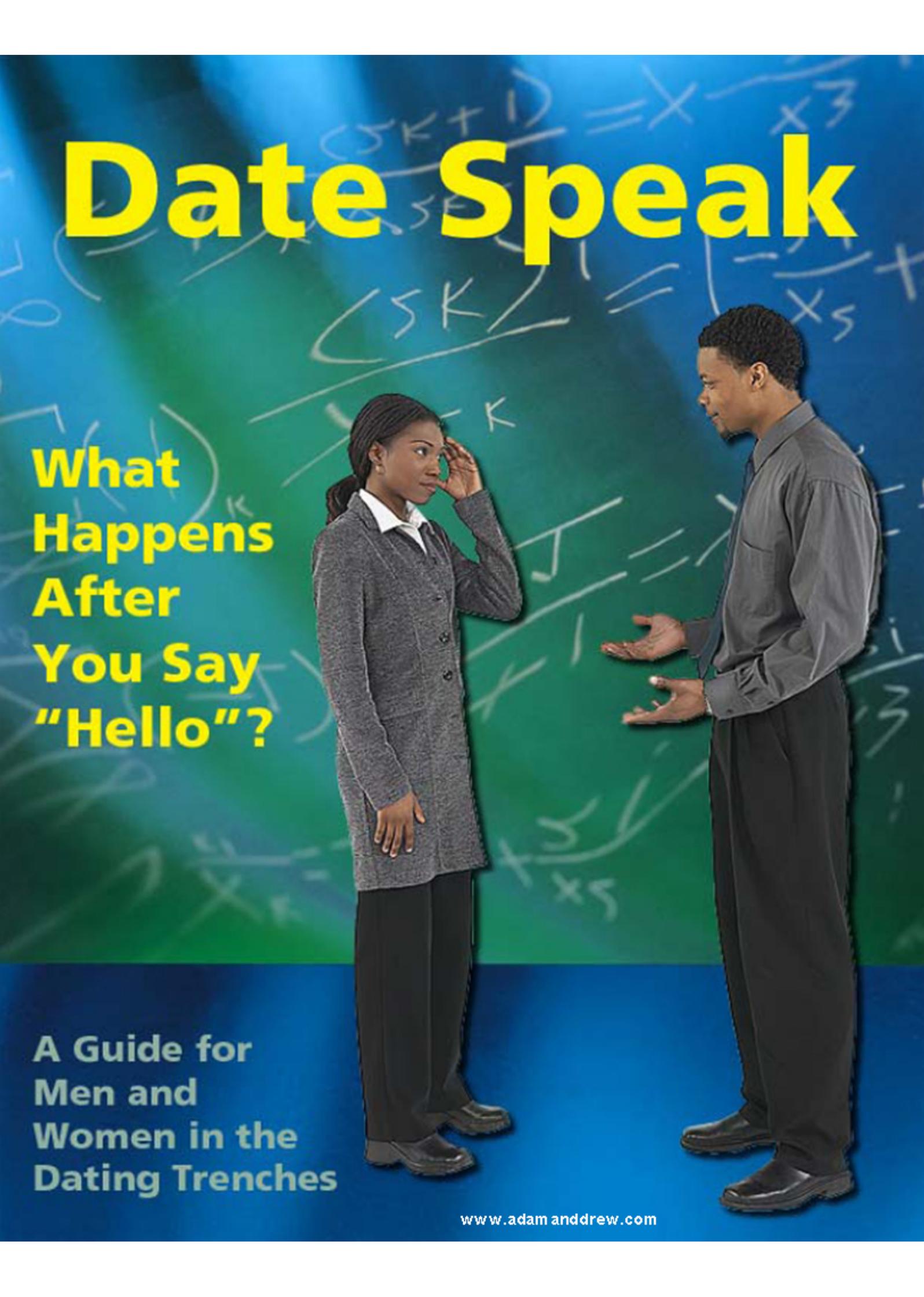


# Date Speak



**What  
Happens  
After  
You Say  
"Hello"?**

**A Guide for  
Men and  
Women in the  
Dating Trenches**

# Table of Contents

<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>I'm Not Tom, You're Not Renee...</i> .....	4
<i>What Date Speak Offers.....</i>	4
<b>HOW WE COMMUNICATE.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Men Versus Women.....</i>	5
<i>Date Speak Solutions: Navigating the Gender Gap .....</i>	6
<b>FIRST-DATE JITTERS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Conquering Self-Doubt.....</i>	7
<i>Acute Shyness.....</i>	7
<i>Date Speak Solutions Practice Positive Self-Talk .....</i>	8
<i>Enjoy Yourself...and Others Will, Too.....</i>	10
<b>CONVERSATION STARTERS.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<i>Opening Lines .....</i>	11
<i>Date Speak Solutions: A Few Good Questions.....</i>	12
<b>CONVERSATION STOPPERS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<i>Taboo Topics.....</i>	12
<i>Putdowns Are Turnoffs .....</i>	13
<b>BRAIN FREEZE AND AWKWARD SILENCES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>Panic Attack!.....</i>	13
<i>Date Speak Solutions: Show Interest.....</i>	14
<b>DATE SPEAK LIBRARY: SUGGESTED READING .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<i>For Your Bookshelf.....</i>	15

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## Introduction

### I'm Not Tom, You're Not Renee...

In the hit 1996 film *Jerry Maguire*, a beleaguered Tom Cruise (in the title role) falls in love with his somewhat shy assistant, Dorothy Boyd (played by Renee Zellweger). The movie garnered great reviews, but it has become better known for a line of dialogue that actually made the American Film Institute's Top 100 Movie Quotes of all time.

As Jerry tries to clumsily explain how much he cares for Dorothy, she gently interrupts him with: "You had me at hello..." Audiences swooned, and the couple joined the ranks of 20th-century dynamic movie duos.

Wouldn't it be great if every line you spoke to a date had such a dramatic cinematic quality and weak-in-the-knees impact? If only! But few of us have Hollywood screenwriters on payroll, so we're stuck with the sometimes goofy lines that flood our brains when we're short on snappy repartee.



### What Date Speak Offers

Help, however, is on the way. *Date Speak* is a down-and-dirty guide to surviving:

- ❖ First-date jitters
- ❖ Acute shyness
- ❖ Brain freeze during conversations
- ❖ Awkward silences and conversation stoppers

With new insights and revelations into how men and women communicate, this easy-to-read book will help you develop the gift of appropriate dating gab, while preventing you from putting your foot in your mouth. Throughout this book, we'll provide practical Date Speak Solutions to your most common problems.

## How We Communicate



**"I'm dating a woman now who, evidently, is unaware of it."**

**—Comedian Garry Shandling**

It probably doesn't surprise you that men and women communicate differently

when negotiating their way through relationships. The reason is relatively straightforward: Put in the most basic terms, we're wired differently.

“Men and women think differently, approach problems differently, emphasize the importance of things differently and experience the world around us through entirely different filters,” notes Dr. Marianne J. Legato in her fascinating new book, *Why Men Never Remember and Women Never Forget*.

Dr. Legato, a professor of clinical medicine at Columbia University who heads the institution's Partnership for Gender-Specific Medicine, believes the distinctions in how we communicate and process information begin in the womb. Anatomy, indeed, may dictate some of our destiny. As Dr. Legato writes, “Our genes set us up for the sex we'll be, and our hormones salt the stew.”

So, what does this “stew” have to do with dating and relationships?

Understanding the differences in the way men and women think can help you communicate better with your dates, whether this is a first-time blind date or an ongoing relationship.

## Men Versus Women

For centuries, scientists assumed male and female brains functioned identically. This seemed somewhat questionable. If you take your young niece to a local toy store and set her loose, she'll automatically make a beeline for the Barbie dolls and princessy makeup kits. Enter the store with your nephew, and the toy trucks, cars and action figures will call his name.

While many would argue that how we're raised—not to mention social influences—dictate such choices, we now know that brain structures and chemistry play a role in how we think.

Women, for example, use more parts of their brains to listen. Men, on the other hand, may have to make a more conscious effort to listen. Women are generally more talkative, while men cut to the chase. Women often stew about incidents or slights that bother them, while men brush them off and move on.

The same goes for reading body language: Women have an easier time reading body language, tone of voice and facial expressions, the main components of nonverbal communication. And as Dr. Legato reminds us, “Not surprisingly, the differences in men's and women's sensitivity to nonverbal cues can be the source of much conflict.” Women become pissy and frustrated when their guys can't gauge their mood and remain unresponsive. They may sulk, cry or slam the door as they leave the



apartment—and their guys are clueless as to what’s going on. Men, in turn, often don’t want to engage in “touchy-feely” discussions or mess around with body language. They’re more focused on “doing” instead of “being.”

## **Date Speak Solutions: Navigating the Gender Gap**

Gender differences can lead to miscommunication, or even outright fights. The solution to this biological conundrum is to recognize the distinct qualities of each sex and learn to work with them. Dr. Legato recommends the following:

- ❖ When a woman dates a guy, she shouldn’t penalize him for being a less-than-perfect listener. Keep things light and, when you want to have a serious conversation, let him know he needs to focus. As for guys, understand that your date expects you to listen to her, and she may send you packing if you fail to pay attention.
- ❖ If you’re at a sporting event, concert or even watching TV at home, don’t try to have a major conversation. Choose a more intimate surrounding.
- ❖ Be honest in your conversations. Nothing is worse than getting caught in a lie that will damage your credibility. Be yourself.
- ❖ Dr. Seuss may have put it best in his classic children’s book, *Horton Hatches the Egg*: “I meant what I said, and I said what I meant.” Say what you mean, as clearly as possible. Don’t try to couch or obfuscate your words. Good communication depends on honesty and clarity.
- ❖ Recognize that men and women are interested in different subjects. He likes soccer; she enjoys classical music. Successful dating and lasting relationships require you to be flexible and open to new experiences. If you insist on meeting someone who shares all of your interests, the pond will offer fewer fish, and you may wind up alone.

## **First-Date Jitters**



**“Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.”**

**—Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.**

Your friend has set you up on a blind date, and you’re nervous about meeting him/her. Or perhaps you’ve asked a coworker to dinner, but you have no idea how to handle yourself outside the office.

First-date jitters are normal. Each of us wants to be liked; it’s a natural human imperative. No one enjoys being rejected, and this is our greatest fear when we prepare to go out with someone

new—someone who has the capacity to say, in short, “Thanks, but no thanks...”

## Conquering Self-Doubt

Pardon our psychobabble, but you won’t get far in the dating world if your self-esteem is in the toilet.

“People are drawn to self-confidence,” notes Dr. Judy Kuriansky in her best-selling book, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Dating*. “I’m not saying you should be an egotistical, selfish narcissist, but neither should you be so humble or self-effacing that you fade into the background or put yourself last.”

Dr. Kuriansky, a clinical psychologist and sex therapist, has treated her fair share of singles who suffer from self-doubt. You need to believe, she asserts, that you offer great date potential. You’re kind, interesting and ready to embrace a new relationship. You have unique talents and abilities, and you feel you have lots to offer to someone special.

If this *doesn’t* describe you, however, you need to work on yourself before you work on a new relationship. Answer these basic questions:

- ❖ What do you dislike about yourself?
- ❖ What do you have to offer a man/woman?
- ❖ What makes you unique?
- ❖ What do your friends see in you?

If you can’t find enough positive things to say about yourself, you may need to visit a counselor to identify the roots of your self-esteem issue. This *doesn’t* mean you’ll need extensive psychotherapy that focuses on all of your childhood frights. Rather, you want to find a therapist who can teach you to feel good about yourself.

Dr. Kuriansky encourages singles to be their own cheerleaders. You need to give yourself “ongoing pep talks to spark up your energy to do your best,” she notes. “When you feel your security waning and your shyness escalating, picture an angel on your shoulder cheering you on: ‘You can do it!’ ”

She also recommends taking yourself out on a date if you are overly jittery. Pick a favorite activity, and make a date with yourself. (Pencil it into your calendar!) Dress up, be on time and go out—with yourself! Have an internal conversation, which will serve as a dress rehearsal for dates with others. Dr. Kuriansky believes this technique can help build your confidence, as well as get to know yourself a little better.

## Acute Shyness

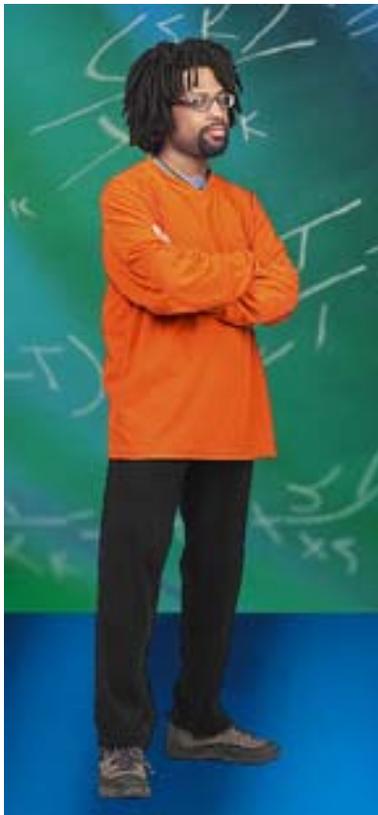


We've all heard the word "shy," but do you know what it actually means?

"One who is shy draws back from others, either because of a withdrawn nature or out of timidity," proffers *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*.

While everyone tends to be nervous before a date, some people are so acutely shy that they become paralyzed at the thought of going out. Crippling shyness, sometimes referred to as "social phobia," has a variety of symptoms:

- ❖ Do you tend to avoid people?
- ❖ Are you afraid to eat in front of another person?
- ❖ Do you break out into a sweat, experience a pounding sensation in your ears, feel your heart beating too fast or skipping beats, or feel faint when you contemplate dating?



If so, you likely suffer from acute shyness. First things first: You have absolutely nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about.

Shyness occurs for many reasons. It may date back to traumatic experiences in elementary school, when you were teased by other kids or were the last to be chosen for a kickball game. Maybe you were sheltered during your early adolescent years, trailing behind all of the other kids who were dating regularly. Or perhaps you have never been comfortable in social situations, wanting to hide in the shadows or avoid revealing yourself to others.

Again, you may want to seek counseling to get to the bottom of the problem. Shyness can interfere with other areas of your life, such as work and day-to-day interactions. It pays to root out the causes and make behavioral modifications.

One of the most useful techniques is also the simplest: deep-breathing exercises. Sit in a comfortable chair, close your eyes, and take deep breaths. Concentrate on the air entering and leaving your lungs. Breathe rhythmically, and focus on every breath. Notice how your body feels—how anxiety leaves your muscles and you become less tense.

### **Date Speak Solutions Practice Positive Self-Talk**

Psychologists and communication experts urge shy singles to engage in positive "self-talk." This means replacing the negative messages that swirl around in your head ("I hate the idea of approaching a man/woman I've never met") with more positive ones ("I am really looking forward to meeting someone new.").

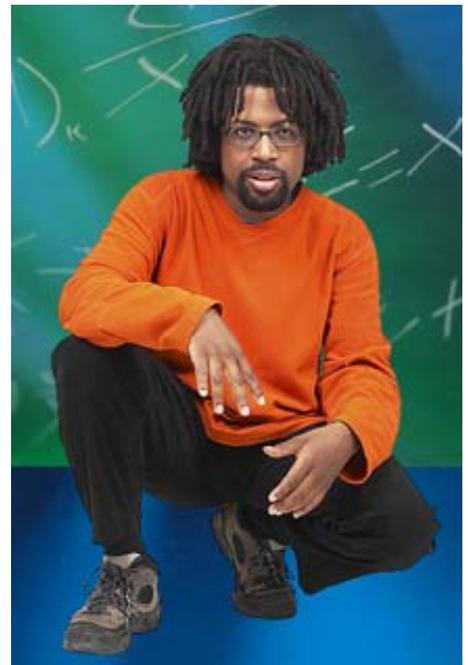
See if you can reframe the negative messages on the next page with positive ones:

1. "I'm too nervous to go to the party this weekend, so I think I'll just stay home." (Possible response: "I would welcome the opportunity to meet one interesting person.") \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
2. "I will probably have a terrible time if I go to the party." \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
3. "I'm not a very interesting person." \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
4. "I'm positive that no one will want to talk with me." \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
5. "I'll make a fool out of myself." \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Reframing your worries and anxieties—turning a negative statement into a positive one—is the first step toward building your self-confidence. "By replacing shy and often detrimental self-talk with confidence-building statements, you can initiate the process of changing how you feel," notes communications trainer Don Gabor in his extremely useful book, *Talking with Confidence for the Painfully Shy*. "Whenever you hear that destructive voice in your head start to undermine your confidence, say to yourself, 'Stop!' Then decide to replace subverting self-talk with constructive statements that build your self-esteem."

Gabor recommends practicing positive self-talk *before* you show up at a social event or make a date:

- ❖ First, set aside some time for a practice session, and select a relaxing place where there will be no interruptions. He suggests scheduling your session before breakfast, while you work out at the gym, during a morning walk or right before bedtime.



- ❖ Imagine an upcoming date or social event, and determine the types of interactions that make you most anxious (walking into the room, approaching someone new, mingling with strangers).
- ❖ Next, visualize the scene, and imagine what it would be like to find yourself in the thick of things. Image all of the details: the sights, the sounds, the smells—even what everyone else is wearing.
- ❖ Finally, imagine what you would do and say in this scene. Be specific! How would you stand, talk, interact and carry yourself? How would you feel?

“If a negative thought creeps in, acknowledge it as a confidence-buster and swiftly substitute it with positive self-talk,” Gabor instructs.

### Enjoy Yourself...and Others Will, Too

CNN talk show host Larry King offers another solution in his book, *How to Talk to Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere: The Secrets of Good Communication*: “The best way I’ve found to overcome shyness is to remind yourself of the old saying that the person you’re talking to puts his pants on one leg at a time... That cliché is an effective way of illustrating that we are all human beings, so just because you’re talking to a college professor with four degrees or an astronaut who has flown in space at 18,000 miles an hour or someone who has been elected governor of your state doesn’t mean you should come unglued.”



As he later points out, other people will have a better time talking to you if they see you enjoying yourself. If they detect nervousness, they may become nervous themselves and, finding the conversation uncomfortable, move on.

### Conversation Starters



**“In my entire life, I’ve had two guys come up to me and ask me out. Other than that, I have had to go and try to spend time with them, or sort of start the conversation—basically like spell it out in a Sharpie, you know?”**

**—Actress Jennifer Love Hewitt**

Remember our opening story about Tom Cruise and Renee Zellweger in *Jerry Maguire*? Love at first sight and “You had me at hello...”—magical moments, aren’t they? In a word, yes. While Hollywood screenwriters excel at keeping us entertained, they tug at our heartstrings with scintillating dialogue that ultimately fuels unrealistic expectations. Sure, falling in love at first

sight is a lovely concept, but for most of us the process takes a bit more work.

## Opening Lines

In real life, you spot someone with whom you would like to start a conversation. You smile and try to get a vibe off this person. If he/she seems receptive, you sidle up and break the ice with an opening line.

But what, exactly, do you say? You certainly don't want to be the movie cliché who opens with "What's your sign?"—probably the worst pickup line in the history of dating. Let's take a run-of-the-mill example and see what you would do:

You spot a guy/girl at a party and feel an attraction. You're not sure whether any overture you make will be reciprocated, but it's certainly worth a try. You move to where Mr./Ms. Possibility is standing and say:

1. "Hi...Um...My name is \_\_\_\_\_. Who are you?"
2. "I love your jacket. May I feel the fabric?"
3. "You seem to be having a good time. I thought I'd check out this corner of the room."

If you selected Answer #1, your overture seems awkward and exudes self-doubt. It's a clumsy way to begin a conversation.

As for Answer #2, it's a little creepy. Would you want a perfect stranger to intrude on your personal space and start touching your clothing? Thought not.

Answer #3 is an appropriate statement. You share your observations and approach your "target" with confidence—but not with a cocky sense of overconfidence. You have a chance to gauge how the other person reacts to your ice breaker.

Of course, there's really no script that offers a foolproof approach to initiating contact. (If so, everyone would be using it, and it would soon become boring and clichéd.) Instead, you want to seize the moment and utter something completely appropriate that fits into the context of the social situation. Dr. Kuriansky believes the most important principle to keep in mind is honesty: Be yourself. Don't try to be someone you aren't or to impress the other person. You're at your most charming, she notes, when you are genuine: "being open, honest and yourself. Whatever is in your mind and heart will come out naturally and sincerely, and that's going to be far more appealing than some contrived statement."



## Date Speak Solutions: A Few Good Questions

There's absolutely nothing wrong with developing a mental list of questions you'd like to use when talking to someone new—just as long as you don't pull a sheet of paper from your pocket and begin interviewing him/her! Come up with about three general topics that can serve as the basis of conversation. You may want to consider:

- ❖ Something you've recently read or a television program you enjoy (“Are you a *Simpsons* fan?”)
- ❖ As simple as it sounds, the weather (“Man, I can't believe how heavily it's raining....”)
- ❖ Work (“So, how do you spend your workdays?”)
- ❖ Hobbies/interests (“I was skiing last weekend, and it was great! Do you ski?”)

Debra Fine, a professional communications trainer and author of *The Fine Art of Small Talk*, suggests the following conversation starters in her book:

- ❖ “What do you think about this party/restaurant/movie?”
- ❖ “What was it like in the town where you grew up?”
- ❖ “What is a typical day like for you?”
- ❖ “Tell me something people would never guess about you.”

Starting a conversation, Fine says, is not really as hard as you might think, “and the best part is that it puts you in charge of your own destiny,” she writes. “Instead of waiting for someone—anyone—to talk to you, you choose your conversation partner. What a concept: You get to select someone.”

Whatever you do, don't turn simple questions into an interrogation. You're simply using them as a tool to get the conversation going. Be sure to listen to what the other person is saying, and react to his/her comments. Share similar experiences, and ask additional questions to keep the conversation moving. Remember: A conversation is a give-and-take, so don't hog the spotlight. Be an equal participant, and show genuine interest in what the other person has to say.

## Conversation Stoppers



**“Nothing is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable.”**

**—French poet Jean De La Fontaine**

## Taboo Topics

Some topics should be avoided when you're dating—whether it's a first date or you're in the early getting-to-know-you phase. This list is topped by controversial topics like religion,

abortion, politics and other subjects that can breed enmity. These topics should be saved until you know each other well enough to engage in conversations that may turn heated. It's important to note, however, that these topics are a general reflection of a person's core values, says Dr. Erika Pluhar, a human-sexuality researcher at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, and coauthor of *Sexual Etiquette 101 & More*. If a relationship begins to turn serious, you'll need to know where your guy or gal stands on such subjects.

“Ultimately, it becomes difficult to form a deep, long-term relationship with someone with whom you have core-values conflicts,” Dr. Pluhar says. “Thus, as a relationship develops, people can begin to get a sense of each other's fundamental beliefs by having deeper and more intimate conversations. In the beginning stages, you often can get clues about what these core values and beliefs are from the initial conversations you have with a person, even if they are not stated explicitly.”

### Putdowns Are Turnoffs

Criticizing everything around you is another conversation stopper, according to Susan RoAne, an expert in speech and author of *What Do I Say Next?* This includes badmouthing people, gossiping and spreading rumors, and dissing the waiters or other service people.

“Diminishing others does not demonstrate superiority,” she notes. “It just shows a lack of conversational skill, compounded by a lack of self-confidence and savvy. People who are self-confident and comfortable in their own skin do not put others down as a means of building themselves up.”

Also watch the sarcasm, even if you tend to be a funny person who enjoys using humor. As RoAne states, sarcasm can be both confusing and unpleasant, and the person you are with will be waiting for you to unleash your tongue on him/her.



### Brain Freeze and Awkward Silences



**“I’ve found that if I say what I’m really thinking and feeling, people are more likely to say what they really think and feel. The conversation becomes a real conversation.”**

**—Psychologist and author Carol Gilligan**

### Panic Attack!

You're on a date, and you've been following our *Date Speak* guidelines. All of a sudden, however, you find yourself tongue-tied and unsure about what to say next. You have that deer-

in-the-headlights look, and you're beginning to panic. It's happened to all of us, so hang in there!

### **Date Speak Solutions: Show Interest**

One of the most effective ways to dig yourself out of the “what do I say next?” conversation hole is to ask your date a question. By getting him/her to talk, you reinvigorate the discussion and have something new to share.

Dating is all about creating connections, says therapist Nina Atwood, author of *Date Lines*. During a first date, be sure to “keep the conversation fairly light,” she advises. “First dates are not an opportunity to bare your soul or have a therapy session.” Instead, talk about your background (abridged version, please!), your hobbies and interests.

You should also listen more than you speak, she notes, to maintain a conversation, avoid brain freeze and minimize awkward silences. Here are some basic guidelines for success:

- ❖ Share something about yourself, and give your date an opportunity to add his/her comments.
- ❖ Don't get caught up in the need to keep the conversation flowing. Conversations are not TV interviews, and your job is to relax and share—not grill your date. Just be yourself, and take your time. This isn't a race, so you don't have to fill every minute by gabbing.
- ❖ Focus on the moment—not what you said a few minutes ago, and not what you're going to say after your date finishes speaking. By keeping your mind relaxed and receptive, you won't feel as though you're in a structured debate. Talk, listen...repeat. Remember to smile. Keep the pace comfortable.
- ❖ Above all, be present. Don't worry about what's going to happen next. Concentrate on what's happening *now*. Savor the moment, and allow yourself to enjoy your date's company.

### **Date Speak Library: Suggested Reading**



We hope that *Date Speak* has given you the confidence you need to improve your dating life. All of the experts featured in this text have written books that can provide more information on specific dating topics. The following list showcases some great additions to your dating bookshelf. They're available at your local bookstore or through major online booksellers.

## **Useful Links**

<http://www.AdamandDrew.com>

## **For Your Bookshelf**

### **Date Lines: Communication from “Hello” to “I Do” and Everything in Between**

By Nina Atwood

Henry Holt and Company, Inc., New York

### **How to Talk to Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere: The Secrets of Good Communication**

By Larry King

Three Rivers Press, New York

### **Sexual Etiquette 101 & More**

By Robert Hatcher, Shannon Colestock, Erika Pluhar and Christian Thrasher

Bridging the Gap Communications, Dawsonville, Georgia

### **Talking with Confidence for the Painfully Shy: How to Overcome Nervousness, Speak Up, and Speak Out in Any Social or Business Situation**

By Don Gabor

Three Rivers Press, New York

### **The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Dating**

By Dr. Judy Kuriansky

Alpha Books, Indianapolis, Indiana

### **The Fine Art of Small Talk: How to Start a Conversation, Keep It Going, Build Networking Skills—and Leave a Positive Impression!**

By Debra Fine

Hyperion, New York

### **What Do I Say Next? Talking Your Way to Business and Social Success**

By Susan RoAne

Warner Books, New York

### **Why Men Never Remember and Women Never Forget**

By Marianne J. Legato, MD, FACP

Rodale Books, Emmaus, Pennsylvania

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