

Excerpted from *[She'll Love It: The Guy's Guide to Giving Great Gifts](#)*, by Laura Jacobson

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Movies, Music, and Books

Books, magazines, DVDs, and music are reliable, good gifts. They're not that expensive, they provide a lot of enjoyment for the money, and you can get big points if you give something she's never heard of that she ends up loving.

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General Ideas

These are tried-and-true guidelines for nice gifts.

Book Ideas

- Bestseller lists – When there are experts out there compiling data, it's smart to use those resources. Check the New York Times bestseller list, the Today Show book club, other book clubs, and Amazon's top sellers. Check the book review section from the New York Times Sunday edition. Check the Pulitzer and Booker prize lists. Find magazines or newspapers she likes and find their top 10 or 100 lists; *Outdoor Magazine*, for instance, has a list of top 25 adventure books. Nearly every group vaguely associated with books has put together a top 100 list.
- Popular fiction – Consider top chick lit sellers like Jennifer Weiner, mysteries by Sue Grafton, or science fiction if she enjoys that genre.
- Interesting science, travel, essays, or history – If your girlfriend or wife is a bit of a science or history buff, or likes nonfiction in general, try giving her books that explain how everyday inventions work. Consider biographies of people in her field or field of interest. If your girlfriend is interested in flying, give her Beryl Markham's *West With the Night*, chronicling her childhood and adult life as a pilot in Africa in the 1930, or *Wind, Sand, and Stars* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the French pilot who also wrote *The Little Prince*.
- Independent bookstores – Talk to the clerks or look for staff recommendations. This is an excellent way to find books you wouldn't have heard of otherwise.
- Comic books – Classics include *Calvin and Hobbes*, *Doonesbury*, *Bloom County*, *For Better or for Worse*, etc. Or if she likes animé, give her more of her favorite or a new series.
- More of what she likes – Check her bookshelf. If she has two or more books by the same

author, she probably likes that author. Get the latest book by that author, or a book she doesn't have by that author.

- Complete collections – Try hardcover or complete collections of books she has some of, especially books she had as a kid. Who wouldn't love the first ten Danny Dunn books, or a leatherbound Pooh to replace the one she lost when her parents moved?
- Books by the author of movies she liked – If she enjoyed the movie *About a Boy*, give her that book as well as other books written by the author, Nick Hornby. Ditto for other movies based on books like *Dangerous Liaisons*, *In Her Shoes*, *Sense and Sensibility*, etc.
- Books we like – A random sampling of books many people haven't read are *Confederacy of Dunces* (hilarious Pulitzer prize winner) and the equally amusing essays by Sarah Vowell and Bill Bryson.

DVD Ideas

Check the top rentals in various categories on Netflix.com and top sales on Amazon.com. Nearly every group vaguely associated with film has put together a top 100 list; google those and see what turns up. For something less mass market, check best-of-year lists and The Great Movies at www.suntimes.com/ebert.

- Try DVDs of an old series that she's mentioned liking: *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Get Smart*, or an old cartoon like *Rocky and Bullwinkle* or *Merry Melodies*. Consider British DVD sets like *Absolutely Fabulous* or *Blackadder*, a season or two of bestsellers like *Seinfeld* or *Friends*, or of course HBO series like *Six Feet Under* or *Sex and the City*.
- You can't do it as the only gift, but you can give her several months free of Netflix.com.
- If she's nuts about a particular actor, give her a collection of his earlier lesser-known works. If your girlfriend or wife is nuts about Hugh Grant, for instance, give her DVDs of *Maurice*, *An Awfully Big Adventure*, and *Sirens*.

Music Ideas

Check the bestseller lists on Amazon.com, Spin.com, and other music web sites. Again, there are a zillion Top 100 lists by everyone associated with music.

- One idea is complete collections of things she likes but doesn't have, like ABBA, Queen, Styx, Schoolhouse Rock, etc.
- Consider collections of classic genres like swing, collections of a prolific singer like Frank Sinatra, or introduce her to a genre you think she'd like.
- As with books, check what CDs she has, what artists, etc. Get her the latest CD from her favorite artist, a CD she doesn't have, or tickets for her favorite artist. Fill in her collection of CDs by an artist she loves but doesn't have.
- If she's behind technology-wise and still has tapes, replace some of the tapes with CD versions. If she has some albums that she loves that aren't available on CD, get them converted to CD.
- If she loves to sing but can't remember all the words, get her a big song book.

Magazines or Newspapers

This is somewhat related to the idea of giving her a hobby-related gift. However, here are some basic ideas on magazine and newspaper subscriptions.

- The Sunday New York Times – Or every day of the week, for that matter. It’s an excellent newspaper, available nearly anywhere, and is a great idea for a woman who likes to learn about more than what’s in her own back yard.
- Her hometown newspaper – In kind of a flip of the previous idea, if your honey just moved to a new city and is homesick, see if you can get her hometown newspaper, daily or Sunday, delivered to her.
- Brain candy – If she periodically buys Glamour, Elle, or even People, go ahead and get her a year-long subscription. (For People, maybe six months; a person can get tired of it pretty quickly.)
- Anything on a topic of interest – If she likes wine, knitting, cars, science, or gardening, get her a subscription to a related magazine. *Wine Spectator* and *Discover* magazines are a couple examples.
- Something to back her up politically – If she’s a red state gal living in a blue state, or vice versa, give her a magazine that will make her feel happy. You might try *Mother Jones* or *New Republic* for the lonely Democrat; *Weekly Standard* or *National Review* for the lonely Republican. Or even get her a Sirius system so she can listen to radio programs related to her political slant.

For the Public Television or Radio Fan

NPR- and PBS-related gifts are great because they’re just plain good, and they’re not run-of-the-mill mass audience gifts. Few people have heard of Sarah Vowell, but she can make *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* the funniest thing you’ve heard this year.

The audio recordings and show-specific products are great for anyone who’s nuts about *Wait Wait, Don’t Tell Me*; *What Do You Know*; or the other shows. (If that’s your sweetheart, keep in mind that the shows travel; buy tickets next time an NPR show is traveling live in your area.)

You can generally buy NPR or PBS products anywhere, but the following locations are where you go to get the ideas in the first place.

For public radio, go to www.npr.org and find the NPR Shop link.

For public television, go to www.pbs.org and find the Shop PBS link.

Getting a Gift Signed

If your girlfriend likes books by David Sedaris, it would be that much more of a thrill to have a signed copy of his latest book. If she loves Lyle Lovett, she’ll go bananas over a signed copy of a poster or CD.

How do you get things signed? It’s not always as hard as you might think.

- Authors pre-sign books for sale. Laura was in the Boulder Bookstore the other day and signed copies of David Sedaris’s *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim* were just sitting there on the shelf.
- Authors go on book tours. Keep an eye on the visiting authors for local bookstores and when your sweetie’s favorite author comes through, make a point of getting a book signed.

- Actors and directors show up at film festivals. If you see your honey's favorite actress is headlining the annual film festival, buy one of her DVDs and get it signed at an event where the actress will appear.
- Ask friends in other cities to help you out if your girlfriend's favorite author, director, or singer is appearing elsewhere at events where autographs are possible. Or if your friend's buddy from high school interviews celebrities for a newspaper in New York, work to send the interviewer items to get signed in case he ever interviews someone of interest to your girlfriend.

Using Online Information to Find Good Gifts

If you know what books or music your honey likes, you could probably figure out what new books she would like. Seems like this might require, however, an enormous amount of knowledge of books and what people like about related books.

It doesn't, because someone else has that knowledge. Big bookstores, DVD stores, and other businesses have all that information in their vast customer databases. And you can get at that information just by going to their web sites. Here are some examples of how to use it.

Using Amazon to Find Items Your Honey Would Like

For instance, let's say your honey has read and raved about a book called *The Curious Incident of the Nighttime Dog*. So bring that page up on Amazon.com and scroll down to the section about what other books were bought.

You see that people who liked that book also bought other books. Try looking up *Life of Pi*. See what customers who bought that book also bought.

You can see that people who bought *The Curious Incident of the Nighttime Dog* and *Life of Pi* also bought both of these books: *Secret Life of Bees* and *The Time Traveler's Wife*. You could buy her both these books or either one for a gift and be pretty safe. Read the descriptions of each book first, of course, and if you feel like it, hunt around more for additional recommendations.

Using Netflix to Find DVDs Your Honey Would Like

It's a similar approach to Amazon. Find DVDs, both movies and TV, that your girlfriend or wife likes. Just type a title into Netflix and you'll have access to the vast information that Netflix tracks about what their customers rent.

Let's say your girlfriend really liked the *Sense and Sensibility* movie with Emma Thompson and Kate Winslet. Go to Netflix and type *Sense and Sensibility* into the search field. When the name of the movie comes up, click on it. In the page for *Sense and Sensibility*.

One of the things listed is the two-part *Pride and Prejudice* BBC series. You've heard good things about it so you might consider getting her that.

You read more about it on Netflix and you see that it stars Colin Firth. Which reminds you that she also liked *Bridget Jones' Diary*, which also starred Colin Firth.

Given that idea, you decide to keep looking. Bring up *Bridget Jones' Diary* in Netflix and see what people who liked that movie also rented.

Hey, look at that. *Emma* shows up on this list, too; it was in the original list of also-rented movies for *Sense and Sensibility*. So you might get her *Emma*, too. This would be a good choice not only because she's likely to like it, but because it didn't do big box office when it was out so she probably hasn't seen it.

On the other hand, after all this searching, you might remember that what she really liked about *Sense and Sensibility* was Hugh Grant. So in that case you might want to give her a collection of his earlier lesser-known works. Look up Hugh Grant in Netflix and you'll come up with movies such as *Maurice*, *An Awfully Big Adventure*, and *Sirens*.

Using Launchcast Radio

If you go to music.yahoo.com, you'll find Launchcast Radio. Set up a new radio station for your girlfriend by selecting the music she likes.

Then play the station, and across the top of the play window you'll see artists you selected, as well as other artists that Launchcast thinks the person with this station would like. If one or more of those other choices seems like a good idea, get her a CD by that artist. Or get two CDs by two artists.

Using Pandora.com

Pandora.com is a more direct approach than Launchcast—it was developed so you could find music you like based on what you currently like.

Go to pandora.com, type in an artist, and wait as it plays the first song. You'll be presented with a series of artists; listen and select or skip to the next.

Other Sites That Suggest Gifts

Also try, for books, gnooks.com, and whatshouldireadnext.com. For movies, try movielens.com and gnovies.com.