

Trend Report  
U.S. Dating Insights  
February 2017



## Introduction

According to [EliteSingles'](#) latest survey into U.S. dating habits, more than one third of Americans have admitted they don't enjoy going on first dates.

For the two thirds that do enjoy it, 82% don't know what to talk about and one in five admit to being extremely nervous beforehand.

So, if you're not feeling confident in the dating department, ahead of the most romantic day of the year, fear not! EliteSingles is here to help with its #itsadate digital bootcamp, industry expert advice and dating insight report.

Each section of this report will offer a wealth of practical advice to improve your personal approach to dating. It will also delve into U.S. dating statistics – showing that with a little focus, applied knowledge and insight-led behaviors, more Americans can find love this Valentine's.

#itsadate



## Contents

### Section One: Profile Perfection

Want to attract the best dates with an eye-catching profile? It all starts with your online dating photo. Saskia Nelson from the world's first dating photography company [Hey Saturday](#) helps you on the way to a high-quality dating profile.

### Section Two: The Art of Conversation

You've secured the date but now you're at a loss for words! Don't worry - you're not the only one. Love and relationship expert [Hilary Silver](#) gives detailed insight into the art of conversation and the best first date topics.

### Section Three: Dress to Impress

If you've been through your entire wardrobe and you're still stuck on what to wear, Lauren Dimet Waters, founder of [Fountainof30.com](#), has top tips to help you dress better for dates. Find inspiration from the EliteSingles x Fountainof30.com fashion look book (yes gentlemen, you too!).

### Section Four: Dating Etiquette

It can be difficult to take your relationship from online to offline. Etiquette expert [Jacqueline Whitmore](#) will guide you through the highs and lows of dating etiquette, from how to greet your date to handling the check.

### Section Five: Body Language

Think the date's gone well but struggling to read the signals? Dating coach [Kimberly Seltzer](#) will help you give off the right signs so your date knows just how you feel.

## Section One

## Profile Perfection

with Hey Saturday Founder [Saskia Nelson](#)



Saskia Nelson set up Hey Saturday – the world’s first dating photography business – because she felt that too many people just didn’t look like their online dating profile suggested. To put a stop to this, Hey Saturday’s professional team of photographers create show-stopping profile photos that help attract higher quality dates.

An old, blurry or cluttered profile photo can instantly turn people off. Not just off a date, but off matching with you in the first place.

**‘A picture is worth a thousand words’**

Is yours saying the right thing?

EliteSingles found that the profile picture is one of the most important factors when considering asking a potential match out for a first date. Yet, over half of us have ended up on dates with people who look absolutely nothing like their main profile photo.

According to Saskia: “If you are serious about finding a meaningful relationship online, the one thing you can do is invest in some good quality photos that capture you (in perfect focus) looking like you, but you on a really good day.”



**No** to your buddies  
and a big **YES** to your  
kids!

Your potential match wants to see you! It is time to steer away from photos with members of the opposite sex. While it may show off your best angle, it can unleash negative emotions and a w k w a r d , o r i n d e e d embarrassing, questions.

In fact, 60% of Americans surveyed said they would certainly ask who the 'other' person within a profile picture is. So be warned... you may be creating some difficult questions to answer later on.

While exes are a total no-go area, research reveals that you are four times more likely to secure a date by putting photos of your children on to your dating profile - especially if dating after a divorce, or following the end of a long-term relationship.

## Do's and don'ts

Saskia says: "It's best to be honest about yourself from the very beginning. So, why not do this through photography? If photos also help capture elements of your personality, current situation and lifestyle, then you're much more likely to attract better quality dates. Simply put, a set of show-stopping dating profile photos will turbo-charge your dating response rate and kick-start your love life. Let the fun begin!"

According to Saskia, there are just a few simple things that people need to consider to achieve the best profile photo:

1. Look good
2. Tell your story
3. Stand out from the crowd

## Look good

Make an effort. Wear what you would on a first date. If you would normally get your hair and nails done ahead of a first date, then do this for your next profile picture too.

## Tell your story

Bring your personality to life through your photos. Show it through the clothes you wear, the locations you take the photos in, or even the use of props – if you're a photographer yourself, have your camera with you!

## Stand out from the crowd

Be bold and wear bright colors in your images. Choose unique locations and have some fun with your photos.



## Now, what about the things you should avoid doing?

### Don't pose or pout

Act natural. For guys, looking slightly off camera is a great shot and for women, warm open smiles will get the best results.

### Avoid groups

This puts barriers in between you and your potential match, making you less approachable.

### Out of date photos

Your photo must be authentic to start off the date with complete honesty. More than 50% of those surveyed have ended up on a date with someone who looks nothing like their profile photo, which immediately starts things off on the wrong foot.

### Messy backgrounds

It's distracting, you want your potential date to focus just on you and not whether you have a messy bedroom!

### No red eye

The eyes are where people usually look and decide whether they think you're trustworthy or not.

## Would you reply to a typo-filled message?

Once you have the perfect photo, it's time to focus on the rest of your profile. Remember, when messaging a potential date, always spellcheck before hitting send!

A quarter of Americans find spelling mistakes and bad grammar in profiles a complete turn off, while a further one in three find spelling mistakes in private messages far worse. While 90% are too polite to correct a suitor, they wouldn't even consider writing back.

What's more, half of American daters claim they can spot a generic 'copy and paste' spammed message. Digital daters across the States are becoming savvier, so it is time to make messages more personal and avoid the lazy route. Treat everyone as an individual, with care and respect – as you yourself would wish to be treated.

## Would you show a match to your friends?

47% of us admit to showing a potential match to a friend or family member before going on a date - so remember it could be more than one person critiquing your profile picture and scrutinizing that grammar.

Women are twice as likely as men to show a future date to a friend or family member for their seal of approval – with over two thirds of females admitting to doing so.

## Section Two

# The Art of Conversation

with relationship expert [Hilary Silver](#)



Hilary Silver is an award-winning therapist, dating, love and relationship expert based in Denver, Colorado.

Hilary is best known for her authentic and direct style, which combines the most current trends in counselling and coaching, with her own wisdom and perspective.

Conversation – it's a  
two-way street

Awkward silences can be a turn off, but so can being on a date with someone who won't stop talking! In fact, 82% of Americans don't know what to say on a first date and 40% don't feel confident leading the conversation.

## Mastering the art of conversation

Our survey highlighted where many of us are going wrong. A whopping 84% of Americans don't have a 'go to' conversation starter prepared ahead of a date and one in four of us say that awkward conversations would be a massive deal breaker. To fill the silences, many of us jump straight into any topic that comes to mind, without really thinking it through.



Hilary Silver says: "It is important to get the conversation balance right – don't hog all the conversation but also don't bombard your date with questions to deter the attention away from you. The conversation has to be reciprocal. For the conversation to be healthy and enjoyable, both people must experience this flow of give and take – a back and forth exchange of energy and attention."

## Hilary's top tips for having the perfect first date conversation are:

### Slow down

Don't be in a rush to avoid a lull in conversation so much so that you just fire off questions.

### Give time for answers

If you ask a question, let your date answer it and notice if they 'pass the mic' back to you.

### Be alert

If they don't turn the question back to you, don't stand on ceremony and wait for the invitation. Chime in and offer it up!

### Be equal

If you've been speaking for a while, make sure to notice and turn the conversation back on the listener.

### Ask

Be genuinely curious about the person across from you and this will happen with ease.

## So what do we all really want to know?

The number one thing we want to find out on a first date is what the person we're with is looking for, with 38% of us citing this as our number one motivator for going on a date in the first place.



## Topics to avoid

### Keep away from small talk

25% of us admit to finding 'chit chat' boring when in a first date situation. Are the rest of us enduring boring conversations with the hope of making a connection? This creates a disparity between daters as their connections will be on different levels, which indicates an uneven playing field from the start.

It is crucial to avoid certain topics on a first date, especially those that may cause conflict or offence. The main things to avoid dropping into first date conversations include: past relationships,

stories of other dates you have recently been on, anything to do with sex and of course the current state of US politics. Such intense topics can be major deal breakers for a first meeting.

### Stop 'people pleasing'

Don't change your opinions on certain topics in order to please a date. "People pleasing" is a definite no for Hilary, as it not only shows weakness and lack of personal conviction, it means you're being dishonest.

Hilary says: "To have a true connection with someone, you have to be yourself, answer for yourself and speak your own truth. Don't shape shift or change yourself into what you think the person across the table wants from you."

### The golden skill of listening

Don't just focus on what you need to say - but also ensure you are actually listening to the conversation taking place.

"Make sure to stay engaged throughout the whole conversation; you can tell if your date is interested and listening through their eye contact, their body language towards you and their facial expressions. Listening is an important component of conversation." Hilary advises.

### Some top tips from Hilary on how to show your date you're interested and engaged:

#### Look into their eyes

If you are really keen on this person, then show it and give them your full attention. It doesn't matter who else might have walked in the door. Retain eye contact and keep the connection.

## Poker face

Watch your facial expression and “non verbals” – these are the things you’re saying without using any words. You want to make sure that you encourage your date to keep talking and don’t inadvertently shut them down with disapproving looks or lack of interest.

## Continuation fillers

Even if you have nothing to say, there are phrases or questions you can have at the ready – like: “What was that like? Tell me more about that;” “I can’t imagine... it’s never happened to me before;” or “I can imagine what that was like”.... This will not only make you appear interested in what your date is saying, but also encourage them to keep sharing.

## Focus

When you ask a question, make sure you stay focused on your date while they are answering and respond appropriately.

## How to get that spark

When asked what they would like to get out of a first date, the majority of survey respondents indicated some form of spark or an emotional connection. The first date conversation is the gateway to that initial spark. So mastering good conversation skills is key. Grasping basic conversation and listening techniques will help improve the chances of forming a meaningful relationship, based on a strong foundation of honesty and reciprocal understanding.

## Section Three

### Dress to Impress

with FountainOf30.com's [Lauren Dimet Waters](#)



Lauren Dimet Waters is the co-founder of acclaimed fashion, beauty and lifestyle site FountainOf30.com.

The site is dedicated to women over 30, who feel 30 and will do whatever it takes to feel confident in their own skin!

### One chance to make a good first impression

What we wear on a first date is crucial to making that lasting, positive first impression. Lauren Dimet Waters offers top tips on how to pick out the perfect outfit for that next big date, as well as some candid

advice on what to avoid. Say no to too much make-up, revealing outfits and if you haven't ironed your shirt or blouse, say goodbye to date number two.

### Dress to impress – a winning formula

83% of Americans believe that wearing a good outfit is an important step toward making a positive first impression. It is the first thing that someone will judge you on - it is so important to get it right.

Furthermore, to be truly confident on a date – especially the first – you have to feel comfortable. What you wear is a major factor in





how you present yourself on a date. If you feel good, your whole body will feel the effects; you'll suddenly sit up straight, walk with confidence and demand the attention of your date.

## What NOT to wear

60% of us would be put off if a date wore an outfit that was too revealing. While you don't have to dress too conservatively, it is not necessarily wise to follow the "less is more" mantra. The outcome of a date is 25% more likely to be negative if too much flesh is on show. This applies to both men and women so ensure you're showing off your personal style, but consider how appropriate your outfit is for the occasion. Smartness is particularly important for making that positive first impression. For both men and women, two thirds of us would be less interested in a second date if our date is dressed scruffily or too casual.

### For women

42% said un-ironed or dirty clothes are the biggest faux pas when it comes to a first date and this would put them off accepting a second date invitation. Men, make your date feel like you've put time and effort into getting ready to meet them. Something as quick and simple as ironing your shirt can massively boost your chances of success on a first date. It will give your confidence a boost too!

### For men

The biggest turn off is a date wearing too much make-up. Make-up should be subtle and natural – too much war paint will put off a whopping 8 out of 10 guys. Lauren adds: "They want to see what their date really looks like. So while make-up can help women to feel more confident, be natural and try not to hide behind too many layers."

### Lauren offers her top tips on outfits to avoid:

1. For women, anything that shows too much cleavage
2. Ripped jeans (men and women!)
3. For both, no labels – a Chanel handbag could give off the wrong impression
4. Dress appropriately for the occasion – our look book offers two different styles to cater for both casual and formal dates

### What to wear

The battle between heels and flats is a personal choice. Even though heels can help to make you feel more confident and help with posture, according to the survey results, the movement towards flats is growing with 1 in 5 ladies saying they would choose flats and have opted for comfort over height on previous dates. Lauren suggests not wearing heels over two inches' high.

## Five top tips from Lauren on the finer details:

### Tip one

Choose simple jewelry - this will accentuate your outfit, without stealing the attention.

### Tip two

For both, accentuate your best assets - if you want to accentuate your figure, tuck in your shirt to show off your waist, or if you've got great arms, wear a top that shows them off.

### Tip three

Shoes are important for both men and women - men, pick out a cool pair of smart shoes. Women, use your shoes to really show off your personality.

### Tip four

Men should wear shirts with some detail - but patterns shouldn't be over the top.

### Tip five

Always choose an outfit that makes you feel confident before you even walk out the door!

## Shake things up and get something new

Buying new clothes for a date is not uncommon, with more than one in four survey respondents hitting the shops before every date. If you're looking to buy a new outfit for your next date, take a look at the [EliteSingles x fountainof30.com digital look book](#) for inspiration, curated specifically to empower men and women to feel confident and look their best on that all important first date.

## Section Four

## Dating Etiquette

with etiquette expert [Jacqueline Whitmore](#)



Jacqueline Whitmore is a renowned etiquette expert, author, certified speaking professional (CSP) and founder of The Protocol School of Palm Beach, a premier business etiquette consulting firm.

For more than a decade, Jacqueline has provided communication and leadership training programs, keynotes and executive coaching to Fortune 500 companies, universities and associations.

## Good manners don't cost a dime

People don't always associate manners and etiquette with dating – but they should. Getting it wrong can be an immediate deal breaker.

The shift to online dating means daters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have to consider how to maintain their manners both on and offline. For many, making the transition from behind the screen to a face-to-

face date can at times be an overwhelming prospect.

From the initial greeting to how to handle the check, consider how your manners will be interpreted by your date. Jacqueline Whitmore provides insight and advice on how to get dating etiquette right, what to avoid and how to end the date if you're not too keen on a second one.



## Dating can be a daunting prospect, even for flirts

EliteSingles' recent survey revealed that while 92% of Americans are okay with a certain degree of flirting on a first date, it is still often considered a daunting prospect. So how do you get the balance right?



### Rule one: put the cell phone away

Checking a cellphone during a first date is one of the biggest deal breakers. Simply do not do it. While 30% of us claim it would completely end the date, the majority would be less than impressed by the appearance of a cellphone during a date – so keep your mobile in your purse or pants.



Just like checking your watch, looking at your cellphone during a first meeting signifies lack of focus, potential boredom, a short attention span and little interest in your date.

Jacqueline explains the importance of keeping those phones out the way: "Don't let bad habits get in the way of your date. Put the cell away and focus on the amazing person in front of you. I always say follow these simple tips when it comes to cell phone etiquette:

### Be all there

When you're on a date, especially a first date, the person you are with should always take precedence over incoming calls or messages. It's sad when couples are at a restaurant and are more interested in their phones than the person sitting in front of them. Put people first, technology second.

### Excuse yourself

If you are expecting a call that can't be postponed, alert your date ahead of time and excuse yourself when the call comes. If you do take the call at the dinner table, keep it as brief as possible and avoid "cell yell." Use your regular conversational tone when speaking on your phone.

### Keep it hidden

Never put your phone (or your handbag, keys, sunglasses or anything you can't eat) directly on the table. Keep your phone concealed and remember to silence the ringtone. If you forget and it happens to ring, don't ignore it and pretend someone else's phone is ringing. Apologize and silence it immediately.

### The three-strike rule

There are only three occasions (other than real emergencies) when it's appropriate to pull out your phone while on a date. First, if you and your date decide to take a photograph together; second, to show your date pictures of a family baby or pet, should it come up conversation; and third, to find the answer to a perplexing trivia question that comes under discussion.

### Ask permission

If you must take out your phone while on a date, always ask permission first. Say something like, "Do you mind if I take out my phone to ...?" If taking photos with your date, always be respectful of their privacy and ask for permission before posting them to social media.



## Don't ruin a date because of poor manners

The EliteSingles survey revealed the biggest deal breakers during a first date are: bad manners, a bad attitude and lateness. A winning formula, therefore, is to be attentive, polite, positive and punctual.

“There is nothing worse than keeping your date waiting. Make sure you plan properly in advance and turn up right on time to meet your date. This shows immediately that you are respectful of your date’s time and starts the date off on the right foot.”

“Even today, chivalry matters to many. Some people like to have the door opened for them and for their chair to be pulled out. Not because they cannot do it themselves, but to feel special and valued on a first date,” Jacqueline explains.

## Dating traditions

Even though the way we meet people has changed, some traditional dating behavior is still prevalent. Of those surveyed, 80% of men are still happy to pick up the tab on a first date, regardless of how it went. Male chivalry lives on, even in the age of digital dating.

However, the ladies are not all expecting their male counterparts to pay, with nearly half of women happy to split the tab. While many men are retaining a traditional approach to dating, women are increasingly likely to think of a date in an equal context.

## Making the first move

If a date has gone well, what's next? For many of us, this part is more difficult than the date itself. Do you wait for your date to contact you? Do you take the lead and reach out first? Will this seem too forward? There are many questions that come to mind for both men and women once the date is over.

Research reveals men are more likely to make initial contact following a successful first date. 88% of males are happy to follow up and ask outright for that second date. While men are keen to get the dialogue going, 83% of women wait to be called or messaged.

According to Jacqueline: "If the date goes well and you want to see that person again, don't be afraid to contact them later in the day or the following day. I would recommend following up within 24 hours, so your date knows that you're interested and that you enjoyed yourself! If you don't feel comfortable proposing a second date, be sure to make it clear you would be open to the suggestion."

## How to handle a difficult date

If a date isn't going well, it is really hard to know how to end it politely without causing offense or being rude. Only one in three of us would be honest and cut short a bad date. Nearly 40% of us would endure a bad date through to its painful end and opt for an awkward goodbye, having wasted time on a non-starter.

Jacqueline offers a simple tip on how to let your date down gently: "Be honest. Try to see the date through the best you can and then be as kind as possible. If the date is really going badly, you could excuse yourself but I'm a big believer that honesty is the best policy. Don't be rude and just walk out. If you're later contacted, make sure you do reply and politely decline the invitation. Just imagine how you would want to be treated in a similar circumstance."



## Section Five

## Body Language and the First Kiss

with dating coach [Kimberly Seltzer](#)



Kimberly Seltzer is a dating coach, therapist and personal image expert. Kimberly is also co-host of Great Love Debate and founder of [EliteImageMakeovers.com](#).

Kimberly is renowned as America's #1 Dating Makeover and Confidence Expert.

### Time to relax!

1 in 5 of us feel extremely nervous ahead of going on a date. Kimberly offers some helpful practical advice on how we can all relax ahead of a big date and go out with the right mindset.

Prior to your date, it is important to be in the right frame of mind to achieve dating success, make that valuable positive first impression and end up with a second date in the diary.

Before you even arrive on your date, it's important to get yourself into the right headspace. If you've woken up on the wrong side of bed and you're in a particularly negative mood, don't take that with you on your date.

According to EliteSingles' research, the majority of daters take between 30 minutes to one hour to get ready for a date. In fact, 44% of men only take 10 to 30 minutes of preparation time before a first date and only 5% take two hours or more. Women, however, are willing to spend a little more time, with 65% taking 30 minutes to an hour to get ready. Around 15% of women take two hours or more.

Kimberly suggests taking at least one hour before your date just for you. Prepare yourself and your body to make sure you're feeling relaxed, confident and positive before you meet your date.



## Most communication is non-verbal

Kimberly explains: "The ability to successfully read and give off the non-verbal signals of the opposite sex is one of the most important aspects of dating and making first impressions in general. Research says that 93% of communication is non-verbal.

So, when we are unacquainted with each other, how we first present ourselves is often more important than the content of our conversations. Knowing how to read and deliver the appropriate message via body signals is a necessary step to finding that special someone.”

It can be hard to tell if your date is interested as we all act very differently when we like someone. If we are interested in our date, the most common reaction is to act excited (37% of people claim to do this), followed by becoming chattier and acting more confidently (21% said they felt this way).

## But how can you tell if your date is attracted to you?

Kimberly explains: “I watch people in the field as they interact with the opposite sex and I find there are distinct flirting techniques, messaging and body signals that men and women display when they are attracted to someone.”

“For both men and women, eye contact is crucial. You can’t expect to give off positive signals if you aren’t looking your date directly in the eye. We often also use body signals and touch to signal interest, but make sure you address your own comfort level beforehand. If you’re interested, perhaps you’ll lay a playful hand on your date’s arm during the conversation.”

Kimberly explains:

### Facial expressions

You can tell if women are interested by their eyes, how they look at you and if they are smiling. Men, on the other hand, will exhibit more of a smirk, raise their eyebrows and flare their nostrils.

### Body signals

If a woman is interested, she will draw attention to her shoulders, neck and wrist and often play with her hair. Men will have an open stance and stand closer to you to show their interest.

### Preening gestures

To show their attraction, both men and women will fix their appearance in front of their date, to make sure they look the most attractive. This can include fixing their hair, straightening a tie, or reapplying lipstick.



## To kiss? Or not to kiss?

Make sure you read the situation carefully before you decide how to approach the “to kiss or not to kiss” conundrum. Both men and women agreed that kissing on the cheek would be the best way to finish a date if they were keen to see the other person a second time.

Interestingly, 42% of American men would like a passionate kiss on a first date that is going well, whereas women prefer to wait until three, or even four dates in.

Two thirds of us would be happy to hold hands on a first date. However, for American women, public displays of affection (PDA) are pretty much off limits as 66% of women would be put off by a PDA on a first date. In comparison, only 25% of men would be put off by this behavior.

So, if you’ve enjoyed your date and want to show them you’re interested in another, follow Kimberly’s advice on how to give off the signs that you are interested.

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## Further Information

To view all of the experts' tips and advice videos visit [www.elitesingles.com/itsadate](http://www.elitesingles.com/itsadate).

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## About EliteSingles

Launched in the United States in 2015, [EliteSingles](#) is a leading premium brand within the serious online dating sector. Available in 18 countries, the platform connects single professionals aged 35+, who are looking for meaningful and long-lasting relationships. EliteSingles uses a detailed signup questionnaire and in-depth verification process to target successful, accomplished and educated users, the majority (82%) of whom are university educated to at least a Bachelor degree level.

EliteSingles sees year-on-year growth of over 20 percent, with 800,000 new member registrations per month. Based in Berlin, it is part of the [Affinitas GmbH](#) group, which is active in 26 markets worldwide and operates dating brands [eDarling](#) and [Attractive World](#).

[www.elitesingles.com](http://www.elitesingles.com)