

52 First Dates



A Plural Dating Game
By the Spindrift Crew

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52 First Dates

52 First Dates is a rules-light tabletop roleplaying game for 4 or more players about going on 52 blind dates while plural.

Well. You probably won't play out 52 dates in one session (or even ever)! More likely you'll just play out a few, either a pre-arranged number or until the players agree they've enjoyed playing and are ready to stop.

What You Need

Okay, you need to get the following together:

- At least three players; preferably four to six, and usually no more than eight
- Two decks of standard poker cards; they should have different backs
- One copy of the System Sheet
- One copy of the Outside Interference Sheet
- One Date Sheet per player
- One Headmate Sheet per player
- One Game Reference Sheet per player
- Pencils
- *optional, but recommended* Extra paper for notetaking

The Purpose of 52 First Dates

This game attempts to do four things at once. It's up to you, the players, to determine if it succeeds at any of those. The four goals are to be a game that:

1. Has multiple players playing the same character
2. Educates about plural systems
3. Functions as an interesting dating sim
4. Is actually fun to play

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Game Design Philosophy

Our take on indie game design¹ is that of an ongoing conversation where a number of different voices weave in and out with their contributions that answer the question, “What *is* a roleplaying game? What *can* a roleplaying game *be*? ”

All of our games are made with that in mind: this is our part in the conversation, right here, right now. We may have more to add later, but this is what we want to say now.

Very few concepts in the game are *completely* new. For example, card-based games have long been a part of the hobby, to varying degrees of success. Romance/dating sim tabletop RPGs aren’t as common, but they’re out there – most notably by Emily Care Boss in her *Romance Trilogy*.

Games where many players run the same character are even more rare; and I don’t know of any that address it from the standpoint of a plural, shared character. If you do, let me know!

But just as nobody invents all the words they speak, the magic isn’t in the parts you use but how you assemble them – or even beyond that, in what you *actually* say with those words.

Hopefully we’ll be able to communicate our message to you as you play [52 First Dates](#)!

A System Introduction

Like many tabletop roleplaying games, [52 First Dates](#) is a collaboration between a group of people. Unlike many, that group are all in the same body.

Hello! We’re the Spindrift Crew!

This is a departure from the way we normally write TTRPGs, which is to try and maintain a consistent voice throughout. We’re purposely doing things differently for [52 First Dates](#) because we think it’s important for this game, and thematically sound.

Rather than interjecting comments into the flow of the text, we decided to use sidenotes in the gutters, each signed with an emoji so you know who’s speaking.

1. Dera totally wrote this section, she’s so wordy 

No Fascists

If you're a fascist, you're not welcome to play this game. It's against the rules. ²

If you're reading this and thinking, "You just call everyone you disagree with a fascist," then you're probably a fascist, or incapable of drawing inferences from context and acknowledging a dangerous political climate that causes the oppressed to be hyperbolic.

Don't play this game. Heal yourself. Grow. Learn. Watch some Mister Roger's Neighborhood or something.

2. No, really, we mean it. This isn't for fascists. 

3. You might notice that there's a lot of the game manual that we didn't write ourselves – such as the TTRPG Safety Toolkit, More Than One, the definitions in the Lexicon, and the Anti-Capitalist Attribution Cooperative License. This wasn't to save time or to increase the page count, but because we think these are important topics, and we doubt we could do them justice ourselves. ⁴



4. see, I told you she's wordy!

⁵



5. Aura, you can't put a footnote on a footnote. ⁶



6. oh, yeah? just watch me!



Cadera Spindrift

Primary (co-)fronter and project coordinator; she/her

Dera

Our self-described analytical headmate and game mechanics wonk; she/her

Carline Stone

Social justice druid and in-house sensitivity reader; will be your big gay auntie; she/her

Aura

Flirty lesbian disaster; looks like our WoW character; she/her

Valorie

Our generally quiet protector/warrior; sometimes Fusillade; she/her



Doesn't speak or write except in emojis; not literally a fox; fae/faer or he/him or it/its or they/them or /

Credits

[52 First Dates](#) was created by Cadera Spindrift ³ as part of the Otherships Jam 3 hosted by Metaparadox.

The contents of the game are covered by the *Anti-Capitalist Attribution Cooperative License*, written by Takuma Okada]{.spin}; a copy of which can be found at the end of the rules.

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All other photographs are courtesy of The Gender Spectrum Collection and are used under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

No Fascists rule by Olivia Hill, licensed under Creative Commons Attribution - Share-Alike 4.0.

More Than One: A Plural 101 by anonymous at MoreThanOne.info; used under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license. (Retrieved June 20, 2021.)

The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a resource co-curated by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a compilation of safety tools that have been designed by members of the tabletop roleplaying games community for use by players and GMs at the table. You can find it at bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit. Specific items in the toolkit are credited as follows:

- *The TTRPG Safety Toolkit Quick Reference Guide* was created by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk
- *Lines and Veils* were designed by Ron Edwards
- *The X card* was designed by John Stavropoulos
- *The O card* was designed by Kira Magrann
- *The N card* was designed by Mysty Vander and Adam Cleaver, based on the Support Flower by Taylor Stokes
- *The Script Change RPG Toolbox* was designed by Beau Jágr Sheldon
- *The Luxton Technique* was originally written by P.H.Lee and reposted by Beau Jágr Sheldon
- *The Open Door* was designed by Eirik Fatland
- *Stars and Wishes* was designed by Lu Quade

Definitions in the Lexicon are adapted from *Pluralpedia, the collaborative plurality dictionary*, and are used under a Creative Commons Attribution - Share-Alike 3.0 Unported license. (Retrieved 2021-06-20)



Honest, open, and empathic communication is essential to playing safely.

Safety Tools

Playing the [52 First Dates](#) RPG should be enjoyable for everyone.

To help ensure that everyone has an enjoyable experience, we recommend the *TTRPG Safety Toolkit*, which we've included below. You should *not* play [52 First Dates](#) without using at least one such tool in your game.

What are safety tools?

Sometimes games have content or situations where a player or GM may feel stressed out, unsafe, or otherwise not having fun. Safety tools are a way for players and GMs to communicate and check-in before, during, and after a game in order to make sure everyone is still having fun, and to provide the right support when needed.

Communication, trust, and care The key to safety tools is communication and trust. There needs to be open and respectful communication alongside a culture of trust for these to work.

As a GM, player, or organizer, you can create this culture by making it clear that the care and well-being of everyone at the table comes before the game or story. This can be done by actively listening to everyone, offering accommodations and safety tools, implementing actions when asked while not prying (nobody owes you their trauma as explanation), and actively checking in before, during, and after a game.

The toolkit

Different safety tools work better for different people and games. Finding the ones that best suit the needs of everyone at the table is important, and should be facilitated through discussion at the start of every new

game or new group.

This guide provides summaries of some safety tools and techniques (with the original designers' permission) to add to your own toolkit. This includes the **X-card system**, the **Script Change RPG Toolbox**, the **Luxton Technique**, and more. Sources and links are provided at the end of this guide for the full original materials, and the toolkit is regularly updated with new tools.

Before the Game Begins

Session 0

Session 0s are a great way to begin communication, set expectations on the kind of story and play, and introduce and discuss what safety tools will be used at the table.

Lines and Veils

Lines and veils are used to set boundaries on content in a game.

Lines are hard limits on content, things that the GM or the players don't want to engage in. Setting up a line means that content won't show up in the game at all.

Veils are soft limits, things that are ok "behind a curtain" or when they "cut-to-black." Setting up a veil means that the content might be in the game but not spotlighted or described in great detail.

Lines and veils can be adjusted as needed throughout the game.

Script Change Rating

Script Change ratings are used to set tone and boundaries for your game. Using film ratings (or your own), you can outline what audience you're playing for (e.g. PG-13 vs R).

The **rating** also addresses what content players do want to see as well as what they don't want to see. Make sure to balance and respect everyone's do and don't wants.

Ratings and do-and-don't-want content can be adjusted as needed throughout the game.

Luxton Technique Discussion

In the **Luxton Technique**, have an open discussion between everyone at the table about potential trauma triggers. This is with the understanding that it's not possible to identify every single possible trigger or trauma, and that there is no social pressure to go into details or individual justifications for a trigger.

During the Game

X, N, and O Cards

X, N, and O cards are check-in tools. They can be used by tapping physical cards, typing the letter in the chat function of the video conference software or virtual tabletop you are using, or using hand signals. Before the game begins, remind everyone that they are available and how to use them.

The **X card** can be used at any point if a participant is uncomfortable with the content happening in-game. When the **X card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “**X**” in the chat, the group can change, rewind, or skip the content.

The **N card** can be used at any point if a participant feels like they are headed towards an X. When the **N card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “**N**” in the chat, the group can change the content or have the scene “fade to black.”

The **O card** can be used at any point if a participant wants to continue with the content. When the **O card** is used by tapping the card or typing an “**O**” in the chat, the group is ok to continue with the content. They can also regularly be prompted by a “**O?**” asked out loud or in the chat to check-in if everyone is still ok.

Script Change

The **Script Change RPG Toolbox** is a collection of tools that can be used to adjust play and content. They can be used by tapping physical cards, typing the letter in the chat function of the video conference software or virtual tabletop you are using, or using hand signals. Before the game begins, remind your players that they are available and how to use them.

Rewind  can be used when something has happened in play that makes a participant uncomfortable. When **Rewind**  is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to rewind...”), be clear about what content is being adjusted, rewind to a point before it happened, and play starts again.

Fast Forward  can be used when a participant would like to skip past uncomfortable content or to the next part of the story for pacing. When **Fast Forward**  is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to fast forward...”), skip forward to a new spot in the story that everyone agrees on.

Pause  can be used when things are too intense, but you still want to continue playing the scene. When **Pause**  is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“I’d like to pause...”), you can take a break and/or discuss the content as needed. After the **Pause** , you can **Resume** , **Rewind** , **Fast Forward** .

Resume  can be used when everyone is ready to continue play, often after adjusting or discussing content. When **Resume**  is used by tapping the card, typing the shorthand in the chat, or stating it out loud (“Let’s resume...”), continue with play.

Luxton Technique

With the **Luxton Technique**, when a participant comes across triggering content in play, they can choose to discuss it with the other people at the table.

The participant is given complete control over that content, expressed as a need or want for how play will continue. This can include in-game directions for plot and characters, as well as out of game needs such as breaks.

After the need and wants are expressed, everyone continues play to accomodate the requests.

Open Door

The **Open Door** is the assurance that someone can leave or take a break from the game for their own safety and well-being without being judged. State this at the beginning and periodically throughout the game.

Breaks

For games longer than 2 hours or games that have intense content, having a short built-in break is recommended to allow people to stay focused and process. Allow for discussion, bio breaks, or any other needs during this time.

After the Game

Bleed

Emotions and stress from the game can bleed over into post-game life. This can affect the enjoyment of the game, as well as out-of-game relationships between players and GM if not worked through.

Being open and honest about where the game begins and ends, and being conscious of which feelings belong to the player and which are just bleed, helps to mitigate the effects.

Aftercare

Together as a group after the game, check-in with everyone to see how they are feeling. This is an open way for everyone to emotionally decompress, talk through, and process the events of the session in a safe environment.

Encourage everyone to practice their own forms of self-care and remind them that their mental health comes first.

Debriefing

Debriefing as a group is a great way to reflect on the game, identify possible issues, highlight the fun things to continue, and work through potential bleed. Debriefing can happen right after the game or in the days following the stream.

Stars and Wishes

Stars and wishes are used to reflect on the session and communicate feedback in a positive and forward-facing way. At the end of the game, go around and get everyone to state a star and wish.

Stars are things that the participants really enjoyed and loved about the game. This could include a particular moment of roleplay, an encounter created by the GM, or anything else that stuck out as something awesome during the game.



Wishes are things that the participants would like to see in future sessions. This could include particular interactions between characters, potential story moments and development, or anything else that could make the game even better in the future.

Highlight Reel and Wrap Session

Similar to **stars and wishes**, Script Change has **Highlight Reel** and **Wrap Session**.

The **Highlight Reel** is used to reflect on the session and highlight moments participants enjoyed. At the end of the game, go around and get everyone to state highlight of the game for them. This could include a particular moment of roleplay, an encounter created by the GM, or anything else that stuck out as something awesome during the game.

The **Wrap Session** is an opportunity for the group to reflect on the session and discuss what could be improved going forward. At the end of the game, go around and open up discussion about the game. This could include content participants didn't feel comfortable calling pause or rewind at the time, or talking about emotional impacts and bleed.

There should be no social pressure to disclose the details or trauma to justify why someone felt uncomfortable or unsafe during the game, as long as the discussion moves towards how to address the issues going forward.

It's important to share what you enjoyed about a game, as well as what you'd like to see changed.

More Than One: A Plural 101

The following section contains information about plurality that should be read and understood by the players before playing [52 First Dates](#). It's adapted from [MoreThanOne.info](#).

Plurality (or multiplicity) is the existence of multiple self-aware entities inside one physical brain.

You could think of a plural collective as a group of lifelong roommates, but with a body instead of an apartment.

It's a concept that fascinates many, the idea of always sharing your life with others, never being alone no matter where you go. Yet, for all that, there's a lack of understanding and a great deal of stigma surrounding plurality, and many plurals hide as a result.

Terms

There are many terms related to plurality. These are only the most common ones.

Different plurals have different preferences when it comes to language. Treat this list just as a starting point.

System (or collective): The plural group that resides within a single brain.

Fronting: When an individual controls the collective's shared physical body, sometimes called the "front".

Headspace: An internal landscape shared by a collective, and often where people go when they are not at front.

Singlet: Someone who is not plural. One being in one brain.

Switching: When collective members exchange control over the front.

Causes

It is not fully known what causes plurality, and it is likely there is not a single cause.

The clinical diagnoses of Dissociative Identity Disorder and Other Specified Dissociative Disorder are typically believed to originate from severe childhood trauma.

Outside clinical psychology, some plurals attribute their plurality to non-trauma causes. Some consider it a difference in their brain that they were born with. Others consider it a spiritual phenomenon.

There are even plurals who were not originally plural, but who became plural when their mental creations came to life, accidentally or intentionally.

There are also plural collectives who do not know their origin, who have mixed origins, or who do not see origin as relevant at all.

There are differences in functioning between the various plural origin types. For example, trauma plurals tend to experience more issues with memory and numerous PTSD-related difficulties that many non-trauma plurals do not.

However, they all share the common thread of being more than one.

Myths

Myth: Plurality is ultra-rare.

The International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation places the prevalence of DID at approximately 1 to 3% worldwide. This is in the same scope as autism or OCD. The number is only higher once you add in OSDD plurals and plurals who do not identify within clinical terms.

While plurals are certainly not a majority, it is highly likely you've encountered at least one over the course of your life without realizing it!

Myth: Plurals are dangerous.

This particular myth is likely due to Hollywood's many portrayals of DID plurals as violent axe-murderers. To say the least, don't believe everything you see on the big screen.



You can't tell if someone's plural just by looking at them. Is this one person or six?

According to a statement released by the ISSTD, recent research finds no correlation between having DID and committing crimes. Those with DID are much more likely to be the victims of violent crime than the perpetrators.

Sadly, most violence done by DID plurals is towards themselves. Over 70% of those with DID have attempted suicide at least once, due to (among other things) the weight of past trauma, comorbid health issues, lack of access to competent and compassionate healthcare, and frequent retraumatization from social stigma and ignorance.

There are no statistics released for plurals outside the clinical scope, but it is safe to say that they are unlikely to be violent either, no more than any other marginalized group.

Myth: Plurals are mentally ill and need to merge to become healthy.

While it was once commonly believed in psychiatry that plurality was inherently disordered, modern treatment guidelines now acknowledge that it is possible to live successfully and happily as a plural. Informed therapy for DID now focuses more upon resolving past trauma and teaching collectives to work together, with integration (the formal term for merging) optional.

Even after learning cooperation and working through past trauma, some plurals still find being plural difficult and opt for integration. Others can't even fathom the thought, and view the concept with great uneasiness. Still others may partially integrate, while others may attempt integration, only to find that singleness either isn't possible for them or only makes things more difficult.

Just as with everything else, integration is personal for every plural. The decision to integrate or to remain plural can only be made by them, and them alone.

Myth: Plurality is all made-up.

Brain imaging studies have been conducted on DID plurals that have shown significant differences between collective members, differences that were not present in trained actors who were pretending to have DID.

There have been no such studies done on non-clinical plurality yet, but interest has been growing in the field.

Myth: Plurality is a miserable state of being / a gift with no downsides.

Plurality is neither inherently better or worse than singleness (one entity in one body). Some plurals are happy being plural, some are unhappy, and others are in-between.

Never being alone can be a blessing. It can also be a curse. You can be super close to your roommates, or you might fight a lot, or you might just get along. And sometimes you can have things going on that make having roommates easier or harder. Even the best of friends fight sometimes.

All of this is true for plural collectives as well. It can be challenging to make sure every member is heard and taken care of. It can also be rewarding, when everyone supports each other to achieve things they couldn't alone.

What is it like?

There are many ways to be plural, and many dimensions to living as plural.

This page only barely scratches the surface, and is not representative of all plurals. Don't be surprised if you meet a collective who hasn't been described here!

Just as with any other group of people, members within plural collectives vary in how and how well they get along with each other. Some coexist happily while others fight, but in all cases, they must learn how to communicate, compromise, and cooperate amongst themselves. On top

of the basics are various unique challenges related to sharing a body, such as managing outside time and relationships as a group. It is an experience with both its challenges and rewards.

Identity

Plural collectives vary greatly in how separate their members are. A collective might see themselves as one being made of many facets, or many people cohabiting one head, or even somewhere in-between. Members may also vary greatly in how different their personalities are: there are collectives where the members are extremely similar in terms of beliefs and behaviors, and others where the members are as different as any group of people picked at random off the streets.

The subjective identities and self-images of collective members might not match their body. There are members who may be internally younger or older than their body's age, members who are of different genders, and even nonhuman members.

Communication

Communication between members is crucial to a collective's functioning. Establishing internal communication, in fact, is a major part of DID therapy.

Some collectives are able to communicate with each other relatively easily, simply by thinking what they want to say at each other, like internal telepathy. In many cases, they are able to send raw thoughts and feelings to each other in addition to words, making communication somewhat easier (but not infallible).

There are some collectives who cannot communicate mentally at all, and instead communicate by leaving each other notes, keeping schedules and to-do lists, and writing in journals.

There are many collectives who fall somewhere in the middle, being only able to communicate through vague impressions. There are also cases where some members of a collective will be able to communicate easily, while others will have much more difficulty.

Even in collectives who can communicate reliably, communication can be disrupted by life stress, improper medication, or other factors, and so many groups have contingency measures for if this happens.

Headspace

Internal worlds vary greatly in terms of scope and function. Some headspaces are extremely simple, being nothing more than a single room or field where people can talk. Others are more elaborate: small villages, great mansions, sprawling forests. Still others are as complex as any fantasy writer's paracosm.

Some collectives do not have internal worlds at all. Instead, when someone is not actively fronting, they sit in the “backseat” or fall asleep.

Switching

Plural collectives vary in both the amount of switching they do, and the measure of control they have over it.

There are some collectives who never, or almost never switch. There is one member who stays at front, while the others stay in the headspace.

There are some collectives who switch constantly, handling their physical life in shifts of hours, days, or even weeks. Certain members may have specific jobs: for example, one member may attend school or work, while another handles chores at home, while another steps in only to handle dangerous situations.

For those groups who switch, there is a spectrum in terms of how much control groups have over their switching. Some may be able to switch almost at will, while others have almost no control. Many fall in between: switching can be controlled for the most part, but there are still conditions that will cause members to either involuntarily swap or get “stuck.” As with communication, both establishing a greater degree of control over switching and finding ways to manage involuntary switches are major parts of DID therapy.

Governance

There are many ways by which collectives govern themselves, laying down rules for everything from how to interact with people outside, to how to take care of their body, to how to treat each other.

Some collectives, especially smaller ones, are extremely informal about their governance. Like a group of roommates, they decide on some basic guidelines and ask each other when if in doubt.

Some collectives have a single individual, or group of individuals who are trusted to handle everything related to a collective's outer life. Others might have everyone vote on bigger decisions. Some expand this further, creating internal parliaments, and writing up formal charters.

Very few collectives run themselves without any rules at all — some degree of order, even if it's as simple as a shared agreement to harm none outside or inside, is vital to successfully living together.

Etiquette

Every system has their own preferences on how they would like to be treated, but the following tend to be common rules of thumb.

Do not ask if they are dangerous. Hollywood is not a reliable source of information.

Don't ask to meet the "real" person. Everyone in a plural collective is real.

Don't assume that members of the collective have the same opinions, preferences, etc.

Do not out a collective without their permission, even if you think the person you are outing them to would be understanding.

Do not push them into therapy or medication against their will. If they haven't expressed any interest in integration, don't broach the topic with them. (Likewise, if they have decided to pursue care of their own volition, don't push them out of it.)

Do not pry into their trauma history, if applicable. (This includes asking if they have one.)

Remember that a plural collective is a group of beings. Many appreciate it greatly when outsiders refer to individual members with their individual names and pronouns. (After all, it's awkward to refer to someone by their sibling's name.)

If you're not familiar with them as individuals, many plurals will have some preference on how to refer to them as a collective: usually with plural "they/them," and with their group name. (You might think of this as referring to someone by their surname/family name.)

If in doubt, ask what they prefer, and follow their lead.

Essentially: respect their right to privacy and self-determination. Unless they've identified themselves otherwise, think of them as a group of roommates rather than as one person with multiple personalities. Or a troupe putting on a show of singleness in order to make ends meet.

Being invited backstage is a great act of trust — don't break it.

Glossary of Game Terms

Before we dive into game mechanics, these are the terms used in the game.

Player

This means what you think it means – one of you who are reading this and, hopefully, playing the game at some point. There are no gamemasters in this game, only players.

The System

A fictional character created by all the players and played jointly between all of them. This character is a plural system, and has been set up on a date by a friend.

Headmates

One of the members of the System's plural system. While there are as many headmates as there are players, a headmate is *not* tied to one player as “their” character.

Date Night

This is the actual event of the blind date between the System and the Date character. It doesn't have to take place at night; you can have it happen at any time. When Date Night occurs, the Prospect character is created (or carries over from a previous date), and the roles are assigned.

The Prospect

For any given Date Night, this is the fictional character the System has been set up with for a blind date. The Prospect has their own desires and personality, separate from those of the System.

Roles

For Date Night, there are three roles: **The Date**, **The Fronters**, and **The Outside Interference**. These change between dates, and may change during a date as well. Roles are determined randomly at the start of Date Night.

The Date

The player who is currently controlling the fictional actions of the Prospect character, playing their cards to help describe how the Prospect acts toward, and reacts to, the System.

The Fronter(s)

The player or players (for a game with 4+ players) who are actively controlling the System by playing cards. With more than one Fronter, they alternate turns between each other. The Fronters roleplay the System as whichever Headmate is fronting at the time, which can change during the game.

The Outside Interference

The player who is controlling “the rest of the world”, and introducing elements into the fictional Date Night to complicate the potential love connection between the System character and the Date character.

The Date Deck

The deck of cards from which both the Date and the Outside Interference draw their cards.

The System Deck

The deck of cards from which all the Fronters draw their cards. It’s a good idea to a System Deck with a different card back than the Date Deck, as the two will get mixed together frequently.

The Date Status Stacks

A row of three cards, situated between the players, upon which they play their cards. Only the top card matters, so the Status Stacks don’t need to be laid out like solitaire game – just as three distinct piles.

End of the Date

When all of the cards on the Status Stack show the same suit or the same rank, it’s time to wrap up that Date Night. The cards determine if the System and the Date share an intimate moment, want to date again, both, or neither.

Achieving Intimacy

One of the two main outcomes of Date Night. “Intimacy” is a deliberately broad term, allowing this to include everything from physical sex to a long night talking about feelings, at the option of the players.

Getting a Second Date

The other main outcome of Date Night. The Prospect character is willing to see the System again, and the players collectively can decide if they’d like to do that, or go on a date with someone else.

Aftercare

This is another broad term, adapted from the TTRPG Safety Toolkit. It’s a recognition that even dating vicariously through a fictional character can stir up emotions, and players may need time to process those.



Instead of dice like many tabletop roleplaying games, 52 First Dates uses playing cards.

Using the Cards

You need to have two decks of cards to play [52 First Dates](#).

One deck is called the *Date's Deck* and is shared between the players in the roles of the Date and the Outside Interference.

The other deck is called the *System's Deck* and is shared between players in the role of the System.

At the beginning of each Date Night, shuffle each deck and then lay out a row of three cards on the table, from the top of the Date's Deck. These are known as the *Date Status stacks*. During the course of the date, you'll play cards from your hand onto one of the stacks.⁷

Your Hand

Each player, no matter which role they're playing, has a hand of five cards. The hands of the Date and the Outside Interference are drawn from the top of the Date's Deck, while the other players' hands are drawn from the System's Deck.

After you play a card, draw another card from the appropriate deck.

7. The two decks will end up mixed together, which is why we recommend that you use two decks with different backs – it's easier to sort out after the date!



Matching Cards

Two cards **match suits** if their suits are the same – such as clubs or diamonds.

These cards match suits:



Two cards **match colors** if their suits are the same color – black or red.

♣ Clubs and ♠ spades are black suits, and ♦ diamonds and ♥ hearts are red suits.

These cards match colors:



Two cards **match ranks** if their ranks are the same number or word, such as Ace, 2, or Queen.

These cards match ranks:



These cards don't match each other at all:



Choosing a Player

When you need to choose a player, such as determining which role someone will play in a date, all players turn over a card from the top of Date's Deck. The player with the highest-ranked card is the one chosen.

To break a tie, players tied for the highest rank card draw a second card from the top of System's Deck.

Roles and Cards

Each role has different rules for drawing and playing cards.

The Fronters

If you're one of the Fronters, you draw your cards from the *System's Deck*. You can play a given card on a Status Stack only if the card *matches* either the suit or rank of the top card on that stack.

You play one card per turn, when your turn comes up in the turn order. In games with more than three players, at least two players will share the System role, and you alternate turns.

For example, if the Status Stacks look like this ...



... and you have these cards in your hand...



...you could play your cards on these stacks:⁸

	10	3	J
10	yes (rank matches)	no	no
3	no	yes (rank matches)	no
4	no	no	no
5	no	no	yes (suit matches)
J	yes (suit matches)	yes (suit matches)	yes (rank matches)

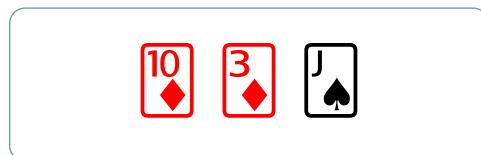
8. You can't play the 5 of clubs at all, since it doesn't match either the suit or the rank of a stack. ↗

The Date

If you're the Date, you draw your cards from the *Date's Deck*. You can play a given card on a Status Stack only if the card *does not* match the suit or rank of the top card on that stack. This is the opposite of the rules for the Fronter role.

You play one card per turn, when your turn comes up in the turn order. In games with more than three players, you will be taking turns more frequently than the players in the System role.

For example, if the Status Stacks look like this ...



... and you have these cards in your hand...



...you could play your cards on these stacks:⁹

	10 ◆	3 ◆	J ◆
10 ◆	no (rank matches)	yes	yes
3 ◆	yes	no (rank matches)	yes
4 ◆	yes	yes	yes
5 ◆	yes	yes	no (suit matches)
J ◆	no (suit matches)	no (suit matches)	no (rank matches)

9. You can't play the ♦ at all, because it matches either the suit or the rank of the card on each stack. ↗

The Outside Interference

If you're the Outside Interference, you draw your cards from the *Date's Deck*. You can play a given card on a Status Stack only if the card's **rank matches the last card played**.

You can play a card **immediately after any other player** plays a card to a stack. When you do, instead of providing dialog for a character, you introduce a complication into the scenario determined by the card you played.

For example, if the Status Stacks look like this, with the last-played card shown in red ...



... and you have these cards in your hand...



...you could play your cards on these stacks:¹⁰

	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
	<i>no</i>	yes (rank matches)
	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>
	<i>no</i>	<i>no</i>

10. It's entirely likely that you can't play a card every time you potentially could – that's by design. The Outside Interference has more opportunities to play cards than the other roles.





Playing a Card

When it's your turn, you can *play* a card by laying it on one of the three Status Stacks.

Playing a card is tied to dialogue or action taken by the character you're playing – be it the System character or the Prospect character. You can describe what your character says and does and then play a card, or you can play the card first and then declare what happened.

The suit of each card determines the current demeanor of your character. Each suit can be played in generally positive way, such as being *direct or clear*, or a less positive way such as being *blunt and tactless*.

The demeanors associated with each suit are shown in the following table.¹¹

Suit	Demeanor
♣ Clubs	Direct and clear, or Blunt and tactless
♦ Diamonds	Flirty and coy, or Evasive and guarded
♥ Hearts	Earnest and heartfelt, or Thoughtless and inconsiderate
♠ Spades	Clever and witty, or Mocking and hurtful

You don't have to announce the exact demeanor you're using when you play the card, but should try to make it clear in the words you use or the way you describe the character's actions.

If you don't have a card of the given suit to play, then you can't take an action using that demeanor.¹² For example, if the player in the Date role has no ♦ Diamonds cards in their hand, then the Date character can't act in a *flirty and coy, or evasive and guarded* manner.

You play cards onto the three Date Status stacks and describe what your character is saying or doing.

11. Try this as a mnemonic:
Spades: sharp-witted
Hearts: passionate
Clubs: blunt
Diamonds: sparkling 

12. *Tip!* You might want to choose the demeanor before you decide what to say, based on the cards in your hand. 

You Must Play If You Can

If you're the Date or a Fronterm and you have at least one card you can play from your hand, you must play one of those cards on your turn. ^{13 14}

If you're the Outside Interference, you aren't required to play cards when you have the option to do so.

At a Loss for Words

If you're the Date or a Fronter and you *can't* legally play any cards from your hand onto the current stack, then your character is **at a loss for words**. You can describe how that character is taken aback.

If you're the Outside Interference and *another player* is at a loss for words, then you can immediately play a card from your hand on any of the cards on the Date Status stack – not just the card most recently played.

The Outside Interference

When you're playing the Outside Interference, you don't have a turn in the turn order – you can play one of your cards any time the rank on that card matches the last card played by another player.

Instead of describing what one of the characters says, you describe an event that happens to the two characters, throwing their date into uncertain territory.

The type of event is based on the rank of the card you play, but you can decide the details of the event as you please.

Responding to Outside Interference

If you're the Date or a Fronter and the player in the role of the Outside Interference plays a card on a card you just played, you have the option to play a card in response, following your normal rules playing cards.

When that happens, you also get to describe how your character reacted to the event in a way that minimized the problem.

You *aren't required* to play a card in response to Outside Interference; if you don't wish to, even if you have a card you *could* play, tell the other players that you pass.

13. This could mean you might end the date even if you don't want to. 

14. That's how dating goes sometimes ... sigh 

Drawing New Cards

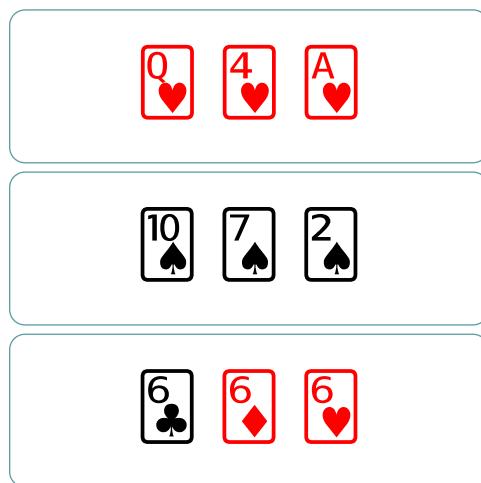
Normally, you get to draw a new card after you play one. However, if the Outside Interference plays a card, neither you nor the Outside Interference draw a replacement card until after you've either responded or passed on responding.

Ending a Date

After someone plays a card onto one of the Status Stacks, they should check to see if a date-ending condition has happened – either all of the suits on the stack match, or all of the ranks match.

When that happens, the date moves to the resolution phase.

These are examples of Status Stacks that end the date:





Nobody wants to have a panic attack just from playing a roleplaying game.

Part 1: The Set-Up

Now that you know how the cards work, we're going to tell you how the game is set up.¹⁵

Before the first Date Night, you have to do the following:

- Go over basic safety procedures
- Decide on the setting and themes of the game
- Create the System
- Create the Headmates

Before *each* Date Night, including the first, you need to:

- Create the Prospect
- Assign Roles
- Set the Scene

Game Safely

15. “the set-up” has a double meaning, see, because not only is this section about preparing the game, but the whole conceit of the game is that it’s a blind date that you were *set up* on 

16. even those of us already in an ongoing relationship! 

Dating can be an emotional rollercoaster for most of us¹⁶, and when dealing with issues of attraction, gender, sexuality, and desire, those emotions might come to the surface just by playing a roleplaying game.

For that reason, we strongly recommend that you use some of the tools in the TTRPG Safety Toolkit, which starts on .

Lines and Veils (see) are the first place to start, by defining which things you don’t want to see at all in [52 First Dates](#), and which things you’re okay with occurring – but only off-screen.

Some specific examples that you might consider for lines or veils include:

- Sexual banter and innuendo

- References to explicit sex acts
- Queerphobia of any kind, including as outside interference
- Other forms of bigotry and oppression, such as ableism or racism
- Abusive relationships, either past or present
- Infidelity
- BDSM, kink, and fetishes
- “Negging” and other insults

The Script Change Ratings () tool lets you rate the game in the same way movies, television shows, or comic books are rated. You can use those to decide when to fast forward, rewind, pause, or resume the date.

(Most people in the United States are familiar with MPAA movie ratings, but they’re a very coarse tool when looking at tabletop roleplaying scenarios. (Many of the ratings rely on determining whether a parent should be present, how is that supposed to work here?)¹⁷ The television content advisory system isn’t much better, parsing out “four uses of at least two expletives” in a way that’s unworkable for gaming and concerning itself with visual imagery.)

One of the most widespread safety tools in the tabletop RPG hobby is the X Card () that players can use to signal when they need something to stop. We also recommend the use of the N and O cards as well, to stave off problems before they become an issue.

The Meaning of Intimacy

One of the two primary outcomes in 52 First Dates – and one of the presumed goals of the protagonist System – is to become intimate with another person.

The word “intimacy” was specifically chosen instead of the more crass “get laid” not just because it sounds more high-falutin’, but also because it’s *not* true that most people going on dates want *sex*.

It *is* fair to say that for the most part, people going on dates are hoping to find someone with whom they feel enough of a connection that they can let down their normal barriers and share who they are and what matters to them.

That’s what we’re labeling *intimacy* here.

It could be any of these, or more:¹⁸

- A wild night of kinky sex

17. Oh, I should add that 52 First Dates is not a game intended for small children. Our assumption is that all participants are adults 

18. Or playing a roleplaying game together!¹⁹ 

19. only you would find that “intimate”, Dera! 



“Intimacy” might just mean spending quality time with someone you like.

- Opening up about a deep-seated trauma in your past
- Taking the Prospect home to meet your family
- Staying up late talking about everything and anything
- Binge-watching your favorite television show together
- Telling your Prospect about being a System

When you have the pre-game discussion about safety, especially lines and veils, be sure to ask what kinds of intimacy the players are okay with exploring, and which types they’d rather avoid.

The assumption in [52 First Dates](#) is that Date Night ends long *before* any actual intimacy occurs – we’re not expecting groups to play out either sex scenes or deep conversations until dawn. But you might want to either pull the veil a little sooner, or drop a line and not cross it, based on some types of intimacy that might arise.



“Let’s just meet over coffee?”

Setting and Themes

[52 First Dates](#) is a game about people. Plural people, singlet people, and the random people we bump into on a date.

It’s not a game about dragons, dungeons, wars, stars, lasers, spells, or anything else like that.

At least ... it doesn’t have to be.

Our default assumption is that [52 First Dates](#) represents a contemporary Western setting, somewhere in the first few decades of the 21st Century. The System character and the Prospect live in a relatively cosmopolitan city where queerness is accepted and celebrated, and where inroads are being made against ableism and pluralphobia but aren’t quite there yet.

The two characters were set up on an arranged date by a mutual friend who, while not knowing the System is plural, has a basic understanding of the persona that they and the Prospect present to the world.

You don’t have to play it that way, though.

If your group agrees, you could change the setting. Maybe this isn’t in 2021, but is set in a future resembling *Star Trek*’s 23rd and 24th Centuries. Or a darker, *Bladerunner*-style future. Post-apocalypse mutated animals? Anime-infused cyberpunk? Not actually the future, but a *long time ago, in galaxy far, far away...?*

Or maybe there are swords and sorcery. The characters could be meeting in a bar in Waterdeep, got hooked up in Bright Moon between fights against the Horde, or are graduates of rival magical academies (run by transphobes), set up by a mutual friend.

Maybe the friend isn't even a friend. A dating site serves the same role, or an all-powerful computer in a grim cyberfuture, or an oracle in the mythic past.

You *certainly* don't have to place your game in North America, I hope that goes without saying – but I would be remiss if I didn't remind you that haphazardly choosing non-white cultures for "play" in games is rather, uh, colonialist.²⁰

That said, it's also okay to stick to the default. It's easier and more comfortable if you aren't trying to figure out what the high elf view of gender might be, or whether Trills are inherently plural^{21 22 23 24}, or what-have-you.

In addition to the setting, you can add on themes to the game, which usually means there's something that one or more of you want to focus on with the characters. Some possible themes include:

- Queer liberation
- A simple study date at college
- Healing after a bad relationship
- Date Night gets caught up in an unrelated heist movie and goes horribly wrong
- A sweet and tender night out
- Capitalism ruins everything

20. you can totally tell that Carline wrote this section ... well, I can at least 

21. I mean, Trills kind of *are* plural. 

22. ... 

23. I HAPPEN TO HAVE STRONG OPINIONS ABOUT TRILLS, OKAY?



24. ... 

I'm not going to give you much more of a list than that, because I don't want to restrict your own creativity. ⁵² **First Dates** may have been created by us, but it's *your* game to play as you wish!

The important thing is communication amongst the players. Be open and honest about what you think you might enjoy, what you're willing to try, and what you absolutely don't want to happen. Use the heck out of the safety tools (see). Be willing to experiment, but don't forget to take care of yourselves.

Most of all, go have fun!



Creating the System

Everyone gets in a say in the System character.

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1. Name
2. Appearance -> one per player
3. Pronouns?

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Gender and Sexuality

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Neurodiversity, Race, and Disability

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Creating the Headmates

Once you've created the System, you need to create Headmates.

1. Write down a name or nickname for the headmate.
2. Write down pronouns for the headmate.
3. Write down a sexuality for the headmate.
4. Write down something that interests the headmate.
5. Write down the general demeanor or personality of the headmate.
6. Write down one quality the headmate is looking for in a potential partner.
7. Introduce us to this headmate.



Creating the Prospect

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The Prospect's Name

You can quickly determine a name for the Prospect by drawing a single card from the top of the Date's Deck, and comparing it to the following tables.

Everyone is involved in creating the Prospect.

These names have been chosen to have few gender assumptions attached.

Card	Name	Card	Name
A ♣	Ari	A ♥	Avery
2 ♣	Blu	2 ♥	Jordan
3 ♣	Page	3 ♥	Star
4 ♣	Taylor	4 ♥	Quinn
5 ♣	Bee	5 ♥	Archer
6 ♣	Nova	6 ♥	Milan
7 ♣	Kris	7 ♥	Aspen
8 ♣	Fox	8 ♥	Mint
9 ♣	River	9 ♥	Zev
10 ♣	Crow	10 ♥	Parker
J ♣	Leaf	J ♥	Sky
Q ♣	Noel	Q ♥	Riley
K ♣	Sparrow	K ♥	Alva
Card	Name	Card	Name
A ♦	Aeden	A ♠	Ash
2 ♦	Rook	2 ♠	Van
3 ♦	Jae	3 ♠	Roan
4 ♦	Wren	4 ♠	Finch
5 ♦	Landry	5 ♠	Kerry
6 ♦	Rain	6 ♠	Lark
7 ♦	Kai	7 ♠	Storm
8 ♦	Ember	8 ♠	Jalen
9 ♦	Clio	9 ♠	Kirby
10 ♦	Lynx	10 ♠	Sage
J ♦	Jan	J ♠	Harper
Q ♦	Lumen	Q ♠	Rory
K ♦	Thyme	K ♠	Angel

The Prospect's Pronouns

Once you have the name of the Prospect, you'll need their pronouns.

Draw one card to determine their primary pronoun, and then draw a second to determine another set of pronouns they also use. ²⁵

First Card Suit	Second Card Suit	Pronouns
♥ Hearts	♥ Hearts	he/him
♥ Hearts	♠ Spades	any pronouns
♥ Hearts	♦ Diamonds	he/him + they/them
♥ Hearts	♣ Clubs	he/him + chart
♠ Spades	♥ Hearts	any pronouns
♠ Spades	♠ Spades	she/her
♠ Spades	♦ Diamonds	she/her + they/them
♠ Spades	♣ Clubs	she/her + chart
♦ Diamonds	♥ Hearts	they/them + he/him
♦ Diamonds	♠ Spades	they/them + she/her
♦ Diamonds	♦ Diamonds	they/them
♦ Diamonds	♣ Clubs	theythem + chart
♣ Clubs	♥ Hearts	chart + he
♣ Clubs	♠ Spades	chart + she
♣ Clubs	♦ Diamonds	chart + they
♣ Clubs	♣ Clubs	chart + chart

If the result above says “chart” (i.e., is Clubs) then check the card’s rank on the next table.

Card	Pronouns
A ♣	ae/aer/aers/aerself
2 ♣	ze/hir/hirs/hirself
3 ♣	xe/xem/xyr/xyrself
4 ♣	ey/em/eir/eirself
5 ♣	zie/zim/zir/zirself
6 ♣	per/pers/perself
7 ♣	ve/ver/vis/verself
8 ♣	it/its/itself
9 ♣	sie/hir/hirself
10 ♣	e/em/eir/emself
J ♣	fae/faer/faerself
Q ♣	ne/nem/nirs/nemself
K ♣	no pronouns

²⁵. Here’s a mnemonic for these – Spades starts with an “S”, as does “she/her”; Hearts and “he/him” with an “H”; C for both Clubs and *chart*. There’s no “d” in they/them, though. 

The Prospect's Traits

When you create the Prospect, draw two cards off the top of the Date's Deck and place them face down, *without looking at them*, to the side of the deck.

The person playing the role of the Date will look at them and use them as a guideline for roleplaying the Prospect. In addition, the trait cards are used in the Wrap-Up phase to determine the outcome of Date Night.

Card	Personality Trait
A ♠	
2 ♠	
3 ♠	
4 ♠	
5 ♠	
6 ♠	
7 ♠	
8 ♠	
9 ♠	
10 ♠	
J ♠	
Q ♠	
K ♠	

Card	Personality Trait
A ♥	
2 ♥	
3 ♥	
4 ♥	
5 ♥	
6 ♥	
7 ♥	
8 ♥	
9 ♥	
10 ♥	
J ♥	
Q ♥	
K ♥	

Card	Personality Trait
A	♣
2	♣
3	♣
4	♣
5	♣
6	♣
7	♣
8	♣
9	♣
10	♣
J	♣
Q	♣
K	♣

Card	Personality Trait
A	♦
2	♦
3	♦
4	♦
5	♦
6	♦
7	♦
8	♦
9	♦
10	♦
J	♦
Q	♦
K	♦

Is This an Ideal Partner?

During the Headmate creation part of the game, you wrote one quality that the Headmate was looking for in an ideal partner. Now it's time to see if the Prospect measures up to that ideal. Here's how you do that.

1. Each player except the player in the Date role takes one of the completed Headmate sheets. This leaves one left-over Headmate, so one of the players should take that and thus have two Headmate sheets in front of them.

2. In order, each player reads off the name of the Headmate and their ideal date quality to the Date player.
3. That player then turns over the top card from the System's Deck.
4. The Date records the name of the Headmate and that quality on the Date Sheet, on one of the blank lines.
5. Then the Date turns over the top card of the Date's Deck.
6. If the cards **don't match at all**, the Date leaves that box blank.
7. If the two cards **match colors**, then the Date puts a check mark in the box on line of the Date sheet. This means the Prospect possesses that quality to a moderate degree.
8. If the two cards **match suits**, the Date marks a plus sign ("+") in the box instead; this means the Prospect has this quality to a high amount.
9. If the two cards **match ranks and colors**, the Date marks a star instead; this means that the Prospect is a near-perfect match for that quality.
10. If the two cards **are identical** – which is possible because they're drawn from two different decks – then the Date marks two stars, one in the box and one to the left of the box. The Date is a perfect match on that quality.
11. If the two cards **match ranks but not colors**, the Date marks a minus sign ("-"); this means the Prospect is the exact opposite of the desired quality.
12. Continue this method until all of the Headmates' criteria have been addressed.

Here's an example. Let's say the Headmate's desired criteria is "enjoys tabletop RPGs" – so that they have someone to share their hobby with.

The player holding that sheet and the Date both flip cards; we'll keep the player's card consistent, with a Two of ♥ Hearts, and examine different draws by the Date.



In this case, the cards don't match at all. The Date doesn't put any mark on that line. The Prospect isn't into TTRPGs.



The cards' colors match. The Date marks a checkmark in the box. The Prospect plays TTRPGs, hooray!



The colors match, but more important, the suits also match. The Date puts a "+" on the corresponding line. The Prospect not only plays roleplaying games, but really likes the hobby. Maybe they're a gamemaster, or just a die-hard roleplayer?



The cards exactly match, one from each deck. [26](#) [27](#) [28](#) We can interpret this as not only does the Prospect play tabletop RPGs as often as the Headmate, *but also* their group is looking for a new player!

The Date player marks a star in the box, and an extra star on the outside. (If the Date had drawn the instead, they would mark just a single star.) [29](#)



Uh oh. The ranks match, but the suits don't match either color or suit.

The Date marks a "-" in the box. Not only does the date not play tabletop roleplaying games, but actively *dislikes* them. This could spell problems for that Headmate.

Determining Roles

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[26](#). There's a 1 in 52 chance of this happening, which is 1.92% of the time.

[27](#). "Never tell me the odds."

[28](#). Han Solo is kind of a creep, though.

[29](#). There's actually as much of a chance of this happening as matching the suit.



A date doesn't have to be fancy – you could just agree to meet in a bar, for example.

Setting the Scene

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Part 2: Date Night

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Let's get this party started!

Starting the Date

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Turn Order

- Date player plays a card
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - Date draws a card
- System player 1 plays a card
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - System player one draws a card
- Date player plays a card *4+ players only*
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - Date draws a card

- System player 2 plays a card *4+ players only*
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - System player two draws a card
- Date player plays a card *5+ players only*
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - Date draws a card
- System player 3 plays a card *6+ players only*
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - System player three draws a card
- Date player plays a card
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - Date draws a card
- System player 4 plays a card *7+ players only*
 - Outside Opposition may play a card
 - System player three draws a card
- Back to start

During the Date Night part of the game, the Date character and the System character alternate turns back and forth.

If you have more than three players, two or more players will be sharing the System character, and will take turns in alternating order.

The Outside Opposition player doesn't have a turn in the turn order, but can act in response to cards played by the other players.



If the first three cards dealt to
create the Date Status stack match,
that means you've been stood up!

Stood Up?

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Playing as the Date

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The Date usually wants to make a good impression.



Likewise, the System wants to make a good impression on the Date.

Playing the Fronter

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Switching Fronters

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Playing the Outside Interference

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Text messages are a great way to interrupt the perfect date.

Card

Rank Outside Interference

Ace	Happy to Be Here! switch fronting Headmate; they're pleased with this
2	Stay For the Atmosphere environmental problem <i>e.g. too loud, bad smell, it's raining</i>
3	See You In the Fall a physical accident nearby; red card. = affects char. <i>e.g. someone trips</i>
4	Capitalism Ruins Everything money problem <i>e.g. card declined, lost wallet, work calls</i>
5	Excuse Me...? harmless interruption at an inconvenient time <i>e.g. small child, wait staff, text message</i>
6	Wardrobe Malfunction clothing-related problem <i>e.g. lost hat, shoes untied</i>
7	Forget-Me-Nots char. forgets something; red card = about the other char. <i>e.g. name, the time, lost keys</i>
8	Consuming Passions food-/drink-related problem arises <i>e.g. fly in soup, wrong order, drink spills</i>
9	Circumstances Beyond Our Control nobody could have predicted <i>e.g. power goes out, traffic jam</i>
10	Anything But This switch fronting Headmate; they're not happy about it
Jack	Oh Shit, It's My Ex! someone char. was involved with; red card = it was a bad breakup
Queen	"Why, Hello There. someone takes an interest in char.; red card = they're insistent
King	What are They Doing Here? someone the char. knows; red card = can't stand them

Named NPCs

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Recurring NPCs

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I Just Met You and This Song is Ableist

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If your date doesn't go well but you meet someone else you like – be sure to get *their* number!

30. The title of that song is ableist. 🌸

31. Oh c'mon Carline, you know it's a joke 🌹

32. ... an *ableist* joke. 🌸

33. She's right, you know. ✨

34. wait, who is right? 🌹

35. Not you. ✨

36. :p 🌸



It's all but required that you talk about this game once you finish it.

Part 3: The Wrap-Up

After a game session of [52 First Dates](#), it's very strongly recommended that you have a wrap-up discussion. Some groups might want to do this after every date, to reflect and talk about whatever issues arose.



When the Date Ends

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Intimacy can mean different things to different couples.

Date-Ending Events

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Achieving Intimacy

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A Second Date

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Getting Ghosted

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Getting ghosted is never fun, but sometimes it's for the best.

Aftercare

In the TTRPG Safety Toolkit (on page 10), they describe *aftercare* as checking in with everyone to see how they're feeling. As the authors of the Toolkit write,

Encourage everyone to practice their own forms of self-care and remind them that their mental health comes first.

This is probably a good time to take a break, giving everyone time to use the toilet, step outside, stretch their legs, or get a drink of water.



This date looks like it went well.

Going on Another Date

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A New Prospect

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The Second Date

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Despite the name of the game, it's entirely possible to get a second date in [52 First Dates!](#) If the Date didn't ghost you, and the players reach consensus on going out again, play a second date (and all subsequent dates) with these changes:

- **Switch Roles** Select a new player to play the Date role, from the players who didn't play the Date. Then select another player to play the Outside Interference who hasn't played the Outside Interference in this game.
- **Keep the Date's Personality Cards** You don't have to remove them from the Date Deck, just note them down on the on the Second Date part of the Date Sheet. These serve as guidelines for roleplaying as the Date.
- **Draw Two More Personality Cards for the DAté** In a second date, you're usually going to be past the initial awkwardness, and you can find out there's more to your date than you original assumed.
- **Decide What Happened Between Dates** Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Curabitur ornare ex nisi, sit amet aliquet libero bibendum non. Curabitur sed ligula eu mi laoreet ornare. Ut tempor pretium ex. Etiam eu semper arcu sem gravida metus, at vestibulum erat augue vel ante.

Going Steady

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If the Date is up for a third date, then you are officially Going Steady. Unless the system (or its members) are lesbians – in which case you're moving in together.



Sometimes you just need a hug,
you know?

Post-Game Discussion

If none of you wish to sit around talking after the game, you can obviously skip this part! But if your group is interested in discussing what happened in the game, here are some ideas for discussion topics:

- How did this compare to your own experience, if any, with dating?
- Did the fronting Headmate change during the course of Date Night? If so, how do you feel that changed the story?
- What did you think of the Prospect? Apart from what the System members might want, would you date them?
- This game gives you less control over your characters than in most roleplaying games. Did you feel constrained by the choices in your hand, and if so, how does this feel compared to more traditional TTRPGs?
- Have you learned anything about being plural by playing this game, even if it's just learning new terminology?
- *Optional* If you're plural and feel like sharing ³⁷, how does this game relate to your lived experience? In what ways is it similar and in what ways is it really different? What part of your life wasn't accurately portrayed in the game? ³⁸

37. Nobody should be put on the spot to answer this! 

38. We know that we took shortcuts in making [52 First Dates](#) for playability's sake. 

Wait, Am I Plural?

For some people, playing [52 First Dates](#) might line up some dots in your life, and you might question whether not you might be plural yourself. Before we go any further, we want to say something very important:

This game was not designed for helping you discover if you're plural or not. We didn't design it that way.³⁹ [52 First Dates](#) is a simulation that might give the players some empathy for what it's like being plural, and reading the game materials could educate you – especially the More Than One and Plural Lexicon sections. But it's just a handbook for a game, not for being plural.

That said, if you want to investigate further, the Plural Resources appendix has a number of links that can help you learn more about the plural experience and what it might mean in your life.⁴⁰

39. Among other reasons, we don't have the expertise to do so. 

40. If this game does play a role in any way determining if you're plural – or *not!* – drop us [an email!](#) 



There isn't a variant for using a ouija board to play 52 Second Dates ... yet.

Variants and Hacks

This section presents alternate rules for playing [52 First Dates](#) in different ways.

(The lorem-ipsums here indicate that further work is needed to flesh out the rules for these variants.)

System to System

One of the more interesting exercises would be playing this as a game of two systems going on a date. We haven't tried it, and to be honest, it could get somewhat overwhelming.

As both systems would be effectively protagonized by the game, the idea of multiple dates with several people should probably be set aside – under these game mechanics, plural systems take considerably more time to create than a one-off singlet character.

The exact size of each system, and how members of those systems are created by the players, can get tricky. Part of the reason for the group creation of headmates was to give all players a sense of investiture – but that might not work if you're simultaneously building two sets of headmates.

Ah, Aura wishes to jump in. I defer to her. ⁴¹

So – here's what I  think! I think if there are two groups playing [52 First Dates](#) at the same time, it would be really cute and awesome if the groups came together and played out a date between the two systems! ⁴²

And they *FELL IN LOOOOOOOOOOVE* ...

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Singlet on Singlet Action

You don't *have* to make this a game about plurality. It could just be a platform for telling stories about singlet couples that fall in love.

It would probably work best as a three-player game. In such a case, two of the players acts in both the Date and "Fronter" roles simultaneously, while a third plays the Outside Interference.

The game *would* lose something in translation, because a key part of [52 First Dates](#) is about group creation of the main characters ... but if you're looking for a dating sim and you haven't followed our advice to check out Emily Care Boss's *Romance Trilogy* – it might work. Maybe!

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Queerplatonic Relationships

[52 First Dates](#) assumes that the date is meant to lead a potential to romantic and/or sexual relationship.

But what if it's just a story about friendship?

This variant looks at using the same rules to show a budding friendship between a plural system and a singlet friend.

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You're encouraged to learn more about plurality by following these links.

Appendix: Plural Resources

A number of resources on plurality are linked on the More Than One site. Those links, and other useful resources, are presented here for easy reference.

- Countering DID Myths by Sarah K. Reece
- Does it work? by Vickis
- Healthy Multiplicity, an extensive selves-help resource for plurality
- How do I know I'm multiple? by Sarah K. Reece
- How to Write Multi by LB Lee
- I am Mr. Robot by pluraldoxa
- I am not Sarah and Love by Sarah K. Reece
- MPD For You and Me by LB Lee
- MoreThanOne.Info by anonymous
- Non-Binary Plural: Language/Concepts for OSDD and Median Experience by cedars
- Plural Dictionary by Mala
- Our Plural Experience by Yavari of Sylvans
- Plural Etiquette Questionnaire by Hungry Ghosts
- Plurality Playbook by Freyas and Irenes
- Plurality Resource by Eclectic Tech
- Pluralpedia, the collaborative plurality dictionary, a wiki
- Quick'n'Dirty Plural History by LB Lee
- Rules of Engagement by Em, Hess, and Kerry of Sylvans
- The power of naming by Vickis

Appendix: A Plural Lexicon

These are important terms about plural systems that you may to understand in order to play the game. These definitions are adapted from Pluralpedia, the collaborative plurality dictionary. As always, our own notes are included in the footnotes, marked by our identifying emoji ()�.

Blending

Blending is when the boundary between headmates becomes blurred, and it can be hard to tell them apart, or even who is present. This can happen to the active fronters, or to anyone else who is co-conscious at the time. ⁴⁴

Blurian

Blurian refers to easier or complete memory sharing, having a lack of significant amnesic barriers. Blurian is usually paired up with the terms median or multiple, in contrast to partitionary, to indicate both the distinction of system members and memory sharing. ⁴⁵

Co-Conscious

Co-conscious (also called “co-aware”) refers to when multiple headmates are active at once. This is distinct from co-fronting in that these headmates aren’t necessarily fronting, they may be in headspace or otherwise experiencing the outside world such as through internal communication.

Co-Fronting

Co-fronting is when two or more headmates are fronting. This can result in them having to coordinate actions, or for their personalities to blend together.

Core

The core is a headmate with a direct connection to the body’s pre-plural self. Not every system has one, and not every system had a point at which they were not plural. The core often inherits the personality, identity, and/or memories of the pre-plural self.

Endogenic

Endogenic is an umbrella term that refers to all systems that are not completely traumagenic in origin, it encompasses many experiences. It is often seen as the opposite to the pathologized views of plurality, although can exist in harmony, even within the same system.

Fronting

Fronting is an activity performed by one or more headmates, where they take control of the body and handle daily activities and communication. This can often include allowing other headmates to speak via internal communication.

44. Our own median system does this a lot; part of why we didn’t recognize ourselves as a system was because we blend from to the other and don’t even notice that our fronter has changed 🌸

45. For game purposes, we assume the protagonist System to be blurian. ↗

Frontstuck

A headmate is frontstuck when they are in front and unable to leave. More than one headmate may be stuck at once.

Front Trigger

Front triggers are the people, places, things, ideas, and scenarios that may cause a system member to front or be drawn near the front. These can be both negative and positive.

Forced Fronting

Forced fronting is when one headmate takes front against the will of others in the system. This is not the same as frontstuck (c.f.) as the headmate is not unable to leave front; they simply don't want to.

Headmate

A headmate is a singular person or entity in a plural system or collective. They can be clearly separated (like in DID or OSDD-1b, called a multiple or partitionary system) or more blurry and fluid (like in median or OSDD-1a).

Headspace

A headspace (also known as inner world or wonderland) is a place that members of a system can visit or inhabit, where they can talk to other headmates. Not every system has one, but many do. It is also not unique to systems. Singlets may have a headspace as well.
46

Host

A host is the headmate who is most active, most responsible for day-to-day activities, or otherwise is fronting most often. Not all systems have hosts, and some may have a rotating team for the role.

Introject

Introjects are headmates who have an original source that their personality, identity, and memories may be based partially or fully on. They can join a system for any number of reasons: having similar traumas to an individual, seeing strengths in the individual that the collective would benefit from, etc.

The term can be considered medical terminology and as such may not be used by every system.

Little

A little is a headmate that behaves or otherwise feels like they are a young age. This often approximately caps at age twelve, but may vary personally between systems based on their body's age.
47



Main

The main is a headmate who is considered by the rest of the system to be one of the main or central influences on the system.⁴⁸ This doesn't necessarily mean they front often. A main can be a leader, teacher, or another authoritative figure that has an influence over the system. They may also be someone that others draw energy from.

Median

A median system (also called midcontinuum) is a system where members are not as distinct or separate from each other.⁴⁹ It can be considered being somewhere between multiple and singlet.

Some are dependent on a single individual, or the dependence can be mutual in that there is no central individual. Some median systems feel more blurred between themselves. Others may also be based around a shared identity or kin.

Median is often used as opposed to multiple, where members in a multiple system are distinct.

Memory Sharing

Memory sharing is a system function whereby headmates can share their own memories with others in the same system. This may happen automatically or may require deliberate action by headmates. Not all systems have memory sharing and those that do may have it to varying degrees.⁵⁰

Mixed Origin

Mixed origin refers to a system that has multiple different system origins. This could be because their system formed from a combination of factors, or that not all of their headmates are of the same origin.

Multiple

A multiple system is the state of being more than one entity in one

These are just a handful of the terms used by plural people to describe our experiences. Different systems, or even different members of the same systems, might use different terminology.

48. Spiny was our main before but we feel more comfortable now with a shared responsibility model



49. This is what we are! a median system



50. For the sake of the game, we decided that the System's members all have shared memories.

physical body where the identities of headmates are more distinct. The term is sometimes used as opposed to median, where distinction between system members is less distinct than with a multiple system.

Parogenetic

Parogenetic refers to systems or headmates that were created using thought-based or metaphysical means, usually deliberately. Tulpamancy (c.f.) is a related concept, but the term is avoided by some systems due to its origins or other reasons.

Partitionary

A partitionary system is one where the divisions between headmates are particularly solidly defined. This may include other attributes, like lack of memory sharing, lack of internal communication, or lack of co-consciousness and resulting time loss. Systems may become more or less partitionary over time. It is also possible for different headmates to have different levels of partitioning from the rest of the system or subsystem.⁵¹

Persecutor⁵²

A persecutor is a headmate who acts harmfully towards other system members, the body, or to others. This is usually out of a misguided attempt to protect the system. Persecutors often hold internalized trauma and act in reaction to it, and the harm they cause may be unintentional. This can include aligning with abusers, engaging in self-harm or suicidal behaviors, abusing drugs, lashing out, etc.

Plurality

Plurality is the state of having multiple headmates collectively sharing a single body. Plural experiences are extremely diverse. Systems may be spiritual in nature or secular, median or partitionary, small systems or ones with thousands of headmates.

Pluralphobe

A pluralphobe is someone, typically a singlet, who actively seeks to remove systems and open plurality from their lives, for any number of reasons.

Protector⁵³

A protector is a headmate whose role is to protect other members of the system from external harm, traumatic memories, harmful members of the system, or other threats.

Quoigenic

Quoigenic is an origin term that means the user does not want to share their origins, does not think it's relevant, or thinks it's the wrong question to ask. It's derived from the French word "quoi", which approximately means "what".

Role⁵⁴

A role is the position a member takes within their system. This can be something with a specific focus such as a protector or a gatekeeper, or more of a general purpose such as a primary fronter.

Singlet

Singlet refers to a person who isn't plural, or in other words doesn't share their body with anyone else. It's not a binary distinction, as people may be questioning being plural, and median can be viewed as a continuum with singlet at one end.

Switching

Switching is when the current fronter(s) of the system changes. This can vary between something that happens constantly, or by accident, to something that requires much effort or happens only once a day or once a week. The experience of what switching is like also varies between systems. Switching can also take varying amounts of time, which can sometimes result in blend states in the in-between time.

System

A system is the collection of people and entities, often called headmates, that share a single physical plural body. The experiences of plural systems are very diverse, and every system is different.

Systems often have a dedicated name, separate from the body's or members' names. It's common for systems to have names that are more like titles than given names, such as being named after flowers, or cosmic themes, with adjectives applied.⁵⁵

System Exclusionist⁵⁶

A system exclusionist is an individual or system that holds strict beliefs about plurality and enforces those ideas on others, often in relation to causation. 'Sysmed' or 'sysmedicalist' is a synonym that refers in particular to systems that apply outdated and misapplied medical ideas about plurality.

54. This isn't the same a "role" in the game sense. 

Traumagenic

Traumagenic refers to a system whose creation/origin is the result of one or more traumatic events. Often, these systems have lingering trauma, and may fall under a diagnosis like DID or OSDD-I.

55. Our system name is "The Spindrift Crew". 

Tulpamancy

Tulpamancy is the art of purposefully creating headmates through various techniques. A headmate created in this way is called a "tulpa". A tulpmancer is a practitioner of tulpmancy. Parogenetic (c.f.) is a related concept, but the term may be avoided by some systems in favor of tulpmancy/tulpgenic or tuplamancy/

56. Don't be one of these. They suck. 

tuplagic.

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vim, GNU make, Pandoc, Lua, and Prince
were used in the creation of this manuscript.

52 First Dates Handouts

What You Need to Play:

- Two decks of cards
- One copy of the Handouts / System Sheet page (this one)
- One copy *per player* of the Game Reference / Headmates Sheet (next page)
- One copy of the Outside Interference Sheet
- One copy *per player* of the Date Sheet (last page)
- Pencils
- *optional, but recommended* Extra paper for notetaking

52 First Dates System Sheet

Instructions go here.

Character Name

Apparent Gender

Age

Appearance

History

Notes

cut here

52 First Dates Game Reference Sheet

- Fronters draw from System's Deck, play cards that match suit/rank
- Date draws from Date's Deck, plays cards that don't match either
- Outside Interference draws from Date's Deck, plays cards that match rank
- Draw a card at the end of your turn (unless Outside Interference)
- Matching suits or ranks ends Date Night
- Fronters or Date *must* play a card if they can play a card

Game Structure

1. The Set-Up
 - Play Safely
 - Create System, Headmates
 - Create Date
 - Determine Roles
2. Date Night
3. The Wrap-Up
 - Resolution
 - Aftercare
 - Another Date?

Turn Order

1. Date plays a card
Outside Interference can respond
2. First Fronter plays a card
Outside Interference can respond
3. Date plays a card *4+ players*
Outside Interference can respond
4. 2nd Fronter plays a card *4+*
Outside Interference can respond
5. Date plays a card *5+ players*
Outside Interference can respond
5. 3rd Fronter plays a card *5+*
Outside Interference can respond
6. ...

Suit	Demeanor
♣ Clubs	Direct and clear, or Blunt and tactless
♦ Diamonds	Flirty and coy, or Evasive and guarded
♥ Hearts	Earnest and heartfelt, or Thoughtless and inconsiderate
♠ Spades	Clever and witty, or Mocking and hurtful

52 First Dates Headmate Sheet

Fill in the next blank line, then pass to the next player.
Roleplay this Headmate fairly when they're fronting.

Name/Nickname

Pronouns

Sexuality

Interest

Demeanor

Ideal Partner

Notes

cut here

52 First Dates Outside Interference

Play a card matching the rank of a card just played. Create a named NPC when you play a Jack, a Queen, or a King.

Rank Outside Interference plus red text if you play a red card

- Ace Happy to Be Here! switch new Headmate to front
they're pleased with this
- 2 Stay For the Atmosphere environmental problem
e.g. too loud, bad smell, it's raining
- 3 See You In the Fall a physical accident nearby **that affects char**
e.g. someone trips, lost frisbee
- 4 Capitalism Ruins Everything money problem
e.g. card declined, lost wallet, work calls
- 5 Excuse Me...? harmless interruption, inconvenient time
e.g. small child, wait staff, text message
- 6 Wardrobe Malfunction clothing-related problem
e.g. lost hat, shoes untied
- 7 Forget-Me-Nots char forgets something **about their date**
e.g. name, the time, lost keys
- 8 Consuming Passions food-/drink-related problem arises
e.g. fly in soup, wrong order, drink spills
- 9 Circumstances Beyond Our Control nobody could have predicted
e.g. power goes out, traffic jam
- 10 Anything But This switch fronting Headmate
they're not happy about it
- Jack Oh Shit, It's My Ex! someone char was involved with
and it was a bad breakup
- Queen "Why, Hello There. someone interested in char
and they're insistent
- King What are **They** Doing Here? someone char knows
and can't stand

Card Named NPC

Pronouns

J ♠	
Q ♠	
K ♠	
J ♥	
Q ♥	
K ♥	
J ♣	
Q ♣	
K ♣	
J ♦	
Q ♦	
K ♦	

Notes

52 First Dates Date Sheet

Draw 2 personality cards in secret. Test Headmates' ideal partner qualities by drawing 2 cards; on a match, check yes. Roleplay fairly.

Ideal Partner Qualities

Headmate	Quality
<input type="checkbox"/>	

Card Personality Trait

A ♣	A ♦
2 ♣	2 ♦
3 ♣	3 ♦
4 ♣	4 ♦
5 ♣	5 ♦
6 ♣	6 ♦
7 ♣	7 ♦
8 ♣	8 ♦
9 ♣	9 ♦
10 ♣	10 ♦
J ♣	J ♦
K ♣	K ♦
Q ♣	Q ♦

Card Personality Trait

A ♦	A ♥
2 ♦	2 ♥
3 ♦	3 ♥
4 ♦	4 ♥
5 ♦	5 ♥
6 ♦	6 ♥
7 ♦	7 ♥
8 ♦	8 ♥
9 ♦	9 ♥
10 ♦	10 ♥
J ♦	J ♥
K ♦	K ♥
Q ♦	Q ♥

Card Personality Trait

A ♥	A ♠
2 ♥	2 ♠
3 ♥	3 ♠
4 ♥	4 ♠
5 ♥	5 ♠
6 ♥	6 ♠
7 ♥	7 ♠
8 ♥	8 ♠
9 ♥	9 ♠
10 ♥	10 ♠
J ♥	J ♠
K ♥	K ♠
Q ♥	Q ♠