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Do the 36 questions to fall in love actually work?

Ask these. Stare intensely. Fall in love. (Apparently...)

by JASMINE LEE-ZOGBESSOU  NOV 5, 2020



“Tell your partner something that you like about them already,” is the 31st question I ask this usually very nonchalant guy over FaceTime. We’re two hours and thirty minutes into this video call, testing out the '36 questions to fall in love' theory. He tells me he likes my smile and I can’t help but blush at that response. When asked, I share something more superficial, telling him I like his body, precisely everything about it and, in that moment, I feel a sense of coyness that I hadn’t felt in a little while.

36 questions to fall in love



Created in 1997 by psychologist Dr. Arthur Aron, [36 questions to fall in love](#) is a study, conducted at Stony Brook University, New York, that tests accelerated intimacy between two strangers. Dr. Aron conducted this test by bringing a heterosexual man and woman together with a list of 36 questions to test out, followed by four minutes of sustained eye contact. This couple got married six months later.



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Broken up into three sets, each section gets more and more personal. From ‘Question 1: Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?’ to ‘Question 36: Share a personal problem and ask your partner’s advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.’

The point of the study is to test the social psychology of relationships and create closeness, although Dr. Aron states that the closeness is intended to be a temporary feeling. So, you’re not expected to immediately fall in love as soon as the 36th question is answered, but you should feel something. Right?

"The questions allow people to understand that we're all human, and that is so connecting"

Before testing the study out for myself with a guy I *used to* date, (I really wanted to try out these questions and had no one else to ask, okay?), I was curious but cynical. I’ve never believed in love at first sight or when characters in movies become obsessed with one another within three days, so I didn’t expect a miraculous surge of adoration to wash over me but I was keen to discover something new about someone I already knew and ask questions I wouldn’t tend to ask.

The advantage of the structured 36 questions

Our answers to ‘Question 9: For what in your life do you feel most grateful?’ was the same – family, while ‘Question 16: What do you value most in a friendship?’ revealed our compatible need for thoughtfulness and having people around us that have our best interests at heart. These questions were some of my favourites.



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There are three questions out of the 36 that centre friendship, including ‘Question 20: What does friendship mean to you?’ and ‘Question 27: If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.’

I personally think that a good romantic relationship should have a good friendship at the foundation as the friendship element is what makes your bond strong, meaningful and genuine, not attraction and a couple of shared interests.

"Psychological intimacy is a prerequisite for passion"

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It was particularly useful for us to have a list in place with questions neither of us had created or over analysed. I spoke with relationship psychotherapist, [Matt Davies](#), who seconded this notion for first-time daters. “When you're first meeting, if you don't have a structure, what you're doing is you're generating all kinds of superficial chat,” he says.

“Psychologically you're assessing, ‘Do I like this person or not? Do I feel safe with them?’ But, with that out of the way, the questions provide you access to finding out whether you feel comfortable and safe with them.”

Unlocking vulnerability

The 36 questions are key in unlocking that vulnerability and genuineness that a lot of people struggle to show generally, let alone when seeking love.



MASAFUMI NAKANISHI

Questions like ‘18: What is your most terrible memory?’ (my answer nearly made me tear up) and ‘30: When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?’ tested how honest and open we could be with one another, which aren’t traits that are often explored early in a potential relationship, due to fear of opening up or sharing personal things ‘too early’.

Dr. Davies says, “Psychological intimacy is a prerequisite for passion. [The questions] allow people to understand that we’re all human, and that is so connecting. It’s the opposite of alienation, where we might think somebody is better than us or we’re one down or one up. I think that is really important to help with intimacy.”

And ignite intimacy it did – while we were already comfortable and familiar with one another, we both learnt something new. Forget the simple things like our favourite colours or favourite movies, we unlocked deeper, emotional experiences such as my sister being in the hospital being one of the worst times of my life and him crying in front of a previous partner.

Do the 36 questions to fall in love work?



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The initial cynicism I had definitely eased up as the questions progressed, although I didn't like every single question due to their vagueness and repetition. However, perhaps that's what's needed. The vague elements of some questions allowed us to be as open-ended as possible, while the repetition of the questions that asked us to say positive things about one another fulfilled my biggest love language.

Once we finished the questions, we joked about whether we were in love yet. Well, we're still not dating but the enhanced closeness we felt has got to mean something.

Full list of 36 questions to fall in love

Set I

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. When did you last sing to yourself? To someone else?
6. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?

7. Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?
8. Name three things you and your partner appear to have in common.
9. For what in your life do you feel most grateful?
10. If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?
11. Take four minutes and tell your partner your life story in as much detail as possible.
12. If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?

Set II

13. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?
14. Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?
15. What is the greatest accomplishment of your life?
16. What do you value most in a friendship?
17. What is your most treasured memory?
18. What is your most terrible memory?
19. If you knew that in one year you would die suddenly, would you change anything about the way you are now living? Why?
20. What does friendship mean to you?
21. What roles do love and affection play in your life?
22. Alternate sharing something you consider a positive characteristic of your partner. Share a total of five items.
23. How close and warm is your family? Do you feel your childhood was happier than most other people's?
24. How do you feel about your relationship with your mother?

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Set III

25. Make three true "we" statements each. For instance, "We are both in this room feeling ..."
26. Complete this sentence: "I wish I had someone with whom I could share ..."
27. If you were going to become a close friend with your partner, please share what would be important for him or her to know.
28. Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.
29. Share with your partner an embarrassing moment in your life.

30. When did you last cry in front of another person? By yourself?
31. Tell your partner something that you like about them already.
32. What, if anything, is too serious to be joked about?
33. If you were to die this evening with no opportunity to communicate with anyone, what would you most regret not having told someone? Why haven't you told them yet?
34. Your house, containing everything you own, catches fire. After saving your loved ones and pets, you have time to safely make a final dash to save any one item. What would it be? Why?
35. Of all the people in your family, whose death would you find most disturbing? Why?
36. Share a personal problem and ask your partner's advice on how he or she might handle it. Also, ask your partner to reflect back to you how you seem to be feeling about the problem you have chosen.

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