

The ABC of Speed Dating

Supercharge your social life with dates

By Ramon Thomas, South Africa's #1 Dating Coach

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Why Speed Dating?

My first speed dating event was back in 2003. Little did I know what I was getting myself into. A website advertised the first speed dating event to be held in South Africa and that it was going to be taped for an [SABC3](#) television show. Anyway I showed up and next thing you know it turns out the show is [Below the Belt](#), hosted by the man/woman called [The Baroness](#). Next I proceeded to enjoy myself talking to all the new women I was meeting. And moving from one to the next. It was like having your cake and eating it. What I could not predict was that my little “date” with the Baroness was going to be recorded for the show. This was awkward as you can imagine. Well thank God it's called speed dating.

The science author [James Gleick](#) wrote an entire book about the acceleration of just about everything. And it's no surprise that even business people are choosing speed dating for corporate match making to try and save time. Most people's experience of time is linear and that's it's a limited resource. In fact if you can improve the quality of the activities you are partaking in, it has been shown that you will perceive a more effective use of your time. And the co-founder of NLP, Richard Bandler, has also popularised a concept called [Time Distortion](#), where you can slow time down by increasing your internal clock.

You are busy and you know it. That's likely why you are trying speed dating. And maybe your social life has suffered because of the lack of time to go out and meet new people. You could have friends who are all married. Maybe you moved to a new town and don't know anyone. All these and more are valid reasons for considering speed dating.

Some benefits of speed dating include:

- You can be sure the other people is there for the same reason
- Physical attraction does count (more for men, then women)
- Chemistry can be assessed pretty almost immediately
- First impressions last
- No fear of rejection (especially for men)
- Women don't need to be exposed to cheesy pick-up lines
- Direct questions can be asked e.g. “How important is sex to you?”

History of Speed Dating

Speed dating is a formalized matchmaking process or dating system (a variant of a meeting system where the purpose is to enjoy romantic or friendship dates rather than decide anything). It originated in Jewish circles in the US as a way to ensure that more Jewish singles met each other in large cities where they were outnumbered by non-Jews. It has been made more popular by its use on dating game shows, e.g. *The 5th Wheel*, and has recently become popular in the gay community. Supporters argue that speed dating simply saves time, as most people decide if they are romantically compatible very quickly, and first impressions are usually permanent.

In the original idea of speed dating, men and women are rotated to meet each other for only eight minutes each, are forced to the next round no matter how much they are enjoying the interaction (or dread the next one), then submit to the organizers a list of who they would like to see again (a form of approval voting since any number of suitors can be approved). If there is a match, phone numbers are forwarded. They cannot be traded during the initial eight-minute meeting, to reduce pressure (especially on women) to accept or reject a suitor to their face.

Critics of speed dating say it's shallow and tends to reinforce first impressions, which are often shallow to begin with. A scientific view of speed dating is that eight minutes is more than sufficient to determine if the range of a mate's hormones, a key indicator of immunities, is complementary (different) from one's own. This is claimed by some researchers to be the key factor in the so-called "first impression", and since it is olfactory (smell-based), there is no need for two individuals considering child-raising to spend more time on first impressions, it being more important to "sniff out" other mates. Another criticism of speed dating is that it tends to put less extroverted subjects at a disadvantage, while those with low self-esteem have been known to experience depression or even attempt suicide if their efforts at speed dating are unsuccessful. None of these views seem to contradict each other, and speed dating grows in popularity perhaps due to the very objections that have been raised to it.

[Source: Wikipedia](#)

Speed Dating vs. Online Dating/Cellphone Dating

The word “speed dating” was officially entered into Oxford dictionary in 2004. The official definition "an organised social activity in which people have a series of short conversations with potential partners in order to determine whether there is mutual interest."

Comparisons are always made between different methods of dating like speed dating, online dating, or cellphone dating. As you know understand what speed dating is about let's briefly consider the other two options. In online dating you normally register on a website, create a profile and pay a monthly fee to be able to contact all members. In cellphone dating you can either use a SMS/text messaging platform or the WAP-sites (mobile websites) to view profiles and contact relevant people. In both cases you have to eventually meet people face to face and thus speed dating shortens this, sometimes laborious process of trying to get together with the opposite sex.

Again with online dating and cellphone dating you may never meet people because you found them undesirable based on the online interaction. This could be seen as a benefit and time saving mechanism as well. The detailed profiles on online dating websites are excellent in filtering out unwanted criteria, whether that be smoking or someone from a different cultural or religious background. With speed dating even if the person looks and dresses stylish that does not guarantee you will be compatible. This is where you have to trust your instincts and where this ebook will come in useful. People always put their best face forward and perhaps even assume a more outgoing persona to impress during those few minutes of meeting new people. With online dating the communication takes may take place via the website, then email and later telephone. This is a sometimes unnecessary delay in the process of meeting people. So many men and women are absolutely convinced that chemistry is very important. And again this is where speed dating triumphs over other forms of dating using technology.

Currently there are many more people who are registered with online dating websites than have participated in speed dating events that will change as the speed dating continues to enter into the mainstream in South Africa. The major drawback to speed dating according to Bodman Dark, author of *The Little Book on Speed Dating*, is that there is no “quality control.”

Just like internet dating, you are meeting strangers, and common sense should be applied in all cases.

Speed Dating and Prince Charming

I hear it's hard to meet people these days. But it's not. Just last night I met my self-professed Prince Charming – a cretin named Phil, who spouted pick-up lines like they were hard-core philosophy. Rather, it's hard to meet a person with whom you would swap your phone number. If you can relate, maybe speed dating is the answer.

Speed dating involves going on a series of 'mini-dates', which last between 3 and 10 minutes each. The events are usually held at a restaurant or bar, and are hosted by an organiser. Equal numbers of men and women are invited, according to age and similar interests.

Each person is given a scorecard, on which to mark any potential matches. At the end of the evening you hand in the card, and if the interest was mutual, you will be rewarded with an e-mail address. The rest is then up to you.

While I cannot guarantee that Prince Charming will not turn up at one of these events, you won't be forced to listen to his soliloquy about your heavenly aspect for long. Then, by simply not ticking his name, you will never have to hear from the cretin again.

On the other hand, Prince Fairly Decent may turn up. The odds are in your favour. With between 10 and 20 men to interview, it's likely that you will find at least one who tickles your fancy. At the very least, you are bound to make a friend or two. Experiences this nerve-racking and this much fun are bonding.

Speed dating evenings also make for an interesting girls' night out. There are regular breaks between the dates to catch up on the gossip that will be recounted many a time over many a cocktail. You don't have to be intimidated by the thought of going on a first date alone, and he is spared the intimidating thought of chatting you, and all your friends, up together.

The concept of speed dating is based on the concept of like-at-first-sight. Like, not love. While his pheromones may make your toes curl and your fingers tingle, speed dating is not about finding true love. Critics of speed dating claim that 3 minutes is not enough to establish a relationship. But this is how speed dating differs from traditional matchmaking services. It's about meeting new people. Forget the wedding bells.

Speed dating is the product of today's hectic lifestyle. In 3 hours, you could go on as many as 30 dates, without any commitment. In normal time, that many dates could take in excess of 90 hours. You save at least 87 hours, very many phone calls, cancellations, rain checks and uncomfortable silences.

Signing up for an event is equally quick and easy. At the end of this booklet we supply you with the contact details of speed dating organisers we recommend. Once you've registered they'll normally be in touch via email newsletters or email invitations. Cost can vary anywhere from **R120 to R300** per event. So much for costs because anyone who can save me the trauma of an entire evening out with Prince Charming deserves so much more.

Body Language Secrets for Speed Dating

Humans are remarkably similar to animals. Despite the faculty of speech, most human communication occurs through body language. And now speed dating, like animal courtship, allows you the chance to choose a partner based on a short period of strutting and posing. Your date is not going to jump into your lap and pull ticks out of your hair, so you need to learn how send and receive the subtleties of body language.

Your date likes you if:

They smile at you. A 'true' smile is one which changes rapidly from a small movement to a broad expression, and crinkles the corners of the eyes.

Their pupils dilate.

Their eyebrows rise and fall as soon as he sees you (also known as the eyebrow flash)

They maintain eye contact. But, if, at some point in the conversation, he drops his

gaze to look downwards, it means he feels comfortable with you.

They mirror your body language. We subconsciously imitate people we like, even to the point of speaking like them.

Their legs are pointed in your direction.

If you like your date, then:

Smile.

Don't fidget or cross your arms. This will tell them that you feel uncomfortable in their presence. This is especially important for men.

During the course of the conversation, lean forward. But respect personal space. To lean forward too early into the date is threatening. If they leans forward too, you know the feeling is mutual, but if they sits back, relax.

Don't touch them. After only 3-5 minutes touching is uncalled for.

Look at them while they are speaking, but don't stare. Tilt your head to one side to show your interest (just like mommy did when you were a little baby).

Mirror their behaviour, but not to the point that you look as though you are making fun of them.

For women flick your hair, gently and sparingly.

There are unfortunately shady characters out there. So beware if:

- They won't make eye contact with you. It's widely believed that to look left while speaking indicates the person is lying.
- They fidget and cross arms. This is a sign of being uncomfortable or anxious around you. It may just be the case that they are shy or getting cold feet but do you really want to spend valuable time getting through their persona?
- They lean too far into your personal space or try to touch you.
- Their gestures are wide and aggressive. Pointing, raising their voice and sudden movements are all aggressive.
- If they behave in congruent e.g. when their body tells you one thing, but their speech tells you another. Body language is generally taken to be more revealing, because it is largely unconscious. Remember voice tone and body language accounts for as much as 93% of all communication.

But bear in mind that when a dog wags his tail, it means he's happy. When a cat wags his tail, beware. Every person is different. Don't base your diagnosis on one signal, but rather on a at least few supporting ones. Most body language experts favour the “Rule of Four”, which means looking for at least four things which suggest the same thing before believing. The most counter intuitive concept about body language is in fact being in control of your own body language and being aware of what signals you are sending. The Rule of Four can be difficult to gauge unless you're a real expert because of how quickly the signals are sent.

First Impressions

Obviously, physical appearance is important, especially on the dating scene. But, it dawned on me after the first few episodes of “Show Me the Mommy” that we forget the real reason that physical appearance is important. The outer package tells us about the inner person. And men wonder why women spend so much time in front of the mirror?

Looking good

On a speed date, physical appearance acts as shorthand to your personality. People are more drawn to you if you look like you take care of yourself. The reasoning is that you treat others the way you treat yourself. So make sure, especially, that your nails and hair are clean, and that you smell good. This is especially important for men who normally don't take good care of these things. Pay attention and get a girlfriend to give you a last minute once-over before going out and meeting 10 or 15 new women. You will be eternally grateful for this sage advice.

The Scent of Love?

Deodorant and perfume are perfect examples of how to reveal the ‘inner you’. It is said that a perfume you cannot smell is perfect for you because it blends into, and thus compliments, your natural body odour. By choosing a certain perfume, you are choosing a certain identity. A sweet scent suggests innocence, while a more musky scent suggests a stronger personality. For Men we recommend speed stick as deodorant and the best cologne like DOLCE & GABBANA for Men, DREAMER For Men By Versace and ACQUA DI GIO For Men By Giorgio Armani. For Women we recommend the best perfume like GREEN TEA by

Elizabeth Arden, Estee Lauder Intuition and Yves Saint Laurent Opium.

Fashion Right

Dress is perhaps the most important indicator of your personality. The way you dress alerts your date to things like social status or class. A lawyer dresses differently to a student. Dress is highly sensitive to fashion. That doesn't mean becoming a fashion slave, but remember that your date's taste is probably steered by what parades through the pages of fashion magazines. One thing I like to do is even if I'm not wearing the latest fashion is to make fun of people who do because that says that I "get it."

Dress can also tell more personal things about you. The key is in the detail. An unusual belt may suggest a more unusual personality. Before the speed dating evening, choose at least one item of clothing or jewellery with personal meaning. For Men another area where you want to pay special attention and wear one so-called peacocking-type item on your body. This will allow the women to comment on that cool ring or shirt you're wearing. Women are used to being told they look beautiful and gorgeous so avoid those stale compliments and try to observe something unique or original about her. You'll feel special wearing the item, and that will come across in your behaviour.

Ultimately, wear something that looks smart, but that you feel comfortable in. The more comfortable you feel, the more comfortable you will look. Speed dating events can be fairly nerve-wracking so you don't want to put additional pressure on yourself. When you are nervous, it is not that easy to 'be yourself'. Dressing in a way that represents your personality, cuts out half the work. If you're unsure stick to the basics.

Remember that Smile

When you are nervous, it is all too easy to forget the most important detail. But don't forget to smile. Smiling triggers the release of hormones that make you feel happy. That doesn't include the mutant, strained smile that is born out of stressful situations, but a genuine smile.

Be Real

Speed dating is all about meeting people we feel a connection with, and that we feel comfortable with. It is all too easy to lie and pretend to be what you feel your date may be

looking for. But, that also means you might get stuck on a longer date with someone you have nothing in common with. Let your appearance tell the story, and don't be afraid to embrace the cliché – be yourself. And to take this one step further pretend this person is an old friend and they will warmly receive you and engage you in rapport.

Conversation Tips

Have you ever played the dating game where the other person answers only in one word answers? It is not that much fun.

“So, how are you?” you ask, a little nervously, because the beginning of a date is always the most awkward.

“Fine.”

“Great...So, what do you do?”

“Accountant.”

By the end of the evening, you are either staring suicidally into your cup of coffee or engaged in a monologue with yourself about the weather, the venue, and a niggling pain in your toe.

Speed dating, fortunately, means that the pain is distributed evenly, and so no one person has to be subjected to Mr/Miss One-Word for too long. But if you are Mr/Miss One-Word you have just wasted an evening and many a precious word. So here are some simple guidelines to a scintillating conversation.

Cat got your tongue?

No matter if you speak one word or ten, if you don't speak clearly your date won't have a clue what you are saying. The conversation will run something along the lines of “Huh? Sorry, I didn't quite catch that...Pardon?” And when your date gets tired of that, there will be the puzzled, but otherwise blank, stare, accompanied by the slow nod. People who mumble are often thought to be shy and to lack self-confidence, which is a definite dating turn-off. Not only that, but your date won't be able to get to know you, and so won't have anything on which

to base his decision at the end of the evening.

Dating, never mind speed dating, can be nerve-wracking. When we get nervous we not only resort to a variety of bad fidgeting habits, but we also speak faster. Speaking fast, although sometimes taken to be sign of intelligence, also makes it more difficult for your date to make sense of what you are saying. On the other hand, don't speak too slowly or over-pronounce your words either, because your date may think you a bit thick. You also want avoid driving your date to boredom.

At a loss for words?

A speed date lasts only between 3 and 10 minutes, so you don't really have time to chitchat about the weather, the venue, and the niggling pain in your toe. While the general tone of your conversation will give an idea about your chemistry, you also need information that will describe your compatibility on an intellectual level. "What do you do?" and "What are your hobbies?" are some frequently used questions, and the answers contain vital information for the compatibility test. But when you have asked and been asked these same questions over and over it can get fairly boring.

Ask questions about things you are interested in. If you are interested in music, ask about your date's musical taste or what they thought of your favourite band's latest CD. Find out about your date's interests. Questions that have only a 'yes' or 'no' answer will prove unhelpful, unless followed by a more probing 'why' question. Throw in an unusual question to spice up the conversation – "If you were stranded on a desert island but could choose to take three things with you, what would those three things be?" or "What is the craziest thing you have ever done?"

It might be useful to plan what questions you are going to ask, especially if you are the type of person who gets easily flustered. But that doesn't mean that you have to follow the questions verbatim. The questions are merely meant to help the conversation flow. Key to keeping the conversation flowing is balance. Don't dominate the conversation, and don't allow the other person to dominate either.

A speed dating evening will give you the ideal opportunity to test and perfect your conversation skills. Just remember, above any other advice I can give you, be yourself – yourself at your best.

Speed Dating Cheat Sheet

The simplest definition of speed dating is dating intensified. Instead of three hours, you have three minutes; instead of one date, you are dating fifteen people. It is up to you to up your game. But in the next few minutes I will tell you how.

I do not need to tell you how nerve-wracking a normal date is. So, I would not blame you if you were bordering on petrified before going to a speed dating event. There is actually less reason to be nervous, because the chances of impressing one person out of fifteen are considerably easier than just one out of one. The key is even if you are about to melt into a puddle of mush on the floor, that you don't look like you are about to melt into a puddle of mush on the floor.

Easier said than done.

Be aware of the body language you are sending out. Don't hunch over, giggle nervously or avoid eye-contact. Remember your manners. Chances are your partner is equally nervous, so they will understand the odd nervous snort. But you need to show them that under the nervousness is a self-assured you.

Have something to eat before the event. Just avoid the garlic, please. Eating may help to settle the butterflies partying in your stomach. You may also be tempted to have the odd drink to settle the nerves. That's all good and well – the food will just help prevent the easy-going you from being the person who everyone will remember as having gotten motherless at the last speed dating event.

If you are one of those people who talk incessantly and at the rate of a fighter jet when you get nervous, don't. Don't blurt out embarrassing family secrets, don't ask impulsive sexual

questions, don't lie, and please – oh, please – don't start the conversation on politics, death, your alien abduction or probing questions around religion. That is one surefire way to kill any romantic mood.

Have a prepared list of questions and interesting, but not controversial, topics ready. Even just knowing it is there in your bag or in your back pocket is enough to make you feel a little less panicked. That doesn't mean that those are the only things that you may talk about. The list is there purely as a backup, and as a source of interesting conversations when the “So, what do you do for a living?” conversation gets a little tired.

Now, that wasn't so hard, was it? Just one last thing. Like Cell C says, if they wanted your phone in the movie they would have put it there. Switch it off!

Life After Speed Dating

It is Saturday evening, two weeks after you conquered the butterflies and tried speed dating. You are snazzing yourself up for your date with Patrick or Patricia, Speed Date #8. And asking yourself how on earth you managed to get yourself into this position, wondering what to do next, because, let's be honest, these are unusual circumstances. You are about to go out with a person whom you hardly know, except what you can learn in three to ten minutes – that he or she is Speed Dater #8, likes the colour red, has two brothers and one sister, and is an accountant. Breathe...

The Match-Up

At the beginning of the speed dating evening, each dater is given a piece of paper on which to evaluate their partners. Speed Dater #8 – Hot as heck, complimented me on my new top... he's a winner 8/10. You can write down anything that strikes you about your partner. After fifteen dates in one evening it is highly doubtful that you will otherwise remember the details. When you hand the piece of paper in at the end of the evening, the organisers will match you up with partners who rated you equally highly. They will then supply each of you with the other's email address or other contact details and leave you to get on with the rest of it.

The Call-Up

After the organisers have left you to it, it is up to you to initiate contact, or to disparege contact if you suddenly realise that you have made a huge mistake and marked #8 instead of #6. You may also get a number of matches, and you are not obliged to communicate with everyone whom you may have marked as a match. Remember that of your partners too. They may realise that another speed dater makes a better match, that they are really in love with their ex-girlfriend, or simply that they are not interested in dating at the moment. So, although it's incredibly tempting, don't retreat from the world to eat tubs of double chocolate ice-cream with caramel sauce if there is no contact from the other side. Just try again.

If you do find a connection however, the normal dating rules apply from here on out. There is the universal conundrum of when do I make contact? If I do it too soon, I'll seem desperate. But if I wait too long, I might be invited to the wedding with speed Dater #11. Two to three days is long enough. After three days, you will have been forgotten, and the potential love of your life will already have plans for this weekend.

Email is the safest way to initiate contact. There is little risk of you catching a case of cold feet and slamming down the phone. I know people who find 'The Phonecall' so intimidating that they will actually rehearse the conversation, and write it down so they can consult it if they get stuck. By contrast, email seems the easy option. It is also safer. You don't want Speed Dater #8-turned-psycho-stalker calling you at all hours of the night.

The tone of the email is up to you, but remember the nuances of conversation are often lost when written down. Those flirty jokes may come across as sexual harassment, and intimacy is rather more difficult to establish. At the other end of the spectrum, personality does not always come across through email. Your date may not come across as the super-sexy Speed Dater #8 that you remember, but that provides all the more reason to meet again in person.

The Hook-Up

Having made contact, it is tempting to arrange coffee immediately. However, you risk seeming desperate again. By allowing time to establish some semblance of a relationship, you make the first date a little less awkward. That is not to say that you should wait a month, but only until you have exchanged a few emails. You will then know a little bit more about the other person than could be discovered in three to ten minutes. You will know that your date had a big meeting on Wednesday, and so you can ask how it went.

Unfortunately, dating is not that safe, particularly for women. Speed dating allows you to screen potential dates, both on the evening and by establishing contact via email. But this still does not offer you complete security. Ensure the date is in a public place, that you do not reveal too much personal information until you feel comfortable, and that a friend knows where you are going.

So there you are – it is a Saturday evening, and you are snazzing yourself up for a date with Peter, Speed Dater #8. You have done everything right thus far. You look good, and, from what you can remember, he looks good too. There is no reason to have heart palpitations. Technically, this is not even a first date, it is a second date to the shortest first date in the world. Apply all the techniques you used to snag the speed date, and you will be just fine. It may work out, it may not, but hey you deserve credit for giving it a shot.

Recommended South African Speed Dating

I highly recommend SMARTdate, a event dating company, that has been established since 2005. The company is run by Jenny Ceresto who's one of the few people in the dating business who is sincere about helping her clients actually meet someone they can have a relationship with. For dates, locations and age groups for events go to www.smartdate.co.za or call Jenny on 072 4644253.

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Lonely or frustrated with your dating life? Why not get a dating coach to help you supercharge your social life, improve your social interactions with the opposite sex and maximise your positive qualities. Ramon Thomas is South Africa's #1 Dating Coach with regular interviews on radio, television, newspapers, magazines and online. I do a special program of coaching via Skype people living outside South Africa. For information on my coaching programs checkout my blog at www.ramonthomas.com or add me on [Facebook](#).

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