

GROUP DATE

a freeform game about dating, by Sara Williamson

Congratulations! It's a Match! In *Group Date*, you will play two people going on their first three dates after being matched with one another on a popular dating website. You don't know too much about each other yet, but the algorithm says you're 98% compatible! What could go wrong?

Group Date is a game for 4-9 people, that takes about two hours to play, including time for setting up and a short debrief. It requires one or two facilitators, depending on if you have an odd- or even-numbered group. The game consists of two warm-up activities, five scenes, and a short debrief afterwards for players to swap stories, share their reactions, and ease out of character.

FACILITATING + PREP

Depending on the number of people gathered to play, *Group Date* requires one or two facilitators. If you have an odd number of people, one person will facilitate and have a modified player role instead of playing as one of the two characters. If you have an even number of people, two people will facilitate, with each facilitator also playing a character in one of the two player teams.

It's the facilitator's job to read the text of the game in advance, gather a few simple materials, explain the different activities and scenes, and keep track of time. In terms of materials, you will need:

- printed name tags and handouts
- tape or badge holders (skip this if you can print the name tags on fancy adhesive labels)
- pens and markers
- a cell phone or watch to keep track of time

And the scene schedule, for reference:

30 min	warm-up & char gen
10 min	date 1
15 min	team meeting 1
15 min	date 2
20 min	team meeting 2
20 min	date 3 (dtr)
10 min	debrief

It may happen that you plan on facilitating either by yourself or with a partner, but end up with a different number of people than you anticipated. If this happens, never fear! It's fine for someone to co-facilitate without having read everything in advance; just have them use the cheat sheet (provided in the handouts at the end) and help keep

track of time. Co-facilitating is a great way for people new to facilitating freeform games to try it out!

It's also fine if one of the facilitators decides to just play after having read the text of the game; there aren't any spoilers.

SETTING UP

Once everyone is gathered, explain the general premise of the game by reading the very first paragraph of the text (starting with "Congratulations!") out loud. Then, give them a brief overview of the game's structure.

Once this is done, but before the warm-up activities start, it's important to say something about player safety. The default safety mechanism for this game is **The Door Is Always Open**. Though this isn't meant to be an emotionally intense game, the players should feel comfortable stepping out or leaving entirely for any reason; perhaps something comes up in play that makes them uncomfortable, perhaps they're feeling sick or tired, or maybe they just need to use the restroom or get a drink of water. The players should know that leaving won't break the game or ruin anyone's experience. They should feel free to leave at any time, or ask to speak to you/your co-facilitator in private if they have any questions.

After the safety talk there are two quick warm-up activities: **Date Story** and **Personality Quiz**. These activities will help people get into the right creative

mood for the game, and help with the character creation process.

DATE STORY

For **Date Story**, gather the players in a circle and have them to think about a short dating-related anecdote. It can be something from their own lives, or something from a book, movie, television show, etc. These will likely tend towards the "funny disaster" genre of dating stories, but they don't have to. Once they've had a few minutes to think, explain that they will be working together to combine their anecdotes into one story, with each person adding an element before passing to the person on their right. Let them know that you, as the facilitator, will help move them along by saying "Great—next!" when it is the next person's turn to speak. If someone's turn comes up and they're not ready, they can say "Pass!"

Give it a try and start out slowly, but as the players become more comfortable, say "Great—next!" more quickly to move them along at a faster pace. It's okay if someone gets flustered; just give them some time to recover or pass.

PERSONALITY QUIZ

For the next warm up, **Personality Quiz**, distribute copies of the VERY SCIENTIFIC DATING PERSONALITY QUIZ handout; you will need one copy for each player. Give them slightly over thirty seconds to fill it out, then instruct them to form a line. One end of the line represents **Order**, and the most organized, punctual,

orderly players should go there. The other end of the line represents **Chaos**, where the spontaneous, messy and chaotic players should be. Players in the middle get to be in the middle: have them look at each others' quizzes to help them line up. Once they're happy with their positions in line, divide the line in half, with an even number of players on each side: these will be the two teams.

CHARACTER CREATION

Now that the players are divided into Team Order and Team Chaos, they will split up and collaboratively create a shared character, one for each team. From this point on, you should make sure that there is either one facilitator in each group, if playing with two co-facilitators, or that the single facilitator goes back and forth between the two groups to check in on them periodically, if you're playing with one.

Pass out the appropriate character sheets for the Order and Chaos groups and have them fill them out; you only need one sheet per team. Have them do this quickly: the first suggestion in each category wins, unless someone else in the group objects.

THE FOUR FACETS

Now that each group has a character, each player will need to pick one of the **Four Facets**, a single component of their characters' personality and one of the driving forces motivating them to go out on these dates. The four facets are

Lust, Optimism, Empathy and Doubt. Have the players take turns reading the following descriptions out loud—they are also printed at the bottom of their character sheets:

Lust: At your best, you're full of passion, energy and life. At your worst, you're temperamental and short-sighted. You consider yourself a lot of fun. After all, where would humanity be without you?

Optimism: At your best, your sunny personality lifts other people up. At your worst, you are insufferable, dismissing the pain of others by telling them to just stay positive. You consider yourself essential to the dates' success, and will make sure the voice of optimism is heard.

Empathy: At your best, you are an excellent listener who shows genuine compassion for those around you. At your worst, you seem to feed on others' suffering, and are easily affected by the moods of others. You consider yourself the wisest when it comes to matters of the heart, and surely no relationship without you can ever last.

Doubt: At your best, you are analytical and introspective, able to reflect critically on yourself and the situations you find yourself in. At your worst, you excel at finding fault, undermining your own confidence and criticizing others. You consider yourself a realist, and will make sure the others don't get lost in the clouds.

After the four facet descriptions have been read out loud, have each player pick one they would like to play. At this stage, each player on a team should have their own character facet; players will have the opportunity to switch later on. Pass out the name tags, and have them write their shared character name and their individual facets on the appropriate Order and Chaos name tags.

Now it is time for the game to begin! The game will follow the pattern of one date scene followed by one team meeting scene, until there have been three dates and two meetings. In all of the scenes, players should try to embody both their character personality (Order or Chaos) and their facet.

DATE SCENES

In the first date scene, players will start out in a large group and mingle before pairing off with someone from the opposing team for a one-on-one conversation. This scene is the couple's first date. If you're playing in a public space, such as a park, bar, or museum, the date should be set exactly where you already are. If the place where you're playing is wildly inappropriate for a first date—such as a gaming convention—you have two options. One use the improv rule **Yes, And** to quickly agree on the fictional location mid-scene. The other is to just run with it. Maybe it will be fun!

Note: it's important on date scenes that the players on the same team don't talk to each other; that's what the team

meeting scenes are for. Let them know this before the first scene starts.

As a facilitator, keep track of time and end the first date scene after precisely 10 minutes. You can use a noise signal for this if it won't bother the non-playing people that may be around you, but if you're in public it's probably better to just raise your hand and have the other players do the same.

The second date scene is just like the first, but lasts a bit longer, at 15 minutes.

The third date scene lasts for 20 minutes, and takes a different form: instead of starting in a group and then splitting up, players will stay in one large group and **Define The Relationship**. This is where the characters will have the conversation to determine if they should stop seeing each other or get serious. Three dates would be way too soon for this conversation in real life, but that's okay—this is just a game! To define the relationship, the players stand with their team mates, facing members of the opposing team. Players will take turns speaking, with one player from a team making one statement, then letting one player from the other team respond. Team-mates don't have to do this in a specific order, but they should make sure that every player has a chance to speak.

MEETING SCENES

In the meeting scenes, players on the same team will talk in a group amongst themselves to discuss how the date went, as well as plan the next one.

Players should still be in character as their personality facets—think of it as one person with a lot of conflicting viewpoints arguing with themselves. In meeting scenes, the players have the opportunity to switch personality facets. This can either be done voluntarily, or, in teams where it is possible, a majority vote to force someone to switch. In a team with four players, for example, three of them might say, “I think Doubt is being very unhelpful here—I think they should switch to Lust.” Duplication is intended! In this way, the character’s overall personality can shift, and on the second date the facets that show up are Empathy, Optimism, Lust and... Lust!

Switching facets is restricted only by the time available for the meetings. The first meeting lasts for 15 minutes, and the second meeting lasts for 20 minutes. Again, the facilitator(s) will keep track of time and call for a scene to end.

In the second meeting scene, the players will have to decide how they would like to define the relationship before they go into the third date.

DEBRIEF

After the game is over, gather everyone around to briefly discuss how it went. Hopefully everyone had fun, but whether they did or not, give everyone a chance to speak. If possible, it might be nice to go someplace a little more quiet or private for the debrief.

And that’s it! Thanks for playing!

THOUGHTS + CREDITS

Group Date was written by Sara Williamson for the Golden Cobra competition in 2014, and was lightly playtested (pre-Cobra-submission) by James Greenan. Thanks, James!

Sara is also indebted to Dahlia Lithwick for her 2012 article for *Slate* entitled “[Chaos Theory: A Unified Theory of Muppet Types.](#)”

This edition of *Group Date* has been lightly edited for inclusion in the Golden Cobra anthology. As a result of being selected as a Golden Cobra winner, for Most Convention-Ready, many more people have gotten the chance to play. Thank you, also, to:

everyone who played it at Metatopia 2014

James Stuart, for co-facilitating the Metatopia run, and always pushing me to make more and better things

all of the Golden Cobra judges

and Jackson Tegu, his co-facilitator and players in the December 2014 run

all of whom have provided invaluable feedback (that will very likely make it into the next version). I am incredibly humbled and honored by the response to this game. <3

If you play this game, I would love to hear how it went! You can find me on twitter: @iamtheonlysara

VERY SCIENTIFIC DATING PERSONALITY QUIZ

1. Eating cookies in bed:

-
- YAY! NO!

2. Being late for things:

-
- Always Never

3. Your desk is...

-
- Neat Messy

4. Choose a Muppet:

- Bert
- Ernie

5. Choose a class:

- Rogue
- Paladin

6. Draw a shape:

FACILITATOR CHEAT SHEET

Before the game:

- Read the game text
- Pick a location to play
- Print handouts—eight copies of the Personality Quiz, one copy of this page, one copy of each of the character sheets, and one copy of the name tags (optionally on adhesive labels of some kind)
- Gather the rest of the materials: pens, markers, tape or badge holders if not using adhesive name tags, and a cell phone or watch to keep track of time

During the game:

- Let the players know **The Door Is Always Open**
- Run two warm-ups: **Date Story** and **Personality Quiz**
- Guide the players through character creation, including picking one of four facets, **Lust, Optimism, Empathy** and **Doubt**
- Refer to this schedule:

30 min	warm-up & char gen
10 min	date 1
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20 min	team meeting 2
20 min	date 3 (dtr)
10 min	debrief

After the game:

- Spend 10 minutes debriefing, making sure everyone has a chance to be heard

ORDER

Name:

Gender:

Occupation:

Emotional Baggage:

Lust: At your best, you're full of passion, energy and life. At your worst, you're temperamental and short-sighted. You consider yourself a lot of fun. After all, where would humanity be without you?

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CHAOS

Name:

Gender:

Occupation:

Emotional Baggage:

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