Online Love 101

A crash course in the rules, attitudes and lingo of cyber dating—and finding what works best for you.

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Easy does it

When HIVers discover online dating, they can move way too fast. “Guys will jump on a plane to meet this girlfriend of mine just based on her photo,” says HIVer Sheri Kaplan, executive director of hetero-friendly Positive Connections (www.positiveconnections.org). Fly-by-night romances often fail, so go slow. HIVer Maria Mejía of Miami found her man of three years online—but they didn’t meet for a year. “I’m very picky,” she says.

Less is more

Online, it’s tempting to pour your heart out, but hold off on lengthy professions of undying love. Andy Wysocki, cofounder of www.bigmuscle.com, a popular gay site, gives guys only a small space to send messages—a healthy technological limitation. “You have less room to make a fool of yourself,” he says.

Yuk it up

It takes a sense of humor to survive HIV, right? So go ahead and let yours out, whether you’re updating your profile or writing an e-mail to a new crush. Bryan, a Massachusetts HIVer, safe-sex educator and online veteran once ran an ad that began “HIV Positive, 100% USDA infected and inspected.” And now he’s taken!

Can the judgments

Some HIVers avoid people who look “AIDS-y” and steer clear of profiles with no pic, just in case. But “people have a soul, not just a face,” Kaplan reminds us. Judge your dating prospects on both.

Go old-school

Internet romancing triggers instant gratification—and frustration. “People expect to hear back right away when they send a message,” Wysocki says, “but courting is still old-school.” Give people 48 hours, at least, to get back to you—and keep the high-school melodrama to a minimum.

Chat live

The anonymity of e-mail allows some people to blossom while others “can’t type their feelings into words,” Bryan says. So when you’re ready, see how the verbal communication goes—but don’t call

from home! (see “Keep It Safe,” below).

Set time limits

Online cruising can be addictive—and a huge time sucker. “People will ask us to delete their profiles because they get addicted—they start clicking and a couple hours will have gone by,” says Wysocki. An hour a day should do.

Don’t use only personals

Excited newbies can become depressed when Web wooing doesn’t work. Make online personals only one of several strategies to find love (See “All the Right Places”). “Not giving up is the key,” says happily partnered Bryan. “I am the king of not giving up!”

Keep it safe

- **Don’t give out important personal information,** such as your full name, until you’re sure your new online pal is legit.
- **When you’re ready to talk on the phone,** use your cell. Let your new paramour earn your trust before giving out your home number.
- **On first dates**, meet in a public setting.
- **Give a friend** your date’s name and number before you meet.
- **If you travel** to another city to meet someone for the first time, stay in a hotel.

The Perfect Personal

Taking a Slick Pic

DO:

- Look ’em in the eye “Eye contact creates intimacy,” says Michael Halliday, POZ designer, photographer and online dater. “Look into the camera, and don’t stand too far away—pictures should be chest-up or closer,” he says. “And, please, lose the sunglasses and hats.”
- Smile “You’ll attract love!” Halliday says. Get a friend to make you laugh while you pose. If you’re using film, shoot a whole roll. Digital photogs snap away, but make sure to use the highest pixel setting.
- Watch your back (ground) “If you’re wearing dark clothes, stand against a light background and vice-versa,” Halliday says. The contrast makes you pop—“you want to get noticed, right?”

DON’T:

- Use flash Flash can cause red-eye and blow out the details of your face, obscuring your

personality. “Take your pictures in natural, preferably diffused, light, like you get on a cloudy day,” Halliday says. The worst time to shoot? High noon.

- Use a disposable camera “They take terrible pictures,” says Halliday. “But if you have no other choice—say, you’re on vacation—take the photo in natural light.” Vacations, by the way, make for great photo-ops, since you’re at your most relaxed. “Just make sure it’s not from Greece 10 years ago,” Halliday adds.
- Show your pets...or other people. “The focus should be on you,” Halliday says. “Pun intended.”

Writing the Right Profile

Handle it
A terrific screen name can be just as alluring as a hot pic. To create one, think of adjectives (tall, funny) and nouns (chef, dog lover) that capture what’s special about you, then put ’em together. Are you a fun-loving, Italian gourmet? Then you’re FunItalFoodie! Locations (“NYLover”) are catchy, too.

Be honest
About your age, weight and other vital stats. “Why does every guy online have a big uncut dick?” asks positive therapist Michael Shernoff. As one HIVer says, “Your BS will catch up with you.”

Be specific
You want people to know you—describe your life, your past, present and future, likes and dislikes, career and interests. Stumped? Ask a friend to take a stab at a first draft.

SINGLES ISO…

Top Guy
Bronx, NY | 40 | MSM
5´7´´ Puerto Rican gay man looking for someone who likes art, movies, music and poetry for love, romance...and sex!

Loving Him
Bronx, NY | 50 | WSM
Medium-height Latin lady and loving people person wants tall, handsome, husky and romantic Latino male for friendship and romantic possibilities. Let’s walk on the beach or in the park!

Bass buddy
Houston, TX | 44 | MSW

Stocky, 5´7´´
Lover of NASCAR and bass fishing seeks sweet woman to share my Houston home with. Let’s go dancing, walk on the beach or just catch a good movie together

Cuban prince
West Hollywood, CA | 39 | MSW
Young-at-heart straight guy who lives life to fullest seeks a woman who enjoys going out as much as quiet hikes, cuddling and conversation.

Sexy tiff
Philadelphia, PA | 27 | WSM
Very funny and attractive female seeking the same in a male, for friends first,then hopefully a commitment. Let’s be ourselves and learn new things together!

Bulldog lover
New York, NY | 56 | MSM
5´9´´ ex-fashionista, sometime comedian, organizer of French-bulldog meet-up group seeks fellow dog lover with taste and integrity for monogamous mad affair leading to matrimony. Let’s travel the world in our love induced haze.

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