

Are you satisfied with the amount of dating you're doing?

- Yes, it's easy to meet people
- Somewhat. I wish I could meet a few more people
- Hardly! Where are all the single people?

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By Mark Amundsen

There are several pitfalls that can turn a fab film date into a flop.

Besides disagreeing on which film you'd like to see, what could *possibly* go wrong? A lot, actually — so follow these expert tips for making sure your next movie date will be a smash hit.

Allen had a little problem. The young man from Bronxville, New York, was in the theater on a first date, waiting for the film to begin. "As Katie and I sat there talking, she asked: 'I thought this movie started at 7:45 p.m.?' I looked down at my watch and noticed it was 8:15 p.m. — and it dawned on me that we were in the wrong theater, since the wrong movie appeared after the previews. How embarrassing!"

The advantages of going to the movies on a date — especially a first date — are well-known. You can spend some time getting to know the other person without having to scramble to think of ways to keep the conversation flowing. You can sit in the dark, where (for a little while, anyway) you don't have to worry about whether you have spinach in your teeth. And if you're 14 and it's 1962, you can make out in the balcony.

"A lot of times it's considered too cliché to go to the movies on a first date," says Karin Anderson, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology and counselor of education at Concordia University Chicago and author of *It Just Hasn't Happened Yet: Bogus, Ridiculous, Absurd Explanations as to Why You're Still Single and How to Deal with Them...Plus a Few Silly Things We Do to Ourselves*. "But if you meet someone in a restaurant or for a drink, there can be extended lulls and gaps in the conversation. The movie gives you something to talk about at those times."

But as Allen's story shows, there are several pitfalls that can turn a fab film date into a flop... here are ten to watch out for:

1. Arriving late.

A restaurant may hold your reservation for 15 minutes or so, but the movies must go on, so don't count on previews and ads to be your buffer. Some people hate coming in late on a movie, and your date may be one of them. (And as Allen's story above clearly shows, it helps to make sure you find the right theater in the multiplex when you *do* get there.)

2. Being unprepared to pay for the tickets.

"If you invited a date to the movie, you pay, unless you've made it clear that you're each paying for yourselves — which makes it seem a little less like a date," says Tina B. Tessina, Ph.D., psychotherapist and author of several books, including *The Unofficial Guide to Dating Again*. "It's great if you get the tickets beforehand. Movies used to be a cheap date, but not anymore." According to the National Association of Theatre Owners, the average U.S. ticket price in 2010 was \$7.89 — it's not limo-and-orchids money, but make sure you have the dough first. Dr. Tessina recommends that if your date pays for the tickets, you should offer to buy the popcorn and drinks. And no matter who's paying, don't criticize the other person's snack preference.

3. Arguing over which movie to see together.

This is a big one. Lovina couples who have been together for a long time can argue over

which movie to see, but not you. "Fighting about the topic might be a red flag waving," says Dr. Anderson. "Flexibility is a good idea, especially early on. Part of being in a relationship involves compromise." Your date may want to avoid a movie for any reason — he or she might be a vampire-phobe, for example, or someone who gets headaches watching 3-D movies—and these issues should be respected.

April Masini, author of such books as *Date Out of Your League* and *Think & Date Like a Man*, offers these guidelines for the kind of movie to choose, especially on first dates.

Films to avoid:

- **Those with excessive violence.** "It may not even be gratuitous, but it won't put her in the mood for love," says Masini. "Trust me."
- **Those featuring excessive sex and/or nudity.** "It doesn't matter if the sex scenes are tastefully done; if it's more than she was bargaining for, she's going to possibly think you're a pervert to be avoided."
- **Kiddie flicks.** "Unless she really wants to see a G-rated movie, or one that's animated, stick to PG films. It's not that they're more risqué — they're more mature in content for the most part."
- **Documentaries.** "Only good if you know she wants to see a specific one. You may bore her to death or make her think you're uncaring or self-centered for choosing a film that is so specific in its content that it has nothing to do with her interests. It's also a good idea to find out her political and social views before you take her to see a documentary bent on destroying a particular political party or party candidate."

Films to aim for:

- **Anything that's opening this weekend.** "If it's really terrible, you can blame it on the lack of word of mouth. Who knew? It just came out! On the other hand, if it's a great flick, you can take credit for your good taste in choosing films. Score one for film options!"
- **Romantic comedies.** "These films are date-proof. You can't screw up a date by taking yours to a romantic comedy. They're literally made for the dating crowd. Sit back, share your popcorn, and relax."
- **Anything garnering potential Oscar nods.** "The best films that you'll see in March at the Oscars are pushed into distribution after Thanksgiving, and after the nominations come out, you can even choose a film because of its appreciation by the thinking segment (as opposed to the blockbuster segment) of the industry. [It's] hard to argue with Hollywood A-listers!"

4. Fighting over where to sit.

Some people have very strong feelings about this, either because of aesthetics or eyesight. But there's no excuse for the kind of behavior described in this tale from the book *Awful First Dates*, Sarah Z. Wexler's compilation of contributions received via her awfulfirstdates.com site:

You can't screw up a date by taking yours to a romantic comedy.

"We went to the movies, and there were still a few seats in one of the middle rows. For some reason, my date tried to drag me to the very front row, where you have to sit looking straight up at the screen the whole time. I refused and took a seat in the middle of the theater...but instead of sitting *with* me, he marched down to the front row and spent the whole movie sitting by himself, sulking and turning around to glare at me."

5. Playing with handheld electronics.

"While at the movie, turn off cell phones, smartphones, and put your Bluetooth earpiece away," says Dr. Tessina. "It's rude to be on your phone while on a date. If you are an M.D. on call or have a babysitter at home, tell your date in advance, put your phone on buzz, and look at it without disturbing your date or anyone else around you."

6. Yakking it up during the movie.

You may not annoy your date — perhaps you've found a partner who can also talk a manhole cover into a coma — but it's embarrassing when the usher has to reprimand you and the other moviegoers are throwing hateful looks your way.

7. Getting touchy-feely with your date.

One would hope that you've gotten past the need to behave like a teenager injected with cattle hormones while in a darkened theater by now. "Holding hands isn't too forward, but be very cautious with anything else," warns Dr. Tessina. It may also invite stern looks from other patrons, and it isn't altogether classy behavior. Wexler passes along another gem from her book to illustrate this point: "At one point during the film, he started stroking my knee; I moved it away. I guess he realized I had a hole in the knee of my jeans, because a few minutes later, I thought there was a worm in my pants — it was actually my date, who had shoved his fingers inside the hole and was basically [groping] my leg." If you're planning to behave that way, you'd better buy a Hershey's Skor at the candy counter, because that's as close to a "score" as you're going to get!

8. Failing to adapt when the situation calls for it.

Things go wrong on dates — the movie can stink (a common issue), the projector can break (uncommon), someone can lose a filling on a Hershey's Skor (rare) — but a good attitude can usually salvage the night. For example, Allen and his date were able to have fun despite going to the wrong theater: "After we skipped the movie, we went to dinner and chatted up some more and got to know each other better," he says. "In addition, we went to Dave & Busters to play games. Overall, it was a good date after the mishap."

9. Not following through afterward.

This can shoot down any date, not just the movie variety. Dr. Tessina advises: "After your date, be complimentary, say you had fun, and if you want to see this person again, say so. It's great if you can ask for a specific next date instead of [saying], 'We should do this again sometime.' If you say 'I'll call you,' then keep your promise. If you've decided this doesn't work, say a pleasant 'good night,' but don't make empty promises."

10. Never doing anything else on dates.

Some people only take their dates to spectator events like the movies, and then realize after many dates — or their 20th wedding anniversary — that they have no idea who this other person really is because of it. "Movies can be escapism for some people," says Dr. Anderson. "Some people are huge movie buffs. But you want to make sure you're not using the movies to avoid having conversations. I want to say to these people, what is it you're escaping?"

So, remember to keep it light, be flexible, and realize that a movie date is a relationship helper, not a substitute for an actual relationship. Bear these things in mind, and you may just be able to write your own love story.

Mark Amundsen is a writer and editor in New York who is a fan of Goldenberg's Peanut Chews, as are his dentist's children's college tuition funds.

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