Services

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