



4 Essential Elements of Online Dating

Essential Element One: Your Profile

Whether you love to write and do it all the time, or avoid it like it had germs all over it, writing about yourself is the hardest of all. But there is no avoiding the profile if you are going to try on-line dating. Let's try to break the process down so it is not so stressful for you.

First, an important news flash. This is not creative writing! It is the truth you are trying to convey, not an elaborate fiction that will crumble like sugar icing at the slightest touch! You want to market the real you. The best of you, naturally. But you. So keep that in mind.

Here we go, point by point.

Create a user name. Typically, people browsing profiles look first at the user name, headline, and photo before reading further. You want to catch the attention of interesting browsers with an attention-grabbing, clever "handle."

At the same time, you want your on-line name to reflect your wonderful individuality in some unique way. Jot down the first things that come to mind when you think of you—personality, interests, profession, humor, lifestyle, and hobbies. Use some of those things in creating your name. Funny Teacher, World Traveler or Hiking Papa are some examples. Be careful to protect your privacy by not using your real name or any numbers that are significant to you, such as birth date or age. Names like Hate Exes, Lonely26, or Chubby can be a turn-off, as they appear negative, desperate or self-denigrating.

This happened to a client of mine, Kara, a forty-something Orlando woman who was super sweet, into the outdoors and looking to settle down. But she was giving guys the impression that she had a wild side. When I first saw that her username was Midnight Seductress, I thought it had to be a mistake. But when I plugged it into the dating site letter for letter, there she was. If flings were on her agenda, this would have been fine, but since she was looking for a serious commitment, her user name was sending entirely the wrong message. Make sure your username reflects your own personality.

Craft your headline. With your headline, you want to have the “had me at hello” effect. As annoying as it is to realize first impressions matter, they do. It’s that instant gut reaction that will entice someone to read your profile... or not. Thus, you will want your headline to give a hint about who you are and what you want. If your goal is dating, go for a light-hearted tone. If you are seeking a long term relationship, sincerity and a more serious tone is suitable. Quotes, movie lines or songs are popular, especially if you adapt them to reflect your uniqueness. You can include humor, pose an interesting question, or emphasize a unique characteristic. E.g. “Music man seeks harmony,” or “I keep my head, heels and standards high.”

Describing you. Remember the first words you write are nothing but a draft. So do not write into the dating website's little box. Open Word on your computer, or whatever program you use, and create a document. Give it a name and save it. You will reread, edit and revise this document before pasting it into any dating website.

Now, what to write? It's all about you. Think about what sets you apart from the crowd. Be confident and fun. As with any good writing, the first sentence needs to be an attention grabber. You probably don't have a lot of space; most sites allow 250 words or less. Make a list of what you want to share—hobbies, interests, work, family, life philosophy (worksheet below). Decide which things really have to make it in to your profile. You can also include less information but capture a reader's attention with a story or anecdote. The more specific you are, the more real you will seem. Rather than listing traits like active, smart or generous, tell your reader that you enjoy rollerblading, tutoring college math and volunteering at Habitat for Humanity. You can mention your children, places you've lived, your social circle, and pets. Most sites ask for a description of your job. It is important to give a good impression without an exact description including the company name. It is worth taking time with this, revising and fine-tuning. Avoid negative comments, untruths or sounding bitter or desperate.

Describing your future partner. This is just as important as conveying yourself truthfully. Be honest about what you are looking for. That means you know your requirements and wants. Whether you are looking for a long term relationship or dating for fun, be clear. Mention life goals and core values that you would like to share with a date or partner. Be realistic and open minded.

Describe your ideal date with enough specifics to be grounded, but avoid coming across as exclusionary. Don't ask for tall, dark and handsome if you don't want to exclude men under 6' with some gray at the temples. Don't specify small, blonde and athletic unless you never want to see that tall brunette who otherwise matches you perfectly. On the other hand, be clear about deal breakers. If you absolutely are not interested in a smoker or must date within your religion—say so. That kind of clarity early on avoids many false starts.

Fine tuning. Good writers say that the best way to look honestly at your own writing is to let some time pass. So save and close your document and look at it through fresh eyes tomorrow. Then, read it aloud to yourself—it's the best way to find spelling or grammatical errors. Ask a friend of the opposite sex to read it too, and give you honest feedback. If you are worried about perfection before going online, you may never get yourself out there! Don't expect it to be exactly right the first time. You can even change your profile after its online, depending on the responses you are getting.

Most important of all is to write the way you speak, while imagining that you are addressing your ideal date. You are, in fact, addressing your ideal date, because it is that person who is more likely to respond to an honest profile that highlights the wonderful person you are.

EXERCISES

Creating a user name

Write down the first things that come to mind when you think of you:

Personality_____

Interests_____

Profession_____

Humor

Lifestyle_____

Hobbies

Use some of those things to create your name. Combine interests or combine hobbies or words on the same topic and stand out from the crowd.

Make up your own word and create a word that represents you. Do not use your real name. You want to keep your identity secret and prevent someone from harassing you should you decide to end contact. Stay away from numbers. They do not add any interest to your name and may reveal personal information.

Crafting your headline

Write down nuggets of what they'll learn about you and what you want in your profile:

Quotes _____

Movie Lines _____

Songs _____

Adapt them to reflect your uniqueness. Have them at hello. Remember this is a first impression.

Describing you

Key elements to consider before you start typing; know what type you want to attract and direct it to them. The first sentence needs to be an attention grabber. Keep it around 100 words and ask for a reply. Write down what sets you apart from the crowd.

What you enjoy _____

Be specific

Use current events _____

Spell and grammar check

End your last line on a strong note for a final lasting impression.

Describing your future partner

Key elements to consider before you start typing; know what type of relationship you want – casual or long term.

How they would fit in your life_____

Life goals and values you would like to share_____

Their characteristics_____

Using the term “he” or “she” personalizes the description.

Essential Element Two: Your Pictures

The photo. There's no denying it: people are visual creatures. Your photo is important and gives texture and honesty to your profile. You have nothing to hide. You are comfortable with yourself. Use a recent great headshot of you smiling. Your smiling eyes and an open, friendly (as opposed to seductive or aloof) expression will speak volumes. (You know the old saying? This photo is saving you from having to write about a thousand words!) If you don't have a head shot you love, hire a professional or get a friend to help you capture the best you. For the other photos, I suggest some candid shots, perhaps of you engaged in a favorite activity: decorating a cake, painting, working with wood, hiking, biking, reading etc. Be careful that the setting of your photo does not give too much away, like a specific neighborhood in recognizable town or city, your house number or car.

Bring your confidence. Confidence is important, it is sexy and it shows when you believe in yourself.

No Group photos. This is all about you, not your friends. Group photos are distracting and you want to be noticed. And certainly no photos with an ex.

Professional photographer. Choose a photographer who has experience taking photos specifically for dating sites. Ask to see examples of his or her work prior to booking. Outdoor shoots offer the most variety, but being indoors can work if the space is multidimensional. Get relaxed shots, but focus at least half of the shoot on more professional looking headshots.

Mix it up. One photo per outfit. Wearing the same outfit more than once means your matches will see just one side of who you are. Mixing and matching different looks from your life, from casual to semiformal will give your match multiple opportunities to find you attractive.

Color For a woman, red is the best color you can wear in your main photo. Not only will it instantly jump out from the otherwise drab montage of black, gray, brown, and white outfits in your matches search results, but it's also been scientifically proven that "red" is for "relationship." Also, wearing a belt will show off your curves. Men, skip the earth tones and go for a bold color shirt – red is attractive for both genders.

Ladies Use a sheer foundation that evens out your skin tone, but don't cake it on. Focus around your nose to reduce redness. Powdering your T-zone is a must for indoor shoots, the artificial light picks up more textures than natural light. Avoid shimmer, too. Lighting can make a sparkly area appear oil instead of effervescent, so use matte eye shadows, and try to find a bronzer without shimmer. Special attention to lashes will make your eyes appear larger on camera. If you're shooting outside, put an extra pop of color on those cheeks since the sun tends to wash them out.

Men Ask a female friend to dab some concealer on just the spots. Men tend to have more redness and uneven skin tones, so the yellow will help diminish that.

Hair Wear it as you normally do. If your locks are usually straight, don't curl them. Your photos should look just like the you that your matches will meet.

Friend photographer Things to consider before the first camera click:

Environment - Show your diverse lifestyle that captures a day of your life. As I mentioned earlier, the picture could be you cooking, reading at a local coffee shop, or dressed to the nines. Remember to keep the focus on you with a clear close up and not too much emphasis on the background. Show off your brilliant authentic self.

Expression - Practice looking in the mirror at home before the shoot. Try different angles and facial expressions, we all have a “best side”. Smile, laugh, and try simply to relax your face. Everyone looks their best when smiling. More options offer a greater chance of capturing that perfect pose.

Lighting - A well-lit environment is crucial so your photos don't appear grainy. Low resolution snapshots can look old, and you don't want your match to question whether the picture was taken recently.

Stance - This is very important to get the best shots. Never face the camera head-on, as this will make you appear wider. Focus on three things; shoulder, posture, and arms. Start by turning sideways to the camera and putting your weight on your back leg. Next, point your front toes toward the camera with a slight bend in the front of the knee. Then rotate your front shoulder away from the camera. If you suck in your stomach, you'll be forced to stand taller. For posture, extend your chin toward the camera, and simultaneously push your shoulders back. This will nicely distinguish your head from your body. If you're sitting, inch your way to the edge of the chair while still presenting more of one side to the camera, and rotate your front shoulder back. As for your arms and hands, never leave them hanging by your side – that will make you look wider. Try moving your elbows slightly away from your body so that the camera sees light between your elbow and your body, and then put at least one hand in your pocket.

Critique at the end - No peeking at photos until the end of the shoot. This will allow your friend photographer to capture you in the moment. There will be plenty of time later to choose your favorites.

So after your shoot, mix the pro's shots with a few from your own photo albums. I suggest 4 to 6 head and body shots. Routinely changing photos will put you on the top of the list of your favorite dating site.

Essential Element Three: Sorting Potential Partner's Profiles

You've posted your profile. You are getting responses and you are ready to make contact with potential matches. First you need an online dating strategy with an action plan to keep you on track.

Consistently log in

Set aside a certain amount of time each day to check your inbox, search profiles and send messages. Being online frequently shows that you are an active member and more likely to receive messages. If someone has been off the site for more than a week it's possible they won't return.

Create filters on the search page

For a search based site begin by browsing the broadest range of characteristics that you are looking for, allowing you to view a large group of potential matches. This could include a thirty mile radius from your residence, a fifteen year age span, etc.

For an algorithm site begin by browsing the narrowest range of characteristics that you're looking for, allowing you to maximize the limited number of results you receive. For each trait, the site will usually ask how important it is to you. If you indicate that it's not important, the site will broaden the search. Check only the types you are open to and note that it's extremely important so that the algorithm stays within your parameters. If you start to notice patterns of matches outside your parameters it is time to adjust your filters. It is a good idea to edit your filter about once a month. For example by changing your age range you will see new people.

Read their content carefully

By paying close attention to how they describe themselves and the tone used you can learn a lot about their level of integrity and honesty. Also, note their description of the ideal match. If it's longer than their personal description it may be an unrealistic laundry list of a fictional character on the other hand if it's extremely short they may be clueless to what they are looking for in a relationship.

Look at their photos carefully

You can learn a lot about someone by looking at their photos beyond whether or not you find them attractive. How do they present themselves? What does their attire say about them? What activities are they engaged in? Is there a lack of photos? If so, do they explain it?

Scouting

Use a scouting strategy to quickly determine if someone you see online is someone that you would like to get to know. Review your relationship requirements, needs and deal breakers, and keep them handy through the process. You may want to put profiles into two categories:

- A. He or she seems to have every single quality I'm looking for.
- B. He or she seems to have some of the qualities I'm looking for.

Keep an open mind to the fact that people on your A list may seem wonderful on paper but may lack chemistry in person. And people on your B list may have the most hidden potential. It's important to not eliminate someone too quickly and risk passing over your ideal match.

Save your searches

Saving your search criteria will help you to be more efficient in future searches. It will allow you to search all of the page results of a specific group of singles before moving onto the next group.

Update your profile

When you update your profile the dating site will automatically send you to the top of people's search results. You can do this by making small edits to your text or by alternating two or three pictures.

Search new members

If you continuously see the same matches, check out the new members. Most sites will tell you who their newest members are.

Stay open to the process of scouting whether dating online or off. Dating is a process with a beginning (looking for someone), a middle (finding someone) and an end (keeping someone).

My client, Rick was true blue to the concept of staying with the process, even when the chips are down. His criteria filters were so narrow that he didn't get any matches for two months. Once we broadened his criteria filters his inbox filled and his dating journey began.

EXERCISES

Sorting

Log in schedule

Day and time _____

Create filters for characteristics that you are looking for.

Broad _____

Narrow (for algorithm sites)

Read their content and look at their photos carefully.

Observations

List potential match profiles into two categories.

A - Yes

B - Maybe _____

Save your searches on the site. Update your profile weekly.

Essential Element Four: Screening Potential Partner's Profiles

Screening

One evening as you are sitting at your computer someone of interest catches your eye and you would like to send them an email to see if there is any potential. You may be wondering where to begin and how will I know.

We'll use a process called screening to gather enough information to determine if someone meets your requirements or not. We will apply this through emails and a face to face meeting. Being the successful single you are means being assertive, patient, having boundaries and maintaining them, being realistic/practical and that you do not get involved with anyone that does not appear to meet all of your relationship requirements.

Your first email

Your first email is the equivalent of a first encounter, so take your time to compose it. Write an email specifically for him or her, and then ask a question. Questions show that you have genuine interest in getting to know someone and really begin the conversation. Start by reading their profile to get specifics about common interests and pay attention for any red flags. A common interest is a great topic for a first email. Ok Cupid's email study showed phrases that are likely to get responses are "Curious what..." and "Noticed that ..."

Subject line

Select a subject title that is click worthy, something with a little personality and avoid titles that are dry or generic.

Content

In composing the email content many online sites recommend to jump right in and skip the salutation for a better open rate. Using proper grammar and sentence structure is a must. The best length is usually three or four sentences- anything longer could make you appear over anxious. Ask one question at the end of the message.

Always use your username to close. It adds warmth and a personal feel to a digital correspondence.

Replies

Reply to their response in a timely manner, no 3 day rules apply to chatting online. Just as when you're chatting in person you want to keep the momentum going in a getting- to-know-you direction. This means showing interest by asking one or two questions.

Some topics to avoid are; sex, politics, religion (unless it is a nice dating site geared to religion), and past relationships. Begin the sorting process by learning about their level of compatibility with your requirements and values. Notice how they respond. If you feel they could have potential and want to know more after about 6 messages it's time to get offline and set a meeting. Guys, do not fear rejection and ask her for a meeting. It's highly unlikely that she will say no since you have already communicated back and forth. If asking is difficult, try ending a statement about a meeting. Then ask what works best for her. Ladies, do not be afraid to take matters into your own hands if he hasn't asked and you want to set up a meeting. You can mention a current event that you have in common and offer to meet him there. You can mention the upcoming weekend and ask what he's up to. If all else fails, just go for it and tell him that you would love to meet.

If your potential match says that he or she has a conflict, keep the conversation going in the meantime. Just be sure to ask him or her to set a date. While this may seem a bit forward, - if someone isn't willing to meet you there is no reason to continue to communicate. It's better to find this out sooner rather than later.

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If you notice inconsistencies or inaccurate information from their profile to their emails you will want to get more facts. Asking questions in a genuinely interested way will garner the best results. So think carefully before hitting the send button. You could approach the subject in question with a personal story and invite them to do likewise. It could be an honest mistake or a big red flag that they are dishonest or hiding something.

Meeting face to face

Going from online to offline is going to be different. You have to get off-line for those sparks to fly, but don't let the prospect of that first meeting daunt you. It's just a meeting, a chance to see if there might be something there – it's not a date. Remembering that will help keep anxiety levels low and expectations realistic.

Before we get into the details, I must, as any good dating coach worth her salt would, mention a few safety precautions. Although you may already have this in mind, a little reminder is worthwhile. Some online daters have a false sense of security because they have already been communicating with someone for a while. But don't forget that even though you have chatted online or maybe talked on the phone, you are meeting a complete stranger and should proceed accordingly. Meet in a public place, where there are lots of people around. Tell your friends or family who you are going to meet, where and when, and give them a call after the meeting. Plan on a short introduction meeting of 30 to 60 minutes. Have your exit strategy ready, if needed.

There are some things to think about as you prepare to take online to the new – offline-level. Although your first meeting will be short, and is not a romantic rendezvous, you still want to make a great first impression. Bring the best version of you. Ladies, wear something you love that loves you back by accentuating your best assets. Guys, wear a nice shirt that matches your eyes or shows off your hours at the gym. And by all means bring your high energy and an open mind.

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You have seen pictures of each other online but the real live version is bound to be different. I am not trying to scare, just remind you that a picture is, by definition, artificial and in most cases idealized.

Now for conversation. The more you practice, the more at ease and confident you'll be.

To decide what questions to ask or topics to discuss consider what your requirements, needs and wants are in a relationship. Also, know what you want to share. Keep in mind that the meeting is to determine if this is someone you would like to spend more time with.

Breaking the ice. Keep conversation light and upbeat. Chances are you both are a little nervous, so a light, even humorous, conversation is the best way to start out. An easy way to build a connection is to talk about a topic that you can both relate to. It could be a current event or swapping funny online dating experiences. It is not the time to talk about your ex, problems at work, your health or anything else "heavy." You should have fun talking with your date even if you pre-plan some topics.

Exploration. Getting to know your date. By now you've had at least one phone conversation. Maybe you remember movies or hobbies he or she mentioned during the call? Or favorite music, or being a pet owner? If so, you can start a conversation with questions:

- "What did you like about that movie? Who was in it?"
- "How did you become interested in your hobby?"
- "What type of music do you love most?"
- "Tell me about your pet."

Follow up questions show engagement, and have the added benefit of accelerating your discovery of common ground you might share.

If you are looking for a committed long term relationship, ask questions that gently probe to assess if that interest is shared.

- “What are you most passionate about in life?”
- “What are your goals for the next ten years?”
- “Do you believe in happily ever after?”
- “What brings you the most pleasure?”

Avoid overly-intense queries that might seem scary on a first meeting, such as, “When can I see you next?” or “Would you like to meet my children?” If you sense the person is uncomfortable at any time, back off. Also, mixing in lighthearted conversation with questions will eliminate the feeling of an interview. Listen sincerely and attentively. Give him or her ample room to talk. Doing so shows that you are interested in the conversation and want to hear more.

Personal anecdotes. It is just as important to share about yourself as to find out about your potential match. Telling a funny story from work that reveals something about the way you interact with people can be enlightening. Talking about a favorite vacation can be insightful for both parties as your date can learn about you and may share a love of traveling as well. As you share stories about yourself, avoid mention of an ex (even if a trip was or a hobby or interest was shared with one), and stick to upbeat, lighthearted anecdotes, avoiding the overly dramatic or painful.

Sharing yourself also gives your potential match an opportunity to ask *you* questions. Do not deflect those questions, even if you are shy to talk about yourself. The goal here is to get to know one another, so be open and honest. Finding a balance between how much to talk and how much to listen is challenging. Keeping tuned in to body language is part of knowing if you are hitting it right. If your date pulls back, glances away from you more than is normal or starts saying, “Uh huh” a lot, shift the focus.

When it is time to leave, exit gracefully. Having plans afterward, even if it's to let the dog out, will help you disengage. And even if things are going very well, disengage you must. This is just step one. Stick to your plan. As you prepare to leave, say thank you for meeting. If you had a good time in one another's company and are open to a date, say so.

What next? Once you have met your online connection in person, there is no going back to communicating on the dating site. For one thing, you have taken the connection to the next level and waiting for him or her to be signed on again is too unpredictable.

An email, text or good ol' fashioned phone call is best. If this contact is a person of interest, you should be well on your way to a first date. If not, this is where the communication stops.

No matter what the outcome of this first face-to-face, stay committed to the process of dating, keep your goal in mind and be open. Doing so will allow more opportunities to present themselves, and somewhere out there is your ideal match!

EXERCISES

Screening

Compose first email.

Subject line

Reply

Set meeting place and time _____

Safety precautions

Exit strategy _____

Prepare to make a great first

impression. Re-read profile for

conversation topics.

About Betty:

Betty Russell, BCC is a Board Certified Dating & Relationship Coach dedicated to providing Singles with solid information, proven dating skills and an attraction plan to find the right partner.



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What people are saying...

I had everything I wanted—a successful business, great friends and family, and yet I had no one special to share it with. What I wanted most—a serious relationship—seemed beyond reach. So I contacted Betty and we got right to work. Through her highly active coaching program I was able to prioritize my love life and give it the attention it needed. She helped me select compatible potential partners and taught me how to date the right way. I've been dating Rebecca exclusively for 5 months. She is everything I want and need in a relationship. Now, well as soon as we tie the knot, I will have everything I ever wanted. Thank you, Betty
Eric S., Nashville

Dear Betty, I thank you for all your advice and help in discovering what was keeping me from having love in my life. You showed me that with the right attitude and dating skills dating can be fun. I went from having no dates to having more than I ever thought possible. I have been dating someone special for 10 months now. We are planning a hiking get-away next month and I'm going to pop the question. I hope she says yes! Thank you Betty for giving me the courage to look for love.

Josh E., Denver

When I first came to Betty I'd had repeated unhealthy relationships. She helped me to break my destructive dating habits and get me on the right track. She re-wrote my online dating profile and selected my best pictures. We selected the best sites for me and worked through the process of online dating. I met a lot of nice women and found the one I dreamed of. We are engaged and plan to marry in June. Thank you Betty, it wouldn't have happened without your advice and support.

Daniel K., Chicago

After my divorce I was so busy with raising the children and getting my life back together that I didn't even consider dating for 7 years. I never would have met the wonderful man I have been dating for the last year without Betty's advice and support.

I just want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart. You helped me change my life and get the relationship I wanted.

Ann P., Atlanta

As a 59 year old nurse I spend my days caring for others. Then one day it hit me that I need to take care of myself and figure out how to get the relationship I hoped for. A friend referred me to Betty. I signed up right away and she had me dating within 2 weeks. It was the best investment in myself that I ever made.

Lori D., Canada