

How To Dump Your Girlfriend

Break-ups suck. You guys get it. I'd argue, though, that certain ways of breaking up with someone are less awful than others. I'd like to share from my experience on the receiving end what I think are some good and some bad strategies for dumping your girlfriend. Let me break it down: I've been dumped by four guys. For simplicity I'll call them one, two, three, and four.

One had golden locks like Cinderella and I used to steal his calculator during eight-grade Spanish class. We started dating sophomore year of high school after admitting our feelings for one another during a game of Truth or Dare. Then, after school one day, he took me outside, sat me down, and told me that the Bible said we weren't allowed to be together because I wasn't Christian. Well, actually what he said was that Christians were only supposed to date each other. Then I stared at him blankly for several minutes, wondering why he'd dragged me out into the freezing cold to share this piece of trivia, until I finally put it together. I was pretty distraught at the time over his reason, but I now think my main criticism of One's break-up strategy is that he didn't quite make it clear that we *were* breaking-up.

Next up was Two. He was a perfectly nice senior boy who'd been unlucky on the dating scene, and I was a recently heartbroken junior girl. We had nothing in common except for a few mutual friends who took it upon themselves to orchestrate a romance between us. Our time together ended uneventfully: Two texted me at the beginning of that summer proposing we "take a break," then failed to acknowledge my existence again until three months later when he called from the airport to officially end things before departing for college. My problem here wasn't that two broke my heart—far from it—but that his extreme stalling had completely exhausted my patience.

After Two I took a dating hiatus until I started college. But, just days after I moved into my freshman dorm, I met Three. I got blocked during a game of pickup volleyball outside Widener Library, and when I turned around to glare my new athletic nemesis, I found myself instead looking into the smoldering, dark chocolate gaze of my future husband. Except, he was already taken. I settled for being friends with Three, and over the course of that year, he became my closest friend. We came up with our own secret code language, we met up every Friday to watch our favorite tv show, and our friends came to be surprised when they saw one of us without the other. We did end up dating eventually, and our eventual breakup my worst one. He had feelings for someone else and neglected to end his relationship with me before starting one with her. Three's strategy was pretty clearly a bad way to end a romantic relationship, but it caused even deeper damage than that: I lost my best friend.

Four lived in my entryway in Lowell last year, in the room directly below mine, but we never really talked until two weeks before his graduation that May. He asked for my number in the least smooth way possible—by invoking my “not having friends on campus” as a reason we should play board a game together—but made up for it with 3am pancake runs and conversations that lasted for hours before we realized how late it was. Four was the best at breaking up with me. He was about to move 4,000mi away for a year-long fellowship, and we had the choice to either date trans-Atlantically or not at all. So we sat in my room one night and talked about it. We disagreed at first, and it was a really difficult conversation. The reason I call it my favorite break-up wasn't because it was the least painful or made me laugh the most later. It's because, while I was still sad, I didn't feel anger or confusion or the rest of the negative feelings that I'd come to think of as inherent to breaking up.

Break-ups suck, but they don't have to be completely terrible experiences. I've been through one that was devastating in a way that could have been avoided, and one that was sad and hard but for all the right reasons. The major difference between them for

me wasn't the weather outside or the timing or the exact phrasing; it was whether or not the two of us were open with each other. That's kind of counterintuitive—avoiding openness often seems like the way to avoid hurting the other person's feelings. But the strategy of not being straightforward during a break up can actually be the most painful one. The best way to break up with someone, as far as I can tell, is just by having an honest conversation.