

**NON-NEGOTIABLES**

*vs.*

**PREFERENCES**

**WORKSHEET**

*Week 3 Coursework*

Modern Dating Sucks Book Club • Jackie Dorman

*"5 to 10 genuine non-negotiables. If you have 23, you have a preference list."*

## The Filter Question

Before you write a single thing, learn this question. It is the most useful question you will ever ask about your list.

***"Imagine this person has everything else on my list. They share my values, want what I want, have the character and capacity to build a long-lasting relationship. But they are missing only this one thing. Would I still say yes?"***

If yes → it's a preference.

If no → it's a non-negotiable.

That's it. That's the whole test. Run every item on your list through this question. Be ruthless.

## Non-Negotiable vs. Preference: The Difference in Practice

Study this side-by-side until the difference clicks. Most people have items in the wrong column.

NON-NEGOTIABLE	PREFERENCE
Wants children (or definitely does not)	Doesn't already have children
Shares your core faith or spiritual worldview	Same denomination or worship style
Emotionally available — not still in love with someone else	Has never been married or in a serious relationship
Financially responsible — honest about money, actively managing it	Makes a certain amount, drives a certain car, etc.
Aligned on where to live: city, region, life pace	Loves the country and is a morning person
Takes care of themselves physically	Has a certain body type, height, or weight
Committed to monogamy and faithful partnership	Is a virgin or has never used pornography
Sober, or aligned on relationship with substances	Has never smoked or used alcohol
Willing to work through conflict rather than disappear	Has a certain personality type, Enneagram, or zodiac sign

*Notice what the non-negotiable column has in common: every one of these affects whether you can build a LIFE with someone. The preference column is mostly about how the package looks.*

## **Step 1: Brain Dump**

Before sorting, get everything out of your head. List every quality, trait, characteristic, requirement, or wish you've ever had about who you want to be with. Don't censor. Don't sort. Just dump it all here.

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## Step 2: The Five Non-Negotiable Categories

Now we sort. Real non-negotiables tend to fall into one of five categories. Use these to find yours.

### 1. CHARACTER

*Who they are when no one is watching. Integrity is the alignment between who someone says they are and who they show up as in ordinary moments.*

#### **Reflection prompts to surface yours:**

- How do they treat people they don't have to be nice to?
- Can they admit when they're wrong without making it a crisis?
- Does the way they talk about their past line up with how they live now?
- What do their oldest friendships tell me about their character?

#### **Examples from this category:**

- *Honest, even when it costs them something*
- *Takes responsibility instead of deflecting*
- *Treats service workers, exes, and strangers with the same respect they treat me*
- *Can admit when they're wrong*

#### **Your non-negotiables in this category (1–3 max):**

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## 2. CAPACITY

*Whether they can consistently show up right now — not whether they want to in theory.*

### **Reflection prompts to surface yours:**

- Do they want a relationship the way someone wants a vacation they never actually book?
- Is there real, practical, emotional room in their life — or just stated interest?
- Have they done the heartwork? Or are they planning to do it later?
- What does their week look like? Is there capacity in it, or is it already maxed out?

### **Examples from this category:**

- *Emotionally available — not still entangled with an ex*
- *Has actual room in their life and schedule for a relationship*
- *Has done their own healing work, or is actively in it*
- *Not in survival mode in a way that prevents real intimacy*

### **Your non-negotiables in this category (1–3 max):**

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### 3. COMPATIBILITY

*Whether your lives actually fit together — not whether you like the same shows.*

#### **Reflection prompts to surface yours:**

- When the infatuation wears off in 14 months, will our daily lives still fit?
- Whose life would have to shrink to make this work — mine or theirs?
- Do we want the same kind of week? The same kind of weekend? The same kind of life?
- What would each of us have to give up to be together — and is that giving up sustainable?

#### **Examples from this category:**

- *Aligned on where and how we want to live*
- *Similar approach to money, work, and rest*
- *Compatible energy and social rhythms*
- *Same vision for whether and how to raise children*

#### **Your non-negotiables in this category (1–3 max):**

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## 4. CONVICTION

*Whether their values are aligned with yours — the deep beliefs that govern how they live, not just opinions they hold lightly.*

### **Reflection prompts to surface yours:**

- What do we both believe makes a marriage worth fighting for?
- When the storms come — grief, illness, financial pressure — will we both be anchored to the same thing?
- What does commitment mean to them when it gets inconvenient?
- Are we starting from the same foundation, even if we disagree on the surface?

### **Examples from this category:**

- *Shares my core faith or spiritual worldview*
- *Same view of commitment, marriage, and what it takes to stay*
- *Aligned on how we'd raise children spiritually*
- *Same convictions about what we'd give up for each other*

### **Your non-negotiables in this category (1–3 max):**

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## 5. COMMUNITY

*Whether they have real people in their life, and are a person worth being known by. The quality of their relationships is the truest mirror of who they are.*

### **Reflection prompts to surface yours:**

- Who are the oldest people in their life, and how do they speak about them?
- When relationships in their life have broken, what did they do about it?
- Are they embedded in a community of people who love them, or are they isolated?
- What do the patterns of their past relationships tell me about how they show up?

### **Examples from this category:**

- *Has long-standing friendships that have survived real life*
- *Has done the work to repair relationships when they broke*
- *Is loved and respected by people who actually know them*
- *Not estranged from everyone in their past with no self-awareness about it*

### **Your non-negotiables in this category (1–3 max):**

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## **Step 3: Your Final Non-Negotiables List**

Pull the strongest 5–10 from the category pages above. If you have more than 10, run them through the Filter Question again until you're at 10 or fewer.

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## **Step 4: Your Preferences List**

These are the nice-to-haves. The bonuses. Things that would make the relationship more delightful, but you would say yes without them.

Write your preferences here, no limit:

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## Step 5: The Standards vs. Trauma Check

Now look at your non-negotiables list one more time. For each one, ask:

*"Is this a STANDARD — rooted in self-knowledge and values? Or is this a WALL — built after pain, to prevent something specific from happening again?"*

Walls protect you from the people who would hurt you. They can also block the people who would love you. If something on your list is actually a wall, write where it came from and ask if it still serves the person you are becoming.

### Items I'm not sure about:

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### Where do they come from?

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### Decision — keep, revise, or release?

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## **Bring to Live Session**

- Your final non-negotiables list (5–10)
- Your preferences list
- Any items you're not sure about — we'll pressure-test them together
- One item from your past that you treated as a non-negotiable that was actually a preference (or vice versa)

***Bring this worksheet to our live session on Tuesday, June 9.***