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Celebrate Story

Relationship gift guide

By Megan Scott, ASAP

Forget mom, dad and aunt Mary. You know what to get them.

Mom -- slippers. Dad -- a silk tie. Aunt Mary -- a mug.

You're freaking out over what to get the person you are dating. After all, you have only been seeing him for a month or two and you are not even sure that you two are exclusive. (You're hoping he's not seeing anyone else but his profile on match is still active.)

"Giving a gift can be a daunting proposition if your relationship is new," says April Masini, author of the Ask April advice column. "A gift of a music CD may be interpreted as thoughtful because it's an artist he knows you love, or it's the music that played on your first date (even though you've only had four dates so far).

"However, it can also be interpreted as a dud gift -- 'She didn't think about what I really like.'"

Or it could send the wrong message -- silk boxers even though you haven't even gone there yet. Or diamond earrings which could be perceived as coming on way too strong and chase her away. (Of course we know a bad present can end a relationship. A juicer when she was expecting an engagement ring.)

So how do you know what to buy? How much to spend? Whether to buy a present at all?

asap turned to a couple of gift consultants and relationship experts to compile the following tips:

1. Give a gift that reflects where you are in the relationship -- not where you want to be.

"If you are new -- and girls are guilty of this -- don't give him a gift that screams togetherness -- a giant picture of the two of you in a heart shaped frame," says Amy Blankenship, founder of shopwithstyle.net. "You probably don't want to give something intimate."

Think twice about exchanging presents if you have only been dating a couple of weeks and are not exclusive. "I would keep it as neutral as possible -- food, candy something cute," says Robin Gorman Newman, founder of lovecoach.com.

2. For women in new relationships, don't give him a present unless he gives you one.

"One of the biggest mistakes a girl might make is she thinks they're exclusive and they're not," says Blankenship. "If you give an extravagant gift to someone you have only been dating a few weeks without the conversation (about seeing only each other) you make him feel uncomfortable."

She says if he does give you a present, give him one that is on the same level. "If he gives you a new CD, don't go out and buy him a digital camera."

3. For men in new relationships -- "Girls will often look at your gift as how you view the relationship," says Blankenship. "If you have only been dating a girl for a couple of weeks and give her a box of sexy lingerie -- that may not be the message

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you want to send her. You might want to give something that is a little more appropriate."

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4. Think about the message you want the gift to convey.

"At all levels of a relationship, a gift can indicate how well the sender knows the recipient," says gift expert Sherri Athay. "Sometimes gifts say, 'I don't know you very well. I'm giving you the same thing everyone else is giving.' The best gift says the giver knows something that is special."

Go with something light but personal, says Blankenship, such as tickets to a sporting event or concert, books, CDs, a bottle of their favorite wine. "It's a thoughtful gift for them, but it's not so personal where it's going to be intimidating."

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5. Steer clear of gift cards.

"A gift card says, 'Do your own shopping,' which can be good for a teenager or a shopaholic," says Athay. "But it also conveys, 'I give up. I can't think of anything on my own, so just go choose something.'"

BUT if you insist on going the gift card route, she says make it personal -- a card from his or her favorite store with a nice note.

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6. Be careful when it comes to spending a whole lot of money.

"If you are even thinking, 'I don't know if I should do this,' the answer is no, I should not do this," says Newman. "If you are purchasing a pricey present, you really need to be on the same page as the other person."

Spending too much can be dangerous, says Blankenship. "If you get a gift from someone that is far beyond what you think is appropriate, it begs the question, what do they want in return for this?" she says. "Sometimes even if you can afford to give a lot more generously maybe you should put the brakes on a little bit."

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7. Ladies, don't read too deep into a man's gift.

"Women tend to be more judgmental and more conscious of trying to interpret what this might mean," says Newman. "Is this a signal of a promise of the future? Also keep in mind that some guys aren't good shoppers. They might know what to get. You could be disappointed if you have these huge expectations."

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8. Remember what is most important.

"The more important thing is how you are outside of the holiday," says Newman. "Try not to make yourself crazy. And remember Valentine's Day is right around the corner."

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So how much should you spend? Masini offers the following price guide.

-- Dating 3 months \$50

-- Dating 6 months \$100

-- Dating 9 months \$250

-- Dating 12 months \$500

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Megan Scott is an asap reporter.

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