Got a Date with a Database: Using Lonely Hearts Ads and Speed Dating to Introduce Students to Library Resources

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Just got invited to give a one-shot on research databases? Looking for a hot, new active learning technique? We have the answer: speed databasing! A cross between lonely hearts ads (Beauman 2011) and speed dating events (Finkel and Eastwick 2001), Speed databasing gives students a chance to "meet" multiple databases during one class session. Librarians act as matchmakers by creating clever lonely-hearts style profiles for each database. Each profile starts with the database name, then includes a variety of descriptors such as age, education, physical description, my ideal dinner guest, and you'd be surprised to know. The intent is to be accurate, factual, and informative, but in a fun, amusing, and engaging style. For a 50-minute session, you will need profiles for at least five databases.

In addition to the profiles, draft questions for students to answer as they meet each new database. These questions can be included on a handout or displayed on a screen at the front of the room. Likewise, create a worksheet for students to complete during the exercise. Tailor the questions and the worksheet to the learning objectives or to a specific class assignment.

To capture the movement of a speed dating event, set up individual workstations for each database, or if moving people is not possible, students can sit in one place and switch the database after each round. Also, you can embellish the activity by playing on the dating theme. Scatter (artificial) rose petals, light (battery-operated) tea candles, or play (romantic) background music. These visual and auditory clues let students know to expect something different from the activity.

Once you have settled students in the room, kick off the session with brief instructions on the exercise. At the sound of a bell (an old-fashioned hotel desk bell is best), students have five minutes to review a profile, search in the database, and take notes. At the next bell, students have one minute to wrap up, then move on to the next database. Repeat this process until the end of the session.

To assess the activity, ask students to create an original lonely hearts profile for a database they did not meet in class. Or, if students are working on another assignment, ask them to indicate the database in which they found their sources, and then compare these databases to the ones introduced via the activity.

Check out our Speed Databasing project on the Open Science Framework platform. The site offers instructions for how to run the activity, the custom-designed activity logo (color and black and white), and example materials–all under a Creative Commons license so they are easy to reuse and customize. We invite you to upload your own materials to the OSF project to evolve the Speed Databasing activity into the future.

Whether students find the perfect match for a current assignment or their soulmate in a database they will use throughout their academic career, Speed Databasing has proven to be an engaging and energizing approach to library resource instruction.

References

Beauman, Francesca. 2011. *Shapely Ankle Preferr'd: A History of the Lonely Hearts Ad 1695-2010*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Finkel, Eli J., and Paul W. Eastwick. 2008. "Speed-Dating." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 17 (3): 193–197, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2008.00573.x.