

B2-C1 Worksheet: Dating Games and the Fear Behind Them - 14 March 2026

Article

In her latest Guardian column, Karen Freyer reflects on a dating lesson she once took for granted: treat em mean, keep em keen. In her 20s, that strategy felt like strength. Waiting hours before replying, acting unavailable and keeping an emotional distance all seemed part of the game. Looking back in her 50s, however, she argues that this behaviour did not come from confidence at all. It came down to fear - fear of appearing needy, of being too honest and of letting someone see the full weight of who she really was.

Freyer writes that modern dating can still bring out old habits. A delayed reply, a vague message or a read receipt can set off endless overthinking, even in people who are otherwise capable and self-assured. Instead of speaking plainly, many try to play it cool, hold back or second-guess every small signal. The trouble, she suggests, is that these tactics may work - but in the wrong direction. They tend to draw in emotionally unavailable people while pushing away those who value openness and maturity.

Her conclusion is simple: the old rule has had its day. Rather than hiding behind mixed signals, Freyer wants to text back, say what she means and stop pretending that detachment equals power. The article strikes a thoughtful note because it is less about romance alone than about self-protection, vulnerability and what people are willing to risk in order to be known. For many readers, that message may hit home well beyond the world of dating apps.

True/False

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).

1. Freyer says the dating rule felt powerful to her when she was younger.
2. She now believes that strategy was based mainly on confidence.
3. The article suggests that delayed replies can trigger overthinking.
4. Freyer argues that mixed signals usually attract emotionally mature people.
5. She thinks many adults still fall back on old dating habits.
6. The article presents emotional openness as a weakness.
7. Freyer wants to communicate more directly than before.
8. The message of the article could apply beyond dating.

Phrase Match

Match the phrases (1-10) to the correct definitions (A-J).

Phrases (1-10)	Definitions (A-J)
1. take for granted	A. to attract someone
2. come down to	B. to reveal a quality or feeling
3. bring out	C. to act calm and not show much interest
4. set off	D. to feel personally real or meaningful
5. play it cool	E. to assume something will always be there or be true
6. hold back	F. to create a particular feeling or impression
7. draw in	G. to stop yourself showing or saying something
8. push away	H. to be mainly the result of one thing
9. strike a note	I. to make someone not want to come closer
10. hit home	J. to cause something to start

Synonym Match

Match the words (1-10) to the correct synonyms (A-J).

Words (1-10)	Synonyms (A-J)
1. vulnerable	A. not clear or exact
2. delayed	B. a planned way of acting
3. vague	C. emotional distance
4. self-assured	D. happening later than expected
5. maturity	E. a sign that gives information
6. detachment	F. the quality of being adult and responsible
7. openness	G. belief in your own ability or worth
8. strategy	H. calmly confident in yourself
9. signal	I. easily hurt emotionally
10. confidence	J. willingness to be honest and direct

Use the new language

Please choose 5 words or phrases and make your own sentence using the new word or phrase.

Discussion Questions

Student A

1. Do you think people sometimes play it cool even when they like someone?
2. What kinds of mixed signals are easy to misunderstand?
3. Why can delayed replies set off so much overthinking?
4. Do you think honesty is easier or harder with dating apps?
5. What personal qualities draw people in most strongly?
6. Is it better to text back quickly or wait a little? Why?
7. Have modern dating habits changed a lot in recent years?
8. Do you think confidence and openness usually go together?

Student B

1. Why do people hold back even when they want a real connection?
2. Is emotional detachment ever useful, or is it mostly a defence mechanism?
3. Do dating apps encourage mature communication or immature behaviour?
4. Why do some strategies seem effective in the short term but harmful in the long term?
5. Should vulnerability be seen as strength rather than weakness?
6. How much do cultural expectations shape the way people date?
7. Can playing games in relationships ever be harmless, or does it always create problems?
8. What does emotionally mature dating look like in practice?

Answer Key

True/False: 1=T, 2=F, 3=T, 4=F, 5=T, 6=F, 7=T, 8=T

Phrase Match: 1=E, 2=H, 3=B, 4=J, 5=C, 6=G, 7=A, 8=I, 9=F, 10=D

Synonym Match: 1=I, 2=D, 3=A, 4=H, 5=F, 6=C, 7=J, 8=B, 9=E, 10=G

Example sentences with the phrases

1. It is easy to take good friends for granted until life becomes difficult.
2. In the end, the argument came down to a simple misunderstanding.
3. Travelling often brings out a different side of people.
4. One careless comment can set off a long and unnecessary row.
5. He tried to play it cool, but everyone could see he was nervous.
6. She wanted to say more, but decided to hold back for the moment.
7. A friendly smile can draw in even the shyest person in the room.
8. His rude tone pushed away people who were trying to help him.
9. Her speech struck a hopeful note at exactly the right moment.
10. The warning about burnout really hit home after a difficult month at work.