



5 Secrets to Make Online Dating Work for You

Make Your Profile Work for You

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.

1. **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, 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.

2. **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.”
3. **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. 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.

4. **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.
5. **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 it's 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

Make your photo work for you

1. **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.

2. **Bring your confidence** – Confidence is important, it is sexy and it shows when you believe in yourself.
3. **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.
4. **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.
5. **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.
6. **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 that flatters your skin tones.
7. **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.
8. **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.

9. **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.
10. **Friend photographer** Things to consider before the first camera click:
- a. **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.
 - b. **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.
 - c. **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.
 - d. **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.
 - e. **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.

EXERCISE

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.