



# **Love Lines**

## **INSTRUCTOR MANUAL 1.5**

*by*

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## Introduction

Communicating with romantic partners is among the most important interactions humans undertake, and yet, most of us do it with little to no training. Love Lines is an innovative and interactive online game that addresses this problem. Within its five levels, students recognize positive as well as problematic romantic communication patterns and apply this new knowledge to resolving simulated romantic relationship conflicts.

After describing Love Lines, this manual outlines a series of best practices and activities to accompany game play. Assigning Love Lines as both homework and as an in-class activity teaches students to retain and apply the skills necessary to improve communication and resolve conflict with their romantic partner(s).

Love Lines can be used in units on:

- Interpersonal Communication and the Self
- Relationship Types
- Gender and Gender Roles
- Relationship Initiation
- Love and Intimacy
- Sexual Communication and Consent
- Partner Satisfaction
- Jealousy
- Infidelity
- Relational Maintenance and Challenges
- Conflict Resolution
- Sexual Problems
- The Dark Side of Relationships
- Relationship Termination

If your students are anything like ours, they love instructional alternatives to reading. Love Lines is an ideal combination of gamification and education while teaching core concepts. For example, level 1 focuses on the following positive concepts.

Accommodation	Everyday Talk	Relational Maintenance
Adaptability	Functional Rules	Relationship Goals
Certainty	Honesty	Rule Negotiation
Collaboration	Integrative Agreements	Sexual Communication
Communication Skills	Intercultural Competence	Sincere Questions
Compromise	Intimacy	Social Support
Emotional Intelligence	One-across	Symmetrical Relationships
Emotion-sharing	Reframing	World-mindedness
Empathy	Relational Commitment	

Level 2 focuses on the following problematic concepts.

Attachment Hunger	Manic Love	Relationship Inequity
Coercive Power	Communicative	Secrecy
Commitment Issues	Aggression	Sexual Abuse
Dysfunctional Relationship Beliefs	Perpetual Conflicts	Spillover
Inappropriate Pursuit	Physical Violence	Wedging
Intimate Betrayal	Relational Trauma	
	Relational Uncertainty	



Love Lines is a perfect edutainment supplement for undergraduate courses in

- Interpersonal Communication
- Family Studies
- Close Relationships
- Human Sexuality

### **Love Lines Background**

Love Lines is an eponymous title named for actual lines of text quoted from interviews with Americans about relationships, particularly infidelity and early sexual experiences. The Love Lines tag is “Real Love. Real Lines. Real People.” Demographics and detailed relational context are intentionally omitted within the game to encourage imagination and aid players in envisioning themselves in relationship to the love lines. Even though the lines are decontextualized, the sentiments are very real, very impassioned, and very likely to have been felt by others.

### **Love Lines Bios**

Ebony A. Utley, Ph.D. ([ebony.utley@csulb.edu](mailto:ebony.utley@csulb.edu)) is the creator of Love Lines. Her research explores intimacy interrupted by infidelity, investigates beliefs about marriage, studies the relationship between hip hop and love, examines rappers’ intimate relationships with God, and considers the impact of boys’ early childhood sexual violations on their adult intimacy. Dr. Utley’s expertise has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Network and other radio, print, and online outlets. As an associate professor of communication studies at California State University Long Beach she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in rhetoric and interpersonal communication. Her endeavors and expertise are archived at [theutleyexperience.com](http://theutleyexperience.com).

Rachel N. Hastings, Ph.D. ([rhastings@swccd.edu](mailto:rhastings@swccd.edu)) is Love Lines’ pedagogical curator. As a poet and playwright, she has performed at colleges and venues throughout the United States and abroad. Hastings’ work is published in *Women & Language*, *The Radical Philosophy Review*, *The Guardian* (Nigeria), and *Liminalities*. Her research focuses on performance and representations of race, culture, and identity across multiple contexts. Her interest in performance and online education motivated her to join the Love Lines team. She is a Professor of communication at Southwestern College in Chula Vista, CA.

Between us, the Love Lines team has over 30 years of experience in the college classroom. We have been refining Love Lines with approximately 750 students in our own interpersonal, family, and intercultural courses since fall semester 2015 and know first-hand the pedagogical benefits of assigning Love Lines as an interactive supplement to traditional textbooks and lecture. We hope and your students enjoy it as much as we and our students have.

Ebony A. Utley  
Rachel N. Hastings



## Love Lines Level Breakdown

The five procedural levels of Love Lines mirror a relationship's stages. The relationship is blissful in Level 1: Honeymoon where players imagine a relationship, associate their emotions with that relationship's communication, and identify the correct relational vocabulary that characterizes that relationship's positive aspects. The relationship experiences conflict and challenges in Level 2: Disturbances where play is identical to level 1 except players are asked to identify what might be problematic about the relationship's communication. The Discovery Level 3 requires players to practice problem-solving by becoming the primary communicator in a relationship with a chatbot. In Level 4: Decision Time players solve problems and resolve conflict in real time with other players online and ultimately make decisions about the fate of the relationship. The final Level 5: Personal Reflection assesses player self-awareness about romantic relationships.

### *Level 1: Honeymoon*

Players begin at Level 1: Honeymoon by inputting the names of two people in a romantic relationship. Choosing the names allows players to depersonalize the game by entering imaginary names or personalize the game by inputting their name and the name of a former, current, or potential opposite sex or same sex partner. After entering names, players are shown a randomly generated love line and informed who says the love line to whom in order to set the perspective.

Players are initially asked to choose an emoji attached to an emotion word and emotion color that represents how they feel about the love line. This step domesticates their experience with the technology because most undergraduates have either previously used or received an emoji in their electronically mediated communication (EMC). Emotion emojis, words, and colors further appeal to the target audience of undergraduates so that if they have difficulty identifying an emotion word, they can still connect with a familiar emoji and/or color. Then they are asked to choose one of three relational rationales e.g. social support, empathy, or reframing, to determine which one represents what is positive about the interaction. If an incorrect rationale is chosen, the screen darkens; the screen lightens when the correct rationale is chosen. Immediate response pages reiterate player choice and explain the correct answer.

Players see a heart meter that fills a third when they are correct; it drains when they are incorrect. Players cannot move to the next level until they have achieved a predetermined number of consecutively correct answers. Positive love lines continue to be randomized and may repeat. Because multiple rationales apply to each line, players may see the same love line with a new set of rationales, only one of which is always correct. Once the goal for level 1 has been met, a results screen shows which positive rationales are most easily identifiable by the player and which ones are more difficult.

### *Level 2: Disturbances*

Level 2: Disturbances marks the start of conflict in the relationship. Level 2 progresses like level 1 with the exception that when incorrect rationales are selected, increasingly problematic love lines are randomized to appear and vice versa. Choosing correct rationales presents randomly generated less intense love lines. The initial love line is randomly generated from a pool of neutral love lines. Players are again asked to choose an emoji that represents how they feel about the love line, and are instructed to identify one of three relational



rationales e.g. communicative aggression, perpetual conflicts, or relational uncertainty that describe what is problematic about the love line. Identifying emotions remains important because oftentimes individuals feel as if something is not right in their relationships but cannot articulate exactly what is wrong. Successful interactions with the game will begin to link player emotional intelligence with relational intelligence. Increasing unfamiliar relational vocabulary is made easier when linked to existing emotions. Emotional intelligence is an essential skill for conflict resolution which is necessary in the upcoming levels.

#### *Level 3: Discovery*

Level 3: Discovery requires players to practice problem-solving by becoming the primary communicator in a relationship with a chatbot. Players are presented with a love line and the perspective in terms of who says what to whom. Then players are instructed to use their knowledge from levels 1 and 2's relationship rationales and type responses in the text box to address the relationship conflict. The game is programmed to respond to input until the player decides the conflict has been resolved and they would like to move on, the conflict cannot be resolved and they would like to move on, or the conflict cannot be resolved and they would like to break up. Moving on presents new love lines and other issues that must be addressed until the player has successfully resolved a predetermined number of interactions. Ending the relationship progresses to level 4.

#### *Level 4: Decision Time*

In Level 4: Decision Time players apply their knowledge to real time communication between romantic partners. Upon entering a username and selecting chat, players are randomly paired with another player. Similar to level 3, players receive a love line with the perspective of who says what to whom. Then they attempt to resolve a relationship conflict with another player who has also completed the previous levels and is concurrently online. Level 4 includes the same move on and break up options as level 3. Moving on and breaking up present new love lines and other issues that must be addressed until the player has successfully resolved a predetermined number of interactions. Profanity is restricted, and instructors can require students to download their chat histories to prohibit malfeasance.

#### *Level 5: Personal Reflection*

The final Level 5: Personal Reflection asks players to make personal assessments about their communication in relationships and how their communication may be improved. Based on their responses, players are directed to third-party websites with curated content for relational maintenance success. Level 5 questions are:

- Have you been in abusive relationship?
- Are hesitant to have a conversation with your partner about your relationship?
- Do you find it difficult to talk about sex?
- Have you experienced infidelity?

For a visual introduction to Love Lines click [here](#).



## **Love Lines Features**

### *Tutorials*

Each level has several tutorials which link to quizzes, Study Stack resources, Padlets, and third-party online self-evaluations to help students process Love Lines concepts. Instructors may choose to assign points to students based on their completion of and reflection on using these tutorials.

### *Save*

A save button allows students to save their progress. Instructors can require students to play up to a certain level and save their progress before an in-class discussion or activity.

### *Downloads*

Students who have saved their progress can download their conversation PDFs. Instructors can require students to upload these downloads to a course management system for individual grading or to Google Drive for the entire class to review and analyze. Conversation PDFs are accessible under level 3 and 4 tutorials.

### *Badges*

Students earn badges for completing milestones throughout the game. Badges can be shared to Facebook. Instructors may require students to upload badge screenshots to their course management system to assign points for the achievement.

- #Bae badge is awarded for completing Level 1.
- #FeelingMyself badge is awarded for consecutively choosing five different emotions in Level 2.
- #PerfectScore badge is awarded for completing Levels 1-2 with no incorrect answers.
- #RelationshipGoals badge is awarded for completing Level 3.
- #PersonalGrowth badge is awarded for completing Level 5.
- #Commitment badge is awarded for time commitment to playing Love Lines (at least 100 different actions).

### *Cheat Sheets*

Within levels 1 and 2, selecting cheat sheet opens a pop up with a definition of the rationale and a demonstrative dialogue between fictional characters. Each rationale has its own cheat sheet. Cheat sheets are intentionally diverse encompassing varied ethnic names, relationship types, and sexual orientations. Selecting the cheat sheet light bulb icon opens a new tab of with the definitions of all Love Lines rationales appropriate to either level 1 or 2.

Instructors may assign activities based on the cheat sheets. For example, cheat sheets may serve as in class or online discussion starters. Instructors may require students to extend a dialogue between cheat sheet characters or create their own cheat sheet dialogues based on the models. Students could also be tasked to analyze the cheat sheet dialogues as a written assignment.



### *Certificate*

Upon completion of all five levels, students earn a PDF completion certificate that can be uploaded to a course management system for points.

### *Accessibility*

Love Lines meets Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) standards. If your students need additional accommodations, please email [info@lovelinesonline.com](mailto:info@lovelinesonline.com).

#### Text contrast (desktop and mobile)

All default Love Lines text and background color combinations surpass the minimum of 7:1.

#### Text alternatives for non-text elements (desktop and mobile)

For each non-text element there is either accompanying text underneath the element or alt text on the HTML element for assistive technologies.

#### Color selector for background and text (desktop and mobile)

Users can set the background and text color with a color palette tool.

#### Role alert (desktop and mobile)

Love Lines uses the html attribute `role=alert` when a message arrives. This notifies assistive technologies to focus on the new element and alert the user of its arrival.

#### Increased line spacing for readability (desktop and mobile)

Increased line spacing within and between paragraphs increases text readability.

#### Scale text to 200% (desktop only)

The page layout supports scaling text up to 200%.

#### Complete keyboard operability (desktop only)

Users can use all parts of the site with their keyboard only. In addition, Love Lines highlights the first relevant element with which the user can interact.

#### Dropdowns follow WCAG fly-out menu recommendations (desktop only)

Love Lines has two screens featuring dropdown components. These dropdowns follow W3's WCAG guidelines including a grace period when your mouse leaves the button area before the dropdown disappears which reduces the demand on precision movement.





## Love Lines Assignments

The four easy ways to incorporate Love Lines into your course are:

- Completion
- Competition
- Engagement
- Interaction

### *Completion*

Instructors can assign points for:

- Completing tutorials
- Playing the game to a predetermined level by a due date
- Earning badges
- Receiving the completion certificate

Screenshots or PDFs of these achievements can be uploaded to a course management system or emailed to the instructor.

### *Competition*

1. Instruct students not to change the purple background and to play levels 1 and 2 individually or in groups. Groups will be faster.
2. Time students to determine who completes levels 1 and 2 first.
3. View student progress from the back of the class and note how many of the purple backgrounds are dark purple which indicates incorrect answers.
4. Create a leaderboard on the board.
5. Students who are highest on the leaderboard can be rewarded with extra credit, selecting speech day order, top pick of peers for the next group project, or another incentive.

### *Engagement*

Engagement can take place as 1) in class discussions 2) in class or video-recorded speeches, 3) in class, homework, or online writing prompts. Here are some sample questions/prompts.

### All Levels

- Define the meaning of each Love Lines level and list 4-5 qualities that distinguish each level from the others.
- Identify a love song that represents each Love Lines level.

### Levels 1-2

- Identify a positive or problematic rationale that you had trouble recognizing. Explain why you had trouble with it.
- Identify a YouTube music video that represents a level one positive quality of a romantic relationship. Choose a peer's video and explain why you agree or disagree that the video represents the positive qualities of a romantic relationship.



- Identify a YouTube music video that represents a level two problematic quality of a romantic relationship. Choose a peer's video and explain why you agree or disagree that the video represents the problematic qualities of a romantic relationship.
- Identify a YouTube clip of a conflict between a reality TV couple. Identify a problematic Love Lines concept within their interactions.

### Level 3

#### Conflict Activity

1. Review various conflict styles.
2. Instruct students to 1) apply their knowledge of conflict styles to identify the chatbot strategies that escalate the conflict and 2) apply their knowledge of conflict styles to attempt to de-escalate the conflict with the chatbot.
3. Require students to determine whether their de-escalation attempts were successful by choosing "the issue has been resolved, move on," "the issue has not been resolved, move on" or "the issue cannot be resolved, break up" If students choose to break up, Love Lines will record their rationales for doing so. If students choose to move on, they can continue to play and/or submit a brief paragraph explaining why they chose not to break up.
4. Consider requiring students to save and upload their escalation identification and de-escalation conversation PDFs for instructor and/or peer review.

#### Discussion

- What conflict style best describes that of the chatbot? Was that conflict style effective in your conversation?
- What conflict style did you use to attempt to de-escalate the conflict with the chatbot? Were you successful?
- What strategies escalated the conflict?
- What strategies de-escalated the conflict?
- How did you feel chatting with the chatbot?
- Chatbots are notoriously frustrating not unlike some romantic relationships. What interpersonal communication strategies are useful when having a conversation with someone who does not respond directly to your concerns?
- Did the chatbot trigger any relationship red flags? If so, how did you respond to them?
- How did you determine whether to move on or break up with the chatbot? What strategies did you use to maintain or terminate the relationship?
- When are some relationship maintenance strategies more appropriate than others?
- When are some relationship termination strategies more appropriate than others?
- What other life lessons can be extrapolated from your level 3 exchanges?

### Level 5

- Perform a rhetorical analysis of one of the sites or videos listed in level 5. What strategies did the creators use to communicate their messages? Were the strategies effective? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast two different sites or videos listed in level 5. What were the similarities and differences? Which site was more effective and why?



- Choose one of the questions from level 5 and explain how you would design a resource that would most effectively answer the question.
- Create your own question for level 5 and research your own resources that would most effectively answer the question.
- What useful information (if any) did you learn from level 5?
- What would be the best way to share information from level 5 with a friend or partner without offending him or her?

### *Interaction*

Level 4 is uniquely primed for in class interaction. As homework, require students to “play up” to level 4 and save their progress so they are ready for interaction once class begins. If you are assigning level 4 as homework, remind students to exchange contact information with peers so that they can arrange to be on at the same time to complete assignments efficiently.

### Emotional Intelligence

1. Instruct students to complete level 4. Username choice does not matter.
2. Discuss what feelings resulted from playing Love Lines.
  - a. What did Love Lines teach you about your in-game relationship?
  - b. How might Love Lines be applicable in your life outside of the game?

### Online Identities

1. Require students to login to level 4 not using their real names.
2. Instruct students to play level 4 for at least one round without moving on or breaking up by representing an identity different from their own (e.g. age, body type, race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.).
3. Ask students:
  - a. What did you do to represent your different identity?
  - b. What are the ethics of representing yourself online as someone you are not?
  - c. How would you feel if someone misrepresented their identity to you online?
4. Repeat the round as many times as is desired.
5. Consider requiring students to save and upload their conversations for instructor review and/or evaluation.

### Romantic Relationship Conflict

1. Ask students to brainstorm (perpetual) romantic relationship conflicts (e.g. gender differences, family/work balance, boundaries, contraception, sexual dissatisfaction or dysfunction, jealousy, infidelity, sexually transmitted infections, etc.).
2. Record the issues on the board and discuss the circumstances under which they may occur.
3. Require students to login to level 4. Username choice does not matter.
4. Ask the entire class to collectively choose one issue and imaginatively respond to the level 4 love line in a way that addresses and attempts to resolve the conflict.
5. Ensure students play at least one round.



6. Discuss how partners responded and whether students will approach the issue differently in their offline lives.
7. Repeat the round with a new relationship conflict from the list on the board as many times as is desired.
8. Consider requiring students to save and upload their conversations for instructor and/or peer review.
9. Ask students what patterns and themes emerged in their exchanges
  - a. Were you able to resolve the conflict? Why or why not?
  - b. What were the various resolutions?
  - c. What makes perpetual conflicts so persistent?
  - d. Did aspects of the conversations vary by gender or race?
  - e. Were any aspects of the conversation unique to your generation?
  - f. Is the medium mentioned in the conversation? How might the conversations been different if they were face to face as opposed to electronically mediated?

### Family Development Pathways

1. Pair students
2. Ask students to choose a family development pathway:
  - a. Marriage
  - b. Family with young children
  - c. Family in later life
  - d. LGBT Household
  - e. Divorce
  - f. Single-Parent Household
  - g. Intergenerational Family
  - h. Remarriage
  - i. Stepparenting
3. Instruct students to determine their relationship (parent/adult child, parent/young child, stepparent/stepchild, same-sex engaged couple, happily married couple, divorcing couple, etc.)
4. Require pairs to resolve a conflict as they role play their family development pathway via level 4 for homework. Username choice does not matter.
5. Instruct students that the dialogue must:
  - a. Clearly identify the pathway, the conflict, and the relationship between partners
  - b. Effectively resolve the problem using pertinent course concepts
  - c. Be engaging, entertaining, creative, and original
6. Require students to submit one conversation PDF and a co-written essay explaining how lessons from the activity could apply to their (future) families.

### Romantic Relationship Decision-Making

1. Ask students to brainstorm romantic relationship issues that require decision-making (e.g. relationship initiation, managing a relationship challenge, conflict resolution, sexual consent, terminating a relationship, etc.).
2. Record the issues on the board.
3. Discuss and define the issues with students. For example, ask students to define sexual consent. (For clarity, rest of this activity will use sexual consent as the example).



4. Require students to login to level 4 using their given names and pair.
5. The recipient of the love line must try to get consent for a sexual activity of their choice as long as their attempt at consent is loosely related to the love line.
6. The other student must decide whether to consent.
7. Play without moving on or breaking up for a predetermined amount of time (we recommend 3-5 minutes).
8. Ask students
  - a. If you were assigned to ask for consent (the love line was said to you), did you receive consent?
  - b. If you were assigned to decide whether to give consent (the love line was generated from your perspective), did your partner gain it? Discuss whether there were differences in assessment of consent.
  - c. If you were assigned to ask for consent (the love line was said to you), what was it like to ask for consent in relationship to a random love line?
  - d. If you were assigned to ask for consent, what was most frustrating (if anything) about trying to get consent?
  - e. If you were assigned to decide (the love line was generated from your perspective), what consent strategies were appropriate/inappropriate?
  - f. What are best practices for gaining consent?
  - g. How can we take the lessons from this activity into your future sexual experiences?
9. Consider requiring students to save and upload their conversations for instructor review and/or evaluation. Instructors may also choose to survey their students' decision-making perspectives before and after playing Love Lines.



### **Love Lines Student Feedback**

Of the 195 students who completed a feedback survey from fall semester 2016,

- 69% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned useful information about relationships while playing Love Lines.
- 68% agreed or strongly agreed that they learned useful information about interpersonal communication by reading the Cheat Sheet dialogues.

Other users noted:

“The best aspects of Love Lines were how it explained concepts in depth, as well as keeping things simple.”—Male Undergraduate, State University

“I liked the emoji section, and I liked how you could put names you were familiar with into it so it seemed like your own relationship.”—Female Undergraduate, State University

“The emoticons were very relevant to how we express emotions now. Words can express an emotion but the emoticons are somehow more accurate to choose from. Also, the texts were very useful to practice trying to solve a problem in a relationship.”—Female Undergraduate, State University

“I enjoyed the interactive aspect, primarily the live chats with other people.”— Male Undergraduate, State University

“My favorite part was reading the Cheat Sheets and also reading what the rationale words meant on the left side.”—Female Undergraduate, Community College

“Love Lines portrays relatable concepts and even slang, such as the use of hashtags and profanity that are widely utilized in modern society. Terminology like “bae” allows students to relate to the content on a personal level. I have never seen educational content that contained terminology relevant in today’s youth society, and it was a refreshing change of scenery.”  
—Male Undergraduate, State University

“I appreciated all the different points of view when it came to relationships. It gave a variety of examples of couples and open relationships. It was nice to read about it because these things actually happen in everyday life.”—Male Undergraduate, Community College

“Love Lines help me realize some of the problematic aspects in my own relationships.”— Female Undergraduate, State University

“The best aspects of Love Lines was that it helped me view relationships in a different perspective which could ultimately help me with my current relationship.”—Male Undergraduate, State University



### **Adopting Loves Lines**

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