

5. Cruising without a Net

Looking online for sex and partners can be fast and efficient, but can also be superficial and lacking in romance. Complex personalities get reduced to a sentence or two and some 'important' measurements. If you find it hard to express yourself in type or are not photogenic and don't know your way around Photoshop, you have a problem. Thankfully, you can circumvent the internet connection when hunting for love and lust, using tried and trusted methods gay men practiced to great effect in days of yore, before the advent of the internet.

Chemistry & mystery

The one thing that cannot be communicated online is chemistry. It's only when you see someone live and in person that you can judge if you are actually attracted to him. Compatible pheromones (the natural, hormonal 'smells' that lure potential lovers), as well as body language and social skills, may draw you to people you wouldn't give a second look online. On the other hand, someone who seemed very appealing digitally could turn you off for any number of reasons once you see him face to face. He might be mentally unstable, smell bad or simply lack the ability to communicate like a normal human being when he's not behind his computer. Since people online use their profiles as a sales pitch for themselves, the final product often doesn't match what was advertised.

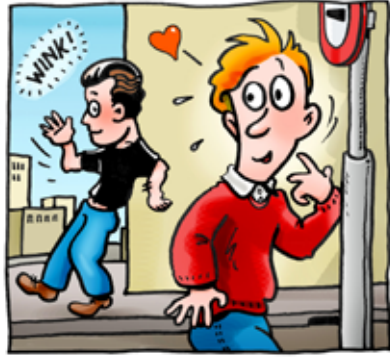
By hooking up without the aid of the internet, a little bit of mystery is maintained. Some people like knowing beforehand if someone is mostly a top or a bottom (the fucker or the fuckee during anal sex) and how big his dick is, but when the stakes are higher than a one-night stand, these are unlikely to be the deciding factor, for getting together. The whole package, the potential as a friend or long-term lover, can only be evaluated out in the real world, and taking your time to discover each other slowly can be more romantic.

It's original and at the same time nicely old-fashioned to not have to say "on the net" when people ask you where you met your boyfriend.

Steven

Places everyone!

Gay men can meet each other anywhere. Gay bars and clubs obviously have the highest density of men looking for other men, but eye contact with a hot guy can happen in the most unlikely of places. When you suddenly seem to have caught someone's attention, you'll have to make a snap-judgement about the level of mutual interest before he's gone. If you're meeting someone in



a predominantly straight place or just out on the street, you will have to put your gaydar to work and decide whether he is truly into you or if he is just a straight man who is wondering why he is getting stared at. Misjudging this could lead to embarrassment or even getting punched. If you sense any aggression coming from your perspective hunk because of your focus on him, leave him be. However, if he gives you a smile or wink, that's a clear encouragement, especially if he stops in his tracks to give you a chance to say hello or even walks up to you.

Some good cruising hot spots include: parks, gyms, public transport and supermarkets. Basically any place where people have the time to idly look around while doing something else, such as listening to a concert, pumping iron, buying washing detergent or simply waiting. In a situation like that, you will be able to make contact and hopefully have time for a chat.

If you are looking for a specific type of guy, you should frequent the locations your preferred type is likely to visit. Musclemen you can find at gyms and the bigger dance events, trendy men at clothing and design stores, exciting closet-cases (in both the single and the married 'straight' man variety) will be mostly spotted in parks at night and at saunas, culture-lovers frequent museums and theaters, and so on. Within the gay scene, cafes and clubs each tend to draw their own specific crowd, so do some research and sightseeing to find out where your type of guy hangs out.

Should you want to cruise very efficiently and still bypass the internet, you can choose to sign up for speed dating. This involves having a series of very short conversations with other single men over the course of an hour or so. At the end of the event, people who marked each other as potentially interesting are set up to have a 'real' date.

Tuning your 'tude

The attitude you project is an important key to cruising success. One some days you will feel more like a hunter than on others, but try to avoid having a 'now or never' mentality. Not only will that often lead to disappointment, but it can make you seem too desperate when chatting someone up. Be open to meeting new people, but don't act like your life depends on it, and focus on having a fun day or evening without too many expectations. This

Two guys made eye contact when their trams were passing each other. It made so much of an impact that both of them got out at their next stop and started making their way back, meeting in the middle. Now that's romantic!

Steven

should keep you from going after anyone for lack of a better option or even ending up in bed with someone you really should have steered clear of. Feeling good about yourself and not really needing a boyfriend tends to end up drawing more suitors your way. First contact with someone you feel attracted to will always be a daunting prospect to most people, but try to keep it in perspective; you're not having brain surgery and the only thing that can get hurt is your ego, insofar as you allow it. No risk, no gain. Be prepared to embarrass yourself occasionally and see it as a learning experience. Be mindful of your body language and make yourself look approachable; standing in a corner with your arms crossed and anxiety plastered all over your face will keep admirers at a distance.

Going out solo when you are on the hunt for something more than just a quick date generally isn't a good idea. It's likely to make you feel insecure and ill at ease. You will be more relaxed in the company of people you know and having friends around you who you are having a good time with, will make a good first impression on potential suitors. Hanging out with more than one friend is advisable, as you won't have to leave someone behind on his own if you end up talking and flirting with a guy you've spotted. Also, if you are out with just one friend, he may be mistaken for a date or partner. A group of friends serves as a handy safety net when you are turned down or are being pursued by a guy you have no interest in. However, it does make you less approachable, because the group might scare people away. Take the initiative if you see someone who looks uncertain about walking up to you.

Don't create a new personality for yourself, as you will have to drop the mask sooner or later. If someone doesn't like you the way you are,

then there will be no future for you together in any case. Be yourself and be spontaneous; don't pre-plan an entire conversation in your mind before engaging. It will only throw you for a loop when your partner in conversation invariably doesn't stick to your script, making you have to improvise anyway. It is important to really listen to the things he says and to build on them, to keep the conversation flowing easily and organically. Try to keep from analyzing every little thing you do and say. This is easier said than done, and you will literally be left speechless from time to time. But your partner will already have formed a first impression of you, even before you open your mouth. If he likes you based on that, he will be charitable and forgive you for saying something stupid every once in a while.

First contact

When you see someone you like, first throw him glances for a while until you lock eyes. Nod or smile at him and see if that gets you a positive response. If so, don't wait too long before making your move. The tenuous connection between the two of you could easily evaporate, and the longer you wait, the more needlessly nervous you will make yourself. If he is hanging out with a group of friends, however, it is often wise to first observe for a moment or two to see if any of them could be the boyfriend of your object of desire. If that doesn't seem to be the case, approach him casually. It is hard to relax on command, but you will be more attractive if you don't get too stressed. Being just a bit nervous is okay; it will likely be taken as a compliment and be seen as charming. Remind yourself that any rejection you might face will not end your world. His taste in men is something that is beyond your control. Remember that a sense of desperation will make people flee. If necessary, suppress mental flashes of your glorious future together.

For first contact, nearly any topic will do. For instance, comment on something good you noticed about him. If you don't want to start flirting straight away, you can comment on the surroundings: ask about training if you're at the gym, ask about frozen dinners in front of a freezer or comment on music or decoration at a club, bar or café.

If you feel anxiety about chatting up an attractive guy, you can make yourself feel a bit more secure by coming up with a few good opening lines and keeping them at the ready. Don't get too creative or complex; keep it simple. An opener like, "Your eyes remind me of my recent stay at the Côte d'Azur. Such beautiful, glistening surfaces no doubt hide untold depths," is unlikely to get you anywhere, unless you convey it

with irony. In an emergency, you can even fall back on a cliché like, “Sorry, but you look familiar. Have I seen you somewhere before?” This is a fairly open-ended question to get the other party talking. His answer will give you something to work with. If that approach doesn’t work, jump to something that happened in the news or say something lame about the weather in combination with a knowing smile. If he finds you potentially interesting, he will happily go along with your topic and disregard cheesiness.

People overestimate the importance of pick-up lines. If George Clooney or Vin Diesel steps up to you with a bad opener, you’ll respond differently than if The Creature from the Black Lagoon does the same.

Greg

Be conscious of his body language. If he is helping the conversation along, keeps locking eyes and leans towards you, you can assume he is interested. If he doesn’t do any of those things, the trick is to find out whether he is shy or just not that into you. It may be possible to get his guard down and make him engage by asking him some questions, calmly waiting for an answer and then letting him talk without interruption. If his replies remain short and noncommittal, if he turns his back to you or if he starts calling the police, you are clearly not a match. Don’t keep pushing; excuse yourself and leave. Maybe it’s just bad timing or maybe he considers you the equivalent of The Hunchback of Notre Dame; it doesn’t matter either way. The next time you happen to run into him, make eye-contact again and gauge his response. If he doesn’t make a move, take him off your grocery list and continue shopping.

If you do feel he is into you but you are running out of things to say for the moment, excuse yourself. You do not have to get him into bed this very moment, especially if you are looking for more than a one-night stand. You can say that you don’t want to be rude to the friends you came with and have to get back to them. Or, if you are alone, make up a believable reason why you have to go. Of course, you can also use this tactic if you find that your target isn’t quite as appealing as you’d hoped. Assuming you still dig him, offer him your number and suggest meeting for a drink sometime. If he accepts, that’s great, but don’t be too disappointed if you never actually hear from him. If he volunteers to give you his number in return, you are much more likely to actually have that drink.

Body talk

If you are on the hunt in a park at night, in a darkroom (a barely illuminated public space for cruising strangers), at a sauna or at a sex party, you should probably forget about chatting. Steamy looks, body language and actions will have to take the place of words. In these circumstances, an erection will equal someone holding out his hand to you and a blowjob will equal “hello”. Cruising without words is an activity for the more advanced gay gentleman, as embarrassing misunderstandings can all too easily occur and hands may end up in inappropriate places. However, obvious arousal combined with heated eye-contact is a fairly good indicator of interest and most men are not all that subtle when they’re on the hunt for sex. But even such a superficial first meeting can end up having romantic consequences.

Networking

Even if being gay is just a small factor in your life and you tend to avoid the gay scene, it helps to have some gay friends. Friends of friends can turn into potential boyfriends, after all, or serve to widen your network of gay friends even more. The more eligible men you run into, the more likely you are to find someone you click with. One of the advantages of this approach is that your potential boyfriend already has a seal of approval from people you know and presumably respect. Your partner would be a part of the same network as you, which makes it more likely that you already share certain values and interests. A downside is that having shared friends may get awkward, if you end up in a nasty or embarrassing break up.

You could also try to combine your hobby with your search for a partner. Sign up for a choir, a dance course, cooking classes or join a sports club aimed specifically at gay men, for instance. The goal should not be to meet someone hot on the first day, but to build a group of friends. In doing so, you will better your chances of a romance blossoming at some point.

Beware of straight people trying to set you up with another gay guy they know, especially if you and he appear to be the only two gay men they’ve met. Some straight people still assume that because two men are gay they will either know each other already or will want to get married the moment they meet. Blind dates in general can be awkward, as you are being set up randomly by a mutual acquaintance. The chance of there being no spark is significant, especially if you have never even seen the

other party. Having to explain why you don't want a second meeting, to both your date and your mutual friends, might be painful. If you do venture out on one, be sure to get some basic information and see a picture of your potential date ahead of time.

If at first you don't succeed...

Don't get too discouraged by a couple of rejections or bad experiences. There isn't necessarily a problem with either you or the guys you are trying to date. However, if you start to feel wracked with self-doubt and can handle the truth, ask some good friends of yours for their honest but tactful opinion on what may be making people turn you down. Maybe

you are a fashion victim, maybe you seem too clingy, maybe you have bad breath or maybe you go for a type of guy who generally doesn't go for men like you. Some subgroups of the gay scene tend to date their own kind, others mostly their opposite. There are no guarantees in the dating scene, and a good fit might take years to find. In any case, you will likely end up making some friends as you go, which is also important. And even if it feels like a lot of people around you have already coupled up, it doesn't mean their relationships will outlast yours once you finally meet your match.

Sex appeal is fifty percent what you've got and fifty percent what people think you've got.

Sophia Loren, actress