

21st Century Language: Analysing Pragmatics

Objective: To explore pragmatic and semantic issues with internet dating.
To be able to analyse and adapt language to suit a specific purpose, audience and format.

Use the printable resource – *Internet Dating*

Teacher note: Students to come up with words and phrases that they would expect to see in profiles people write about themselves and discuss the semantic meaning of the words used and whether these correlate with what the author actually means.

Discussion: The Development of Internet Dating

Use the interactive resource – *The development of Internet Dating*

Teacher note: Students could watch the following clip of Brian Cranston describing filming old dating videos and some examples and note down what they notice about how language has been used to suit this specific context. Examples are deliberately dated as it will enable students to see how the use of the internet has impacted language change in this specific context.

The Pragmatics of Internet Dating

Use the printable resource – *The pragmatics of Internet Dating*

Teacher note: Students should read the following articles and discuss what it suggests about the pragmatics of internet dating.

Teacher notes for 'The Secret Language of Internet Dating'

- It would appear that the pragmatics and 'secret meanings' of lexis used in internet dating has been almost instinctive – the meanings of what you write have transformed as internet dating has become more popular.
- Troublesome terms outlined in the article include active and fun (sexual connotations); curvaceous, stocky or well-built (fat) and if people mention that they enjoy a night out or staying at home, readers become suspicious as it is too contrived and is considered an 'empty statement.'
- 'Text speak' or poor grammar is also used in internet dating language as it apparently suggests that it looks like you haven't tried too hard when crafting your profile (although this is apparently counter productive).
- With the speed and immediacy of internet dating, more profiles are concerned with images to convey a sense of self rather than a written profiles.

Teacher notes for 'Must Love Pets: Dating Profile Mistakes'

What words really mean

- **Laid-back** Marijuana habit
- **Free spirit** Sure to cheat on you
- **Not materialistic** Skint
- **Life and soul** Drink problem
- **Must love pets** Prefers cats to people
- **Likes fun** Looking for no-strings sex
- **Tired of games** Has serious baggage
- **Wants an independent partner** Will never buy you dinner
- **Artistic** Lives with parents
- **Photo available on request** Married

Cliches

- I like to curl up on the sofa with a glass of wine and a DVD
- My life is great. I just need someone to share it with
- My friends and family are really important to me
- I'm just as happy at a black tie event as I am in a muddy field
- My friends say I'm... (attractive, romantic, thoughtful, etc)
- I never thought I'd end up on a dating site

Words used in popular profiles include 'enjoy,' 'good,' 'happy,' 'friends,' 'walking,' liking or loving things and an absence of negative things. Definitely no 'lonely' or 'desperate!'

Interestingly, women rarely mention 'relationship' and neither sex use 'commitment' or 'marriage' often.

Dating Profiles

Use the printable resource – *Dating profiles*

Teacher note: Have students read the three examples of dating profiles. Based on the advice they have read, ask them to decide which one best suits the form and why.

Who wrote the profile?

Use the printable/interactive resources – *Who wrote the profile?*

Teacher note: Have the students analyse the dating profile and consider the following:

- Who wrote it
- What makes it successful

After students have had an opportunity to analyse the profile, show them the advice from eharmony. Surprisingly, this is a male profile (students sometimes assume the author is female) and this could then lead to an interesting discussion on how the writer has adapted language choices to appeal to women.

Plenary: The influence of culture on language use.

Teacher note: The two web articles read earlier were from British newspaper, *The Telegraph*, whereas the exemplar dating profile was from American website eharmony. Pupils could therefore discuss the difference in advice given from these two different sources and explore whether cross-cultural communication and conflicting advice such as this is an issue when it comes to internet communication, or whether they feel that we are able to instinctively code switch and change the way in which we communicate to suit context.

Creative Writing Task: Write the dating profile of a superhero!

Use the interactive resources – *Superhero dating profiles*

Teacher note: The superhero dating website could be shown and discussed with students first to scaffold their own writing. Students then write their own profiles and could then write a commentary analysing their language choices to suit Component 3 of the A Level exam.