

ONLINE DATING: A SURVIVOR'S MANUAL

By Raquel Guarino

There are plenty of fish in the sea, but let's be real: most of them are catfish. Here are some tips to help you find the sexiest man-fish the internet has to offer.

Warning: This guide is going to come off as self-indulgent, superficial, and one-sided...kind of like dating in real life!

1. PICTURES, PICTURES, PICTURES

Let's face it, humans are superficial. We are visually stimulated creatures and physical attraction plays a huge part--at least initially--in finding a mate. This rule is so important that I'm making a bunch of related sub-rules so that you can find your mate without struggle-busing your way through internet love and risking meeting a creeper in real life (like I have!). Look, I did all the hard work for you, so just listen up.

These rules go for you too, ladies.

A. Rule #1a is that the dude **MUST** have photos. If they are making a profile on OKCupid and you happen to be interested in them, this means they are most likely our age and know how to use a computer. They probably have Facebook or a smartphone or some way of getting (recent) photos of themselves to said Facebook/smartphone. There are literally no excuses for them not to have photos of themselves unless they are secretly 50 years old/in a relationship and scared their partner might find out/completely computer illiterate/plain stupid/really, really ugly. Not trying to be mean, but these are just the facts. You don't want any of those things, right? So do not talk to people without pictures!

B. Said person should also have a good amount of photos, too. At **LEAST** two, but there are a number of stipulations that go along with this--only in the rarest occasion is one single photo acceptable. The photo must abide by **ALL** rules listed below. By two photos, I mean there should be at least two photos in which you can tell exactly what the person looks like. If it's just two photos of his/her face, **BEWARE**. What does their body look like? What if they have a hunchback? You'll never know because they're only showing you their face! Photos that do **NOT** count toward the two photo minimum include:

- Sunglasses photos. Everyone looks like a million times better in sunglasses because we envision an attractive face behind the sunglasses instead of what they actually look like. What if they're cross-eyed? What if they squint weird? What if, what if, what if?! I don't care if they have 10 different photos. If the guy is wearing sunglasses in all 10, **HE'S HIDING SOMETHING**.
- Photos that they're **NOT** actually in, including: pet photos, photos of their Honda Civic, sunsets, etc.
- Photos where the dude is so far away you can't see what the person looks like. Is that even him??
- People with only super artistic photos where you maybe see the top-half of their eyebrows. We get it, you're "edgy" or whatever.
- Action photos that blur/block people's faces (for example: photos of said person skiing with huge hood and goggles and scarf so basically their nose and mouth are the only things visible).

- Baby photos - unless they still look like a baby, say NO. No one wants to date a man-baby anyway. NOBODY.
- Photos in really bad lighting so you can only see part of their face. Ugh.
- Repeated photos.
- Other red flags:
 - People with only body/ab/shirtless shots (creepy)
 - People with only head shots (hiding something)
 - Super blurry/bad lighting (already mentioned, but needs to be emphasized!!)
 - People with only group photos - not necessarily a definite NO, but come on, how annoying is it when you have to play a guessing game to figure out whose profile it is? I wasn't aware it was okay for grown-ups to still play Guess Who?. This isn't 1995.
 - Say no to "O" faces. If they're making a funny face in every one of their pictures, how do you know what their face ACTUALLY looks like? Proceed with caution, my friends.
 - Excessive selfies. 1 or 2 at most, otherwise the person might not actually have friends/family/other people to take photos for them and that is generally NOT a good thing. It might also mean that they only look attractive at very specific angles. Deceptive, much?
 - They're not smiling in any photos. Might be hiding some jacked up teeth behind them lips, girl.
 - Someone with exclusively glamour shots... They're nice, but that's probably not how they are in real life. Unless they're Fabio.
 - Excessively scandalous photographs. Unless I can tell you're joking, keep your pants on, Wonder Boy.
- Totally legitimate pictures
 - This is just a personal favorite, but you get points if you have photos with grandma/grandpa. It means you are a loving person and stuff. And you will hopefully also like me when I am old and wrinkly, too.

2. THE PROFILE

A. Put some effort in, you lazy biotch.

Alright, let's make one thing clear. Have you lived over a decade? Have you survived things? Do you have a range of emotions? Have you ever said things before? Perfect, you are well-qualified to make an online dating profile. And I'm not talking about one of those SUPER-LAME profiles that I've read a million times over and over again:

"I'm not really good at talking about myself but here it goes. I like to listen to music and hang out with my friends and am also extremely boring."

COOL BRO I'VE NEVER MET ANYONE LIKE YOU BEFORE!

Both you and I know that you're doing yourself a great injustice by describing yourself in such lackluster terms. Yeah, I get that you're lazy and that "you don't really care about this and you just joined this site because your friend told you to do it." I get it. Listen, we're all here on this site for basically the same reason, and telling me what your three favorite movies that I don't care about are isn't going to do you any favors. What couple has ever fallen in love because they both liked Mexican food? When Rihanna fell in love in a

hopeless place, she didn't mean Chipotle. It's just not how it works. You have to be open and honest. You have to let your personality shine through a little bit (it sucks and is annoying as hell to be yourself, I know).

Let's be real about something here. It's very possible--indeed, probable--you will get dates even without a good profile. Maybe you're just one of those sexy-ass people that doesn't even need words. It's all well and good if that's the case. But for the percentage of us who need a little extra *something* to separate us from the rest of the other chumps on that godforsaken dating website--or just don't want to solely attract losers--writing something not lame as hell is key to chatting online with babes all day.*

The best profiles are the ones in which someone has put a little bit of effort into things. Even if the person says something completely whacko, there's something extremely attractive about a guy or girl who is open and honest about who they are and what they've done. Didn't you win the National Tuba Competition in 8th grade? What about that time you fell flat on your ass the first day of college? Were you the chick that saved those kittens from the NYC subway? WORK IT GIRL.

Tell a story about yourself. Tell a dumb joke you find hilarious. Tell us what makes you happy and what makes you sad. Be specific, and don't be shy. Reveal a piece of your personality. Remember, it's not about how many fish you reel in, but what kind of fish. Because you could have 100 Pokemon, but if they're all Magikarp, your life still sucks. Having a profile that shows you're a savvy, intelligent human being is more likely to attract other sexy-ass smart people, too.

**Probably not a good move to chat online ALL day with babes though. More to come in the next rules.*

B. And remember: quality, not quantity. No one's trying to read your 450 page autobiography right now. It's the internet, brah. Our time could be invested in other things such as watching cat videos, so make sure it's not being wasted. Keep it interesting but concise, 'kay?

C. One of the biggest turn-offs for me personally is when I'm reading a profile and the dude doesn't seem happy with himself. Sure, you might be a super awesome person, but if you don't even think so, then why should I? Being positive is really important. Or better yet: just not being negative. You don't need to pretend the world is rainbows and butterflies because life royally blows sometimes and ish happens. But no one wants to date someone who hates themselves.

us on a first date

me: hi how are u

you: ughhhh my lifeee ughh

See? Not cool. Not cool at all. Additionally--and this is for any guys reading this--spare me the whole "I'm such a nice guy and yet I get constantly screwed over by girls, why doesn't anybody love me???" BS because I'm not buying it. You're a whiny little bitch and probably deserved it.

3. BECOME AN INTERNET DETECTIVE

This is where I get serious for five seconds. STALK THE F OUT OF WHOEVER YOU'RE TALKING TO. I might sound crazy for saying this, and maybe I'm just paranoid (my dad's a cop and has indoctrinated fear into me since I was a wee lass--I am the proud owner of a pink bottle of Mace), but when it comes to online dating, your safety is of absolute, utmost importance. It is 100% within your rights to be as private as you want with whomever you're talking to, and it is also your right to seek out as much information as is available to you.

Case in point: I once started talking to a really cute guy online. After being given his first and last name, I found 3 mugshots of the same guy on Google images from 3 separate (semi-recent) arrests. He apparently really enjoyed driving drunk and assaulting people. With some amateur sleuthing skills under my belt, that potential crisis was--thankfully--averted.

- A.** The best way to find out if the person you're talking to is legit is to get their first and last name. This is often easier said than done, but usually an easy way of finding out is: 1) Straight up asking him; or 2) Getting his Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram. The lines get a bit blurrier if the person you're talking to doesn't want to share their information with you--it doesn't make them shady *necessarily*, but it does make it more difficult to see if this person is who they say they are. Google this person, Facebook them, LinkedIn them, whatever you need to do in order to certify their legitimacy as a real human person with real human friends that aren't creepy porn bots or some ish like that.

Terrifying real life example: I was talking to a SUPER HOT guy online and we were scheduled to hang out. An hour before the date he messaged me telling me that the guy in his pictures wasn't him but a "more attractive guy with the same build as him." Ooookay. Just make sure to do your homework, ladies. Unless you're planning a one-way trip to Creepytown, that is.

- B.** On the flip side, don't be an idiot yourself. Knowing how much info you can get from another person's profile and conversations often means that they can get just as much information from you! Google-proof yourself by typing in your name and checking to see what results show up. It's important to make sure your phone number or address isn't on any of those crazy websites where you can look up people's personal information. If you have a unique first name, you should also Google that along with your school's name, too. It turns out that at the time of my graduation from Yale, there were only 3 other girls with the name Raquel. That makes it pretty damn easy for people to find out about me without even knowing my last name! Better to be safe than sorry.

You might also want to take down anything that you don't think fairly represents who you are right now (hint: your decade-old Myspace profile...I'm not judging, promise). I know I'm starting to sound like a nagging mom, but seriously just trust me on this. With the abundance of resources on the internet, do you really want someone's first impression of you to be your Xanga account from 1998? Didn't think so.

4. GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS.

I'm going to tell you something you don't want to hear: you won't like most of the people that message you. In fact, you might not like any of them. The amount of messages that will bore, disturb, offend, or make you feel really weird inside will overwhelm you. It might even turn you away from online dating completely.

I think this is the most crucial point for most women who have never dated online before. Already reluctant about the whole thing in the first place, girls are immediately turned off by the sudden influx of unwanted attention from strange men. Oooh, girl. I feel you on this completely, and for a while I felt kind of hopeless about the whole thing.

And then suddenly it hit me.

I am completely capable of sending messages to guys who aren't creepy, and there is a pretty great chance that they will respond back to me.

Ladies, it is so much easier than you think it is. If you're looking through tons of crappy profiles and you finally glaze over one that doesn't suck, then congratulations, you've just hit the jackpot. Send the poor guy a message--he's probably feeling just as miserable about the whole online dating thing as you are. The statistics for men dating online are so stacked against them anyway that you're actually doing them a service by blessing them with your message. According to the co-founder of OkCupid, women are significantly more likely to receive a response from a guy than the other way around.** Put simply, the odds are in your favor, and you're a damn fool not to take advantage of it!

- A.** But what to write? While writing "Hey" isn't the worst thing to do in the world, it is most definitely the lamest. Give your message some meat. Use his profile as a cheat sheet and focus on things you might have in common or a particular sentence that struck a chord with you. Most importantly, act like you're actually interested in the guy. Ask a question or two so he'll have something to say when he responds to you. By sending a personalized message, you'll set yourself apart from the rest of the other (not as cool) girls who didn't bother to make an effort in the first place.
- B.** Once you get the ball rolling, don't play hard to get. Messaging back promptly is super important. If you let his message sit in your inbox for too long, he'll eventually lose interest in you. Remember, there are thousands of other women on this site, too. Keeping the conversation flowing is key to maintaining interest and eventually scoring a date.
- C.** But don't let this guy hog up your inbox, either. If you've been chatting for over a week and this guy still hasn't made a move, you have two choices: put on your big girl panties and ask him out yourself or move on, *sista*. Any guy who insists on keeping a relationship strictly online is usually pretty shady and likely has something to hide. Plus, chatting for way too long without actually meeting up creates unfair expectations once you eventually do meet. Even when the other person has the best intentions in mind, it's much easier to take on another persona when talking online. There's nothing more charming than an internet Romeo, and there's nothing more alarming than finding out that your Romeo is more like Ron Jeremy.
- D.** With that being said, as tempting as it may be, NO SEXTING--at least not until you meet. First of all, how can you trust that this person you've never met is going to treat you with the respect that you deserve? Secondly, there is so much more to a person than just his picture and profile. For all you know, this hunk you've been talking sexy time with hasn't showered in three weeks, has only

posted pictures of himself from five years ago, or has an incredibly high girl-voice. Imagine how *that* sounds in bed. The fact of the matter is until you see him with your own eyes face-to-face, you really never know for sure.

Okay, so you've been equipped with all the tools you could possibly need to defend yourself in the battlefield of online dating. Wish ya the best, Better Call Saul, and if all else fails, there's always Netflix.

** Source: <http://blog.ted.com/2013/02/14/7-things-we-learned-about-online-dating-from-the-co-founder-of-okcupid/>