

# 8 Ways to Tell If You and Your Significant Other Are Compatible

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Tall, attractive, funny, smart, accomplished, shares your hobbies -- when it comes to dating, we all have our "wish lists." But those characteristics have little to do with compatibility and long-term happiness, says Rachel Needle, a psychologist with the Center for Marital and Sexual Health of South Florida. "Also, compatibility isn't all or nothing. It exists on a continuum." Likewise, your ideal match can change throughout your life as you experience new things and change as a person, says Justin R. Garcia, a scientific adviser for Match.com and assistant research scientist at the Kinsey Institute. That's one more reason you shouldn't put too much weight on the traditional Mr./Mrs. Right criteria. So if compatibility is a moving target, how can you tell if someone will be your best match both now and in the future? Read on for some surprising clues.

## 1. You Love Each Other's BO

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If you don't gag at the smell of his sweaty gym bag, that might actually be a good thing. "The scent of our mate can be one of the most intoxicating or revolting elixirs," says Paul Hokemeyer, a Manhattan-based marriage therapist. "If you love the way your partner smells, there's a great chance your relationship will endure." That may be because our natural scent is tied to our immune system's genetic makeup -- and evolutionarily speaking, we want to get with people who complement our biology and help us have healthy offspring, says Kinsey Institute researcher Justin R. Garcia. For instance, one 2002 Nature Genetics study found that women prefer the smells of men whose genes match those of their fathers. Study researchers believe this helps women choose mates who they instinctively know have healthy genes.

## 2. You Talk Like Each Other

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It's not just what your date says, it's how he or she says it. Research shows that people who have similar communication styles -- both in speaking and in writing -- are more likely to be compatible. For instance, in a 2010 Psychological Science study, speed daters who spoke to each other with similar language patterns were more likely to both go on a second date and be together three months later. Language similarity was even more of a predictor of relationship stability than how much the two actually talked! Study researchers believe that when we match our language styles to others, we are focusing more on the conversation. Meanwhile, when someone speaks to us in a communication style that is similar to ours, it becomes easier for us to understand what he is saying as well as his intentions. Both make for more solid relationships.

### 3. You Bring Out the Best in Each Other

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Sure, you're always true to yourself, but different relationships bring out different characteristics in all of us -- some good and some not so good. So what does your significant other bring out in you? And what do you bring out in him or her? "If both you and your partner like who each of you become in this relationship, it's a really wonderful sign," says psychotherapist Ken Page, author of "Deeper Dating." However, bringing out the best in each other doesn't mean changing each other. "It's a very different thing than feeling like you have to fix yourself in order to be loved and accepted," he says. "The relationship might inspire you to become a better person. It may ask for changes that are difficult. But there's a basic feeling of rightness in the connection that is a hallmark of compatibility."

## 4. You're Financially in Sync

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Love and money are tricky. But more important than how much money each of you makes is what each of you thinks is the right way to handle that money. “Having similar relationships to money increases your compatibility in the long term,” says marriage therapist Paul Hokemeyer. “So if she spends money she doesn’t have for that overpriced designer handbag, and you’re concerned about having enough tucked away for a rainy day, your chances of being successful in love and life are grim.” In a 2012 study published in *Family Relations*, researchers followed 4,500 married couples and found that those pairs that argued about money early in their relationships (no matter their income, debt or net worth) were more likely to divorce. What’s more, according to the study, disagreements about money were the greatest predictor of divorce compared to any other conflict.

## 5. You’re Both Willing to Work

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Not just at your jobs -- but in your relationship. "Every relationship has its problems," says psychotherapist Ken Page. "And I don't mean silly little problems. Quite simply, our worst character flaws will in time get acted out in the relationship. Couples that have an ironclad commitment to keep working, to keep trying and to not give up are couples that have the greatest form of compatibility and the greatest chance of long-term success." A 2012 study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found that couples willing to make sacrifices within their relationships were better able to solve their problems and significantly more likely to have lasting and satisfied marriages.

## 6. You're Both on a Get-Fit Mission

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You don't have to hit the gym together every day or take healthy cooking classes to be compatible, but if one of you is a health nut, it's helpful if both of you are, says psychotherapist Ken Page. But more important than how often each of you exercises or how many servings of vegetables you eat is your individual and joint attitudes toward healthy living. "It's not just about sharing an activity," Page says. "It's about sharing a positive, values-based lifestyle that improves their lives. It's that quiet, daily sharing of a sense of mission that helps love to grow and deepen." Bonus: Social and spousal support can boost your odds of healthy-living success.

## 7. You Want the Same Things

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Now is the time to think about the cold, hard, scary future. University of California, Berkeley, researchers Carolyn Pape Cowan and Phil Cowan reference their longitudinal study of first-time parents in their book "When Partners Become Parents: The Big Life Change for Couples." They found that 100 percent of heterosexual couples with children in which the husband didn't want to become a parent were divorced by the time their kids turned six years old. It's important to assess your core values and what's important to you in the long term, says psychologist Rachel Needle. While compromise is a healthy part of any relationship, if your fundamental desires aren't in line, your lives just aren't compatible.

## 8. You're Friends and Lovers

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“There are two parts of a relationship: companionship and eroticism,” says psychotherapist Tammy Nelson, author of “The New Monogamy.” Companionship is the business of a relationship, the roommate capacity, the ability to live together, to travel through life as a couple. Eroticism is where the passion lives, where great sex happens and where the intimate, sacred space of your relationship is created,” she says. “If you have a great companionship partnership, if you are good friends, make good roommates, and can hang on the couch together, then you are compatible in that area. If you have good sex, both orgasm regularly by focusing on the other's pleasure and can explore new and more exciting ways to find adventure in your intimate lives, then you are compatible sexually. If you have both, then you should marry that person today.”

## Are You Compatible?

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In the end, while your interests, values, communication styles and even biology can make you more or less compatible with your spouse, partner or date, there's no end-all-be-all test of true compatibility, says psychologist Rachel Needle. Finding your ideal mate is a matter of trial and error. In each relationship, you learn more about what you want and need and what makes you click with someone else, says Kinsey Institute researcher Justin R. Garcia.

## What Do YOU Think?

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So tell us, in your own dating life, what have you found are the biggest signs of compatibility? What do you look for in a partner? Share your dating, relationship and marriage advice and experiences in the comments section below so that the rest of the Livestrong.com community can benefit from your wisdom!