










# AOL Instant Messenger™

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## Overview

The AOL Instant Messenger™ service provides the easiest way to see which of your friends are online and to communicate instantly with them.

It is the **only** Internet chat service that enables you to see and communicate with all your friends, whether they are on America Online or signed on to the AOL Instant Messenger service.

To start, you create a list of all your online buddies—friends, family, and co-workers who are AOL members or have registered as AOL Instant Messenger service users. Whenever they sign on, you can see them in your Buddy List window and they can see you in their Buddy List windows. Once you know a buddy is online, you can use the Instant Message™ feature to send that person a message and start chatting.

### Additional Features

- Privacy controls allow you to determine who can communicate with you. You can allow anyone to send you messages, limit your communications to a small circle of friends, or just block messages from specific people.
- Using personal profiles, you can display information about others or share information about yourself, such as your e-mail address or a link to your web page.
- A warning feature allows you to help regulate the AOL Instant Messenger™ community. If someone sends you an annoying or offensive message, you can issue a warning to that person. The warning slows the rate at which he can send and receive messages. If enough people send warnings to someone, that person can lose his ability to send or receive messages for a time.
- Quick access to AOL NetFind, the easiest and most comprehensive way to find what you are looking for on the Internet.
- Find a Buddy allows you to find the screen names of those friends who already belong to the AOL Instant Messenger service. Sign On a Friend makes it easy to invite other friends to join and share the fun of instant online communication.

## Registering

Before you can use the AOL Instant Messenger™ service, you need to register your copy and choose a screen name. Your screen name is the name by which you will be known to everyone else using the AOL Instant Messenger service and America Online. You choose a password when you register so you are the only one that can use your chosen screen name.

If you are already an AOL member, your screen name has been reserved for you. You still need to register to use the AOL Instant Messenger service however.

To register, go to the AOL home page and follow the links to register and download your copy of AOL Instant Messenger software.

You can then install the AOL Instant Messenger software and sign on with your screen name and password.

### Note

- Anyone who knows your password has access to your account. Therefore, you should **never** reveal your password to anyone online. No one from AOL will ever ask you for your password while you are online.

## Connecting Through a Modem

If you want to connect to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service through a modem, you need to dial in to your Internet Service Provider first. Once you are connected to the Internet, you can then sign on to the service.

## Resolving Connection Problems

If you experience problems connecting, you can run the automatic configuration program to find a host and port through which you can connect. You must have a live connection to the Internet to complete this procedure:

1. Click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.
2. Click the Connection tab.
3. Click the Auto Configure button.

The Automatic Configuration program will attempt to find a host and port through which you can sign on to the AOL Instant Messenger service.

Note: If you want to preserve your Internet connection while you are signed on to the AOL Instant Messenger service, select the Keep connection alive check box on the Connection tab. (Some Internet Service Providers automatically disconnect you if you have been inactive for a given period.) Every five minutes the program sends a signal to keep your connection alive, even though you may be idle.

## Automatically Connecting and Signing On

To make your connection to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service as quick and easy as possible, you can configure the program to start when Windows starts and then automatically sign on when you connect to the Internet through your Internet Service Provider.

1. Enter your screen name and password on the Sign On screen.
2. Click the Setup button, and then the Misc tab.
3. Select the Save password check box.
4. Select the Automatically sign on when AIM starts check box.
5. Select the Start AIM when Windows starts check box.
6. Select the Modem option under Internet Connection.
7. Click OK.

The next time you start Windows, AOL Instant Messenger will automatically start and then sign on once you establish a connection to the Internet through your modem.

## Connecting Through a Local Area Network

If you want to connect to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service through a local area network (LAN) at work or school, you need to have a live connection to the Internet before you attempt to sign on to the service.

### Resolving Connection Problems

If you experience problems connecting, you can run the automatic configuration program to find a host and port through which you can connect. You must have a live connection to the Internet to complete this procedure:

If your local area network is behind a firewall, you will need to use a proxy server to connect to the service. Contact your network administrator to help you determine the configuration settings to enter.

1. Click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.
2. On the Connection tab, enter the settings your network administrator supplies.
3. Click OK to save the settings and close the dialog.

Note: If you want to preserve your Internet connection while you are signed on to the AOL Instant Messenger service, select the Keep connection alive check box on the Connection tab. (Some proxy servers automatically disconnect you if you have been inactive for a given period.) Every five minutes the program sends a signal to keep your connection alive, even though you may be idle.

### Automatically Connecting and Signing On

To make your connection to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service as quick and easy as possible, you can configure the program to start when Windows starts and then automatically sign on when it detects a connection to the Internet.

1. Enter your screen name and password on the Sign On screen.
2. Click the Setup button, and then click the Misc tab.
3. Select the Save password check box.
4. Select the Automatically sign on when AIM starts check box.
5. Select the Start AIM when Windows starts check box.
6. Select the Local area network option under Internet Connection.
7. Click OK.

The next time you start Windows, AOL Instant Messenger will automatically start and then sign on once it detects a connection to the Internet.

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## Creating a List of Online Buddies

Your Buddy List window shows you which of your friends are online. Whenever they sign on, they appear in your Buddy List window and you can communicate with them using the Instant Message™ feature.

The first time you sign on, three empty groups appear in your Buddy List window: **Buddies**, **Family**, and **Co-Workers**. Add your buddies to any of these groups or create additional groups.

**Note:** You must know your friends' screen names (from either America Online or the AOL Instant Messenger™ service) to add them to your Buddy List window.

### To add a buddy:

1. Click the List Setup tab in the Buddy List window.
2. Click on the folder to which you want to add your buddy.
3. Click Add Buddy. A branch appears with the default name New Buddy.
4. Type the screen name of the buddy you want to add and press Enter.  
Type in only your buddy's screen name, not his or her full Internet address. For example, type JohnDoe, not JohnDoe@aol.com.
5. To see if your buddy is online, click the Online tab.

### To add a group:

1. Click the List Setup tab in the Buddy List window.
2. Click Add Group. A folder appears with the default name New Group.
3. Type a new name for the group and press Enter.  
You can now add buddies to this group.

## Tips

- You can look up your friends' screen names if you know their e-mail addresses. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then Click Find a Buddy, and then By E-mail Address. Then follow the instructions to find their screen names.
- You can invite friends who haven't yet signed up to join the AOL Instant Messenger. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window) and then click Sign On a Friend. Then follow the instructions to send them an invitation and instructions on how to join.



## How the Buddy List™ Feature Works

When you sign on to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service, your Buddy List window appears. There are two tabs in your Buddy List window: Online and List Setup. The Online tab shows you which of your buddies are online and the List Setup tab allows you to create and manage your list of online buddies.

Initially, three empty groups appear on these tabs: **Buddies**, **Family**, and **Co-Workers**. Add your buddies to any of these groups or create additional groups. You must know your friends' screen names (from either America Online or the AOL Instant Messenger service) to add them to your list of online buddies.

### On the List Setup tab:

- Each group appears as a folder.
- The buddies within each group appear as branches off the folder. The folder must be open to see the list of buddies in that group.
- You cannot see which of your buddies is online when displaying the List Setup tab. Click the Online tab to see which buddies are online.

### On the Online tab:



Names that appear in bold indicate which buddies signed on most recently. Names that appear gray indicate which buddies are idle. Names that appear gray and in italic indicate which buddies just signed off.



The numbers in parentheses next to each group indicate how many people in that group are online out of the total number of buddies in that group. For example, (3/9) means that three of the nine buddies in that group are currently online.



You can open and close groups within your Buddy List window. Click the "-" symbol next to a list to hide the screen names in that group. The "-" symbol changes to the "+" symbol indicating the group is closed. Click the "+" symbol to display the screen names.



Hold the cursor over a buddy momentarily to display additional information about that person, such as warning rating, log in time, and idle time.

### Tip

To toggle between the Online and List Setup tabs, press CTRL+TAB.

## Editing Your List of Online Buddies

Once you have created your list of online buddies, you can edit them at any time. For instructions on adding another buddy or group, see the topic [Creating a List of Online Buddies](#).

### To move a buddy or group:

1. In the Buddy List window, select the buddy or group you want to move.
2. Drag and drop the entry to a different position within your buddy lists.

### To rename a buddy or group:

1. Click the List Setup tab in the Buddy List window.
2. Select the buddy or group you want to rename.
3. Click the right mouse button and choose Rename from the popup menu that appears.  
The name of the buddy or group appears highlighted.
4. Enter the new name for the buddy or group and press Enter.

### To delete a buddy or group:

1. Click the List Setup tab in the Buddy List window.
2. Select the buddy or group you want to delete.  
**Note:** Deleting a group deletes all the buddies in that group as well.
3. Click Delete.  
A stickup message appears asking you to confirm the deletion.

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## **Sending a Message to Someone**

1. Select the person's screen name on your Buddy List window.
2. Click the IM button.
3. Type your message and click Send.

You can use the toolbar to change text or background colors, change text size, or emphasize text with bold, italic, or underlining. You can also use the toolbar to provide hyperlinks to Internet locations or e-mail addresses.



## Sending a Hyperlink

1. Within an Instant Message window, type and select the text you want to turn into a hyperlink.
2. Click the Link button on the toolbar. Enter a name for the file in the File name field.  
The Edit Hyperlink dialog opens.
3. Specify the URL (Internet address) of the site you want the link to point to.  
You can also specify an e-mail address as the URL. For example, <mailto:johndoe@aol.com>.
4. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.
5. When you are ready to send your message, click Send.

### Tips







You can also click the Link button with no text selected. If you do this, you will need to enter the link text into the dialog. The link appears at the insertion point location.



If you enter a URL as text (for example, <http://www.aol.com> or <mailto:johndoe@aol.com>), the text automatically converts to a hyperlink when you send the message.

## Creating Smilies Automatically

You can add the following commonly used smilies (or emoticons) to your messages by typing the corresponding characters.

Type	To create
:~)	
:-(	
;-)	
:)	

### Tips



You can also create these smilies in a message by holding down the right mouse button, clicking Insert, then Smilies, and then clicking the smilie you want to insert.



To control whether these smilies appear in your Instant Message window and on your right mouse button menu, see the topic [Turning Smilies On or Off](#).

## **Saving Messages**

You can save a log of the messages you exchange with someone.

1. Within an Instant Message window, choose Save from the File menu.  
The Save Text to File window appears.
2. Enter a name for the file in the File name field.
3. In the Save as type field, select Text Only if you want to save just the text of the message.  
If you want to save the text and be able to follow any hyperlinks in the messages, select AOL Rich Text Format. This will create an HTML file you can view with your web browser.
4. Click Save to save the messages that appear in the upper pane of the Instant Message window.

## Displaying Information about Others

You can display information about people who are signed on at the same time you are, as long as those people have not blocked you. You can see whether they are on AOL or the AOL Instant Messenger™ service and when they signed on. If they are signed on to AOL Instant Messenger and wish to share more information about themselves, you can also see how long they have been idle, how long they have had an AOL Instant Messenger account, and any personal information they want to share with others.

### To display information about someone:

1. In the Buddy List window, select the person whose information you wish to see.
2. Click the Info button.

### Note



You cannot view the profiles of AOL members from the AOL Instant Messenger service.

### See also

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## Providing Information about Yourself

You can provide personal information about yourself that is available to others. This information may include a favorite quotation, an e-mail address, a link to a web page, etc. This information is only available when you are signed on.

### To provide information about yourself:

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the My Info tab.
3. Enter information about yourself that you want to share with others.

Use the toolbar to change the size, color, and font style of the text you enter. You can also use the toolbar to provide links to Internet locations or e-mail addresses, such as <http://www.aol.com> or <mailto:johndoe@aol.com>.

4. Click OK to save the changes and close the dialog.

### Note



Only other AOL Instant Messenger™ service users can view this information; AOL members cannot see it.

## **How Away and Idle Messages Work**

If you need to step away from your computer but do not want to sign off, you can instruct AOL Instant Messenger™ to let others know you are temporarily not available.

If you know you are going to step away, you can turn on your away message to let others know when you will be back. Your away message appears when anyone requests information about you, but AOL Instant Messenger can also automatically respond to anyone who sends you a message while you are away.

If you do not set your away message but simply leave your computer for 10 minutes, then AOL Instant Messenger considers you idle. Anyone who requests information about you can see that your system is idle, but AOL Instant Messenger can also automatically respond to anyone who sends you a message while you are idle.

## Defining a New Away Message

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Away tab.
3. Make sure the Auto respond and insert in personal profile option is selected.  
If you do not want AOL Instant Messenger to reply automatically to messages you receive when away, select the Insert in personal profile option.
4. In the Enter new Away message field, type a new away message.
5. Click Add Message.
6. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

## Turning On an Away Message

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), and then click I'm Away.
2. Choose the away message you want to use.  
The away message appears on your screen.  
To turn off your away message, click I'm Back.



## **Deleting an Away Message**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Away tab.
3. Select the away message you want to delete.
4. Click Remove.
5. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

## Defining an Idle Message

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Away tab.
3. Select Auto respond when idle with message.
4. In the text field below this checkbox, type the message you want to send to anyone who sends you a message while your computer is idle.
5. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

If you do not use your computer for 10 minutes, AOL Instant Messenger automatically sends your idle message to anyone who sends you a message. To stop sending the idle message, press a key or click a mouse button.

## **How Privacy Works**

You can prevent specific AOL Instant Messenger™ service users (or all of them) from sending you messages. This feature is useful if you find someone's messages offensive or if you simply want to communicate with a certain set of users.

If you prevent people from sending you messages, you will not appear in their Buddy List windows and they will not appear in yours.

## Blocking a Specific Person from Sending You Messages

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. Select the Block the users below button.
4. Click the Add Name button.
5. In the Block List, type the name of the user you want to block.
6. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

You will not appear in that person's Buddy List™ window and that person will not in yours.

### Tip



To block someone who sends you a message, click the Block button in the Instant Message window.

## **Blocking Everyone From Sending You Messages**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. Select the Block all users button.
4. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.  
You will not appear in anyone's Buddy List™ window and no one will appear in yours.

## **Allowing Only Specific People to Send You Messages**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. Select the Allow only the users below button.
4. Click the Add Name button.
5. In the Allow List, type the name of the user you want to add.
6. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

## **Allowing Only People on Your Buddy List to Send You Messages**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. Select the Allow only users on my Buddy List button.
4. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.

## **Allowing Everyone to Send You Messages**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. Select the Allow all users to contact me button.
4. Click OK to save your change and close the dialog.



## How Warnings Work

No one patrols the Internet to make sure people remain polite or decent. If other people using the AOL Instant Messenger™ service send you annoying or offensive messages, you have two ways to handle the situation. You can either block them, see [Blocking a Specific Person from Sending You Messages](#), or impose a warning on them.

Warnings are penalties that one AOL Instant Messenger user can issue to another. If you receive a warning, your warning level increases and your ability to send and receive messages decreases. If you receive enough warnings, you can be prevented from sending or receiving messages at all and may even be signed off.

Warnings are not permanent however; their effects decrease over time. If you have been warned off the service, you can return after a "cooling off" period.

You can see someone's warning level if you request information about that person using the Info button in your Buddy List window.

## Warning Someone

To warn someone who has sent you an offensive message, click the Warn button in the Instant Message window in which you received the message.

This imposes a warning on the sender, thereby hampering that person's ability to send and receive messages.

You can choose to impose the warning anonymously. Anonymous warnings are less severe and the person you are warning may not know who issued the warning.

### Notes



You can issue one warning for each message someone sends you.



You can only impose warnings on other AOL Instant Messenger™ service users; you cannot warn AOL members.



If someone warns you, consider ending the conversation. Every additional message you send enables that person to warn you again.

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## **Sounds Preferences**

The Sounds tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to set which sounds, if any, play when your buddies sign on or off and when you send or receive messages.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not online, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### **Play sound when buddies sign on**

When selected, this option plays a sound whenever someone on your buddy list signs on.

### **Play sound when buddies sign off**

When selected, this option plays a sound whenever someone on your buddy list signs off.

### **Play sound when first message is received**

When selected, this option plays a sound the first time you receive a message from a particular buddy, but not on subsequent messages from that buddy.

### **Play sound when receiving a message**

When selected, this option plays a sound every time you receive a message.

### **Play sound when sending a message**

When selected, this option plays a sound every time you send a message.

### **Note**

AOL Instant Messenger™ software includes a directory of default sound files. This SOUNDS directory is located within the directory in which you installed the AOL Instant Messenger™ software.

## **Misc. Preferences**

The Misc tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to control your sign on settings, help you see when your buddies sign on or off, and customize your Instant Message Window.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### **Save password**

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger™ saves your password so you do not need to enter it when you sign on. This option is only active if you have entered your password on the Sign On screen.

### **Automatically sign on when AIM starts**

If you select this option, you will be automatically logged on whenever you launch AOL Instant Messenger. This option is only active if you have selected the Save password option.

### **Start AIM when Windows starts**

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger will automatically launch when you start Windows. If you also save your password and select the Auto-login option, you will automatically sign on when a network connection is found.

### **Internet Connection**

If you choose to launch AOL Instant Messenger when Windows starts, specify the type of network connection you use: Modem or LAN.

### **Dim buddies after they have been idle for \_\_ minutes**

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger will dim the display of those buddies in your Buddy List window who have been idle for the amount of time specified.

### **Flash Buddy List window when buddies sign on or off**

If you select this option, your Buddy List window will blink for five seconds every time one of your buddies signs on or off.

### **Default Font**

Click this button to select a font style and size for the Instant Message window.

### **Window Color**

Click this button to select a background color for the Instant Message window.

### **Enter key inserts Return**

Select this option if you want the Enter key to insert a new line. Deselect this option if you want the Enter key to send your message.

### **Tab key inserts Tab**

Select this option if you want the Tab key to insert a tab. Deselect this option if you want the Tab key to toggle among fields in the Instant Message window.

### **Always view time stamp**

Select this option if you want the messages you send and receive to be marked with the time they are

sent.

### **Disable graphical smilies**

Select this option if you do not want yellow smilie symbols (smilies, winks, and frowns) to appear in your Instant Message windows. Instead, just the text characters, such as :-), will appear. The Smilies submenu will also be removed from the Insert menu (accessed by clicking the right mouse button in a message.)

## Connection Preferences

If you access the Internet through an Internet Service Provider, you most likely will not need to make any changes to the Server or proxy sections of the Connection Preferences tab. However, if you access the Internet through a Local Area Network firewall (for example at your workplace), then your network administrator may need to configure the proxy section of the Connection Preferences tab.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not online, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### Server Host

This field contains the default Internet address of the AOL Instant Messenger™ server. Under normal circumstances, you do not need to change this field. If you should change it accidentally, you can restore the default address by clicking the Reset button.

### Server Port

This field contains the default server port number to be used on AOL Instant Messenger™ server. Under normal circumstances, you do not need to change this field. If you should change it accidentally, you can restore the default port number by clicking the Reset button.

### Auto Configure

If you click this button, AOL Instant Messenger™ will attempt to configure itself to work in your computer's network environment. Try Auto Configure if you are having difficulty connecting with AOL Instant Messenger.

### Reset

If you click this button, AOL Instant Messenger™ will restore the default Server Host and Port values.

### Connect using proxy

If you click this button, AOL Instant Messenger™ will activate the proxy server controls.

### Proxy Host

Supply the name of the proxy server.

### Proxy Port

Supply the port number to be used on the proxy server.

### Protocol

Specify whether your proxy server uses the SOCKS 4, SOCKS 5, or HTTPS protocol.

### Authentication Username

Supply the authentication username required by the proxy.

### Authentication Password

Supply the authentication password required by the proxy.

### Use proxy to resolve hostnames

Select this if you want the proxy to act as a name server for hosts that are behind the firewall.

**Keep connection alive**

Select this option if you want AOL Instant Messenger to preserve your Internet connection during idle periods. (Some Internet Service Providers automatically disconnect users who have been inactive for a given period.)



## Privacy Preferences

The Privacy tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to determine who can send you messages, in whose Buddy List windows you can appear, and what kind of information others can display about you.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### Allow all users to contact me

When selected, this option allows all users to see you in their Buddy List windows and send you messages.

### Allow only users on my Buddy List

When selected, this option allows only the users you added to your Buddy List window to see you in their Buddy List windows and send you messages.

### Allow only the users below

When selected, this option prevents all users, except those you specify, from seeing you in their Buddy List windows and sending you messages.

### Block all users

When selected, this option prevents all users from seeing you in their Buddy List windows and sending you messages.

### Block the users below

When selected, this option allows all users, except those you specify, to see you in their Buddy List windows and send you messages.

### Allow List

This list box is active if you have selected Allow only the users below. To add a Screen Name, click Add Name, type in the Screen Name, and press Enter. To delete a Screen Name, select the Screen Name and click Remove.

### Block List

This list box is active if you have selected Block the users below. To add a Screen Name, click Add Name, type in the Screen Name, and press Enter. To delete a Screen Name, select the Screen Name and click Remove.

### Allow users to see how long I've been idle

When selected, this option allows others to see if you are idle. This information appears when another AOL Instant Messenger user requests information about you.

When this option is deselected, others will only know you are idle if you set an idle message on the Away tab.

### Allow users to see how long I've had an account

When selected, this option allows others to see when your AOL Instant Messenger account was established. This information appears when another AOL Instant Messenger user requests information about you.

**Allow users who know my e-mail address to find my screen name**

When selected, this option allows users who know your e-mail address to obtain your screen name through the Find a Buddy feature.

**Allow users who know my e-mail address to find only that I have an account**

When selected, this option allows users who know your e-mail address to learn only that you have an account (but not to learn your screen name) through the Find a Buddy feature.

**Allow users who know my e-mail address to find nothing about me**

When selected, this option allows users who know your e-mail address to learn nothing about you through the Find a Buddy feature.

## **Buddy Preferences**

The Buddy tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to define the font in which to display your list of online buddies.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### **Font**

From the dropdown menu, select a font for the Buddy List window.

### **Size**

From the dropdown menu, select a size for the font in the Buddy List window.

## My Info Preferences

The My Info tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to supply information about yourself that you would like others to be able to access. (For example, your name, title, e-mail address, etc.)

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

When you are finished entering and formatting your information, click the OK button to apply your changes and close the dialog.

You can also temporarily modify your personal information with an away message to let others know you are not available.

### See also

[Displaying Information about Others](#)

[Letting Others Know You are Away or Idle](#)

[Away Preferences](#)

## Away Preferences

The Away tab of the Preferences dialog allows you to define messages that appear to others while you are away from your computer or while your computer is idle.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### Auto respond when idle with message

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger automatically responds to messages you receive when your computer is idle. (AOL Instant Messenger considers your computer idle when you have not used the mouse or keyboard for 10 minutes.) Enter the message you want sent to others in the text field below this option.

### Auto respond and insert in personal profile

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger automatically sends your away message to anyone who sends you a message when you set your I'm Away option. Your away message also appears in the Personal Profile section of the Buddy Info window when anyone requests information about you.

### Insert in personal profile only

If you deselect this option and set your I'm Away option, AOL Instant Messenger displays your away message in the Personal Profile section of the Buddy Info window when anyone requests information about you.

### Enter new Away message

Type in a new Away message you want to save in this field.

### Add Message

If you click this button, the message in the Enter new Away message field is added to the list of away messages.

### Remove

If you click this button, the selected message is removed. You cannot remove all the away messages; one message always remains.

### I'm Away

If you click this button, your I'm Away option is activated and the current message is sent to anyone who sends you a message.

### See also

[Letting Others Know You are Away or Idle](#)  
[My Info Preferences](#)

## Helpers Preferences

During installation, AOL Instant Messenger™ determines the location of your default web browser. This browser or its associated e-mail program is automatically launched when you click on a hyperlink within AOL Instant Messenger. The Helpers Preferences tab allows you to determine whether AOL Internet Messenger launches your default browser or an alternate browser. You can also specify the e-mail program to launch when you click on a mailto link.

If you do not have a web browser or e-mail program installed, you cannot open hyperlinks or launch an e-mail program.

To open the Preferences dialog, click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences. (If you are not signed on, click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.)

### Default Web browser

If you click this button, AOL Instant Messenger will use your default web browser.

### Alternate Web browser

If you click this button and specify the pathname of an alternate web browser, AOL Instant Messenger will use the browser you specify.

### Open each Web document in a new window

If you select this option, AOL Instant Messenger will open each additional Web document in a new window, instead of re-using an open window.

### Use e-mail program in Web browser

If you click this button, AOL Instant Messenger will use the e-mail program in your web browser.

### Use alternate e-mail program

If you click this button and specify the pathname of an alternate e-mail program, AOL Instant Messenger will use the e-mail program you specify.

### Command arguments

Enter the command line arguments that your e-mail program requires to address a message. Use the argument %1 to specify where to put the e-mail address. For example, mailto:%1.

# AOL Instant Messenger™



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## Why Can't I See Anyone in My Buddy List Window?

There are several reasons why you might not be able to see anyone in your Buddy List window.



You must have added buddies from the List Setup tab of your Buddy List window. If you have not added your buddies yet, see the topic [Creating a List of Online Buddies](#).



Make sure you are displaying the Online tab of your Buddy List window. Click the **Online** tab to display your online buddies.



Make sure the groups in your list are open so the screen names of your buddies are displayed. If a "+" symbol appears next to a group, the group is closed. Click the "+" symbol (changing it to a "-" symbol) to open the group and display the screen names.



None of your buddies might be signed on.



You may have set the Block All option on the Privacy tab of the Preferences dialog. This prevents anyone from seeing you and also prevents you from seeing anyone in your Buddy List window. See the topic [Privacy Preferences](#) to change this setting.



All of your buddies may have blocked you from seeing them.



## Why Can't I Connect?

If you cannot sign on and are not receiving errors about your password, you are not connecting to the server.

If you have been able to connect before and you know your network or Internet Service Provider connection is operating properly, the AOL Instant Messenger™ server might be down. If so, you will need to wait and try to sign on later.

If you are signing on from a local area network and have not been able to connect before, you might be experiencing problems on that network or you might not be getting through a firewall. Contact your network administrator to help you determine the configuration settings to enter.

### **To change your connection configuration:**

1. Click the Setup button on the Sign On screen.
2. On the Connection tab, enter the settings your network administrator supplies.
3. Click OK to save the settings and close the dialog.

### **See also**

[Connection Preferences](#)

## Why Can't I Open My Browser from a Link?

If your browser does not start when you click on a link within AOL Instant Messenger™, you need to check the settings on the Helpers tab of the Preferences dialog. At installation, the AOL Instant Messenger™ software sets the path to the application associated with HTM files.

### **To check your browser settings:**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Helpers tab.
3. If you have selected the Default Web browser option, make sure you have not removed your default web browser from your computer.
4. If you have selected the Alternate Web browser option, make sure the pathname to the alternate browser is still valid (e.g., C:\NETSCAPE\NETSCAPE.EXE).
5. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

**Default Topic**

## Why Can't I Send Messages?

If you cannot send a message to a particular person, that person has either signed off or blocked messages from you.

If you cannot send messages at all (indicated by a red bar beneath the Send button), you have reached your rate limit. You cannot send or receive messages until the bar turns yellow or green.

Your rate limit is determined by your warning rating. The higher your warning rating, the slower the rate at which you can send messages.

Each time you receive a warning, your warning rating increases and the rate at which you can send messages decreases. Likewise, if you try to send a lot of messages quickly, your rate limit decreases. If you receive too many warnings, send too many messages too quickly, or some combination thereof, you can be stopped completely.

You cannot reset your warnings or your rate limit. Gradually your warning rating will be reduced and your rate limit will increase, but you must be patient and behave to return to a green rating.

## How Do I Disable Automatic Launch?

If you enabled the automatic launch feature when you installed AOL Instant Messenger™, the software automatically starts when you start Windows. If you also saved your password and selected the Auto-login checkbox on the Sign On screen, you automatically connect to the service when a network connection is made.

### **To disable automatic launch:**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. Deselect the Start AIM when Windows starts checkbox.
4. Click OK to save this setting and close the dialog.

The next time you start the AOL Instant Messenger™ software, the Sign On screen appears.

## How Do I Disable Automatic Sign On?

If you select the Auto-login checkbox on the Sign On screen, you automatically connect to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service every time you start the software.

### **To disable automatic sign on:**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. Deselect the Automatically sign on when AIM starts checkbox.
4. Click OK to save this setting and close the dialog.

The next time you start the AOL Instant Messenger™ software, the Sign On screen appears.

Everyone on America Online has a screen name. Anyone not on America Online can register a screen name when they download a copy of AOL Instant Messenger.

**Empty**



# AOL Instant Messenger™



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**Customizing**



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## Saving and Loading Settings

Saving and loading your AOL Instant Messenger™ settings allows you to:



save your settings so you can quickly set up your account and list of online buddies on another computer. For example, you can copy your settings from a desktop computer to a notebook computer.



share your settings with others. For example, you can copy the settings you use to connect to the AOL Instant Messenger server through a firewall and e-mail the file to your co-workers.

### Notes



Not all versions of AOL Instant Messenger can save and load settings.



You cannot save or load settings from an AOL account.

## **To Save Settings**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window) and then click Load/Save.
2. Click Save Buddy List.
3. Select the type of settings you want to save and click Save.
4. Enter a name for the file you want to save and click OK.

## To Load Settings

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window) and then click Load/Save.
2. Click Load Buddy List.
3. Select the file containing the settings you want to load.
4. Select the type of settings you want to load.

If you are loading Buddy List Preferences, you can choose whether or not to add the groups to your existing list (Merge with my existing Buddy List). If you choose not to merge the settings, your existing list of online buddies will be replaced by the ones you are loading.

5. Click Load.

## **Settings You Can Save and Load**

There are six types of settings you can save and load in to your copy of the AOL Instant Messenger™ software.

### **Connection Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the settings on the Connection tab of the Preferences dialog: host server, port, and proxy information. In addition, this setting stores the setting of the Auto-login checkbox on the Sign On screen.

### **Personal Profile Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the information you enter on the My Info tab of the Preferences dialog.

### **Privacy Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the information on the Privacy tab of the Preferences dialog: your privacy setting (Allow All, Block All, etc.), your allow list, your block list, and the settings that allow others to see if you are idle or how long you have been a member.

### **Sound Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the settings on the Sounds tab of the Preferences dialog. The on or off value of each option on the tab is saved or loaded, neither sound files nor pointers to them are saved.

### **Instant Message Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the default text properties of your Instant Message window as defined on the Misc tab of the Preferences dialog.

### **Buddy List Preferences**

This setting corresponds to the buddies and groups in your Buddy List window. You can choose to save any or all of the groups. When you load buddy list preferences, you can choose to replace your groups with the ones you are loading or merge them into your existing groups. If you merge a group that has the same name as an existing group in your Buddy List window, the buddies are added to the existing group.

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**Preferences**



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## Formatting Your Screen Name

If you are dissatisfied with the capitalization and spacing in your screen name, you can change it while you are signed on.

If you want to make any other changes to your screen name, you must register a new screen name at the AOL Instant Messenger™ web site.

### **To format your screen name:**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), and then click Options.
2. Click Format Screen Name.
3. Type your new screen name in the appropriate field.

The only changes you can make to your screen name are the addition or deletion of spaces or the capitalization of letters. For example, if your screen name was algore, you could change it to Algore or Al Gore. You could not change it to TipperGore however.

4. Click OK.

## Changing Your Password

You can change your password whenever you are signed on to the AOL Instant Messenger™ service. You can make any change you want to your password as long as your password contains between 4 and 16 characters.

### To change your password:

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), and then click Options.
2. Click Change Password.
3. Type your current password in the appropriate field and then type a new password twice in the appropriate fields.
4. Click OK.

### Note



Anyone who knows your password has access to your account. Therefore, you should **never** reveal your password to anyone online. No one from AOL will ever ask you for your password while you are online.



## Updating Your E-mail Address

One way that others can find you and add you to their Buddy List window is through your e-mail address. If your e-mail address changes (for example, if you change jobs or switch from one Internet Service Provider to another), you should update our record of your e-mail address. This will allow others to find you by your screen name .

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), and then click Options.
2. Click Update E-mail Address.
3. Enter your new e-mail address in the dialog.
4. Click OK.

## Setting Visual Alerts in Your Buddy List Window

You can set visual alerts to let you know when your buddies sign on or off or when they become idle.

### To set visual alerts:

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. To make your Buddy List window blink for five seconds each time a buddy signs on or off, select Flash Buddy List window when buddies sign on or off.
4. To dim the display of buddies who are idle, select the Dim buddies after they have been idle for \_\_\_ minutes option and enter the number of minutes buddies must be idle. The default is 20 minutes.
5. Click OK to save the changes.

## **Changing the Font in Your Buddy List Window**

You can change the default font used to display groups and buddies in your Buddy List window.

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Buddy tab.
3. Select the font and size in which you want to display your online buddies in your Buddy List window.
4. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

## Changing Sounds that Play When Buddies Sign On or Off

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Sounds tab.
3. In the Buddy Sounds group, click Browse for the sound you want to change.  
The Browse for Sound dialog opens.
4. Select the sound you want to use and click OK.
5. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

### Tips



To test a sound, click Preview.



To turn a sound off, deselect the check box for that sound.

## Changing Sounds that Play When You Send or Receive Messages

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Sounds tab.
3. In the IM Sounds group, select the Play a sound when receiving an IM or the Play a sound when sending an IM button.
4. Click the Browse button for the option you have enabled.  
The Browse for Sound dialog opens.
5. Select the sound you want to use and click OK.
6. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

## Changing Key Bindings for Messages

Using the Misc tab of the Preferences dialog, you can change the behavior of the Enter and Tab keys in the Instant Message window.

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. If you want the Enter key to insert a new line, select the Enter key inserts Return option. (Deselect this option if you want the Enter key to send your message.)
4. If you want the Tab key to insert a tab, select the Tab key inserts Tab option. (Deselect this option if you want the Tab key to toggle among fields in the Instant Message window.)
5. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

## Changing the Default Appearance of Messages

You can customize the appearance of messages you compose by changing the default font, text color, or window color.

### To change the default font used to display messages:

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. Click the Default Font button.
4. Select the font settings you want to use and click OK.  
The Font and Size settings only affect the display of messages on your screen. They do not change the font or size of messages you send.
5. Click OK to save the settings and close the dialog.

### To change the default window color of messages:

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. Click the Window Color button.
4. Select the color you want to use and click OK.
5. Click OK to save the settings and close the dialog.

### Note



If you want to change the size of text you send, you must use the toolbar (or the right mouse button menu) in an Instant Message window to increase or decrease it.

## Viewing the Timestamp in Messages

To see when your messages arrived, you can display their timestamps in your Instant Message windows.

### **To view timestamps within a message window:**

In an Instant Message window, choose Timestamp from the View menu.

### **To view timestamps for all messages:**

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. Select the Always View Timestamp option.
4. Click OK to save this setting and close the dialog.



## Displaying or Hiding Information about Yourself

Using the Privacy tab, you can determine whether or not other users can see how long you have had an AOL Instant Messenger™ service account or whether you are idle. Other users can see this information by requesting information about you (using the Info button) or by holding their cursor over your screen name in their Buddy List windows. You can also determine whether or not other users who know your e-mail address can use the Find a Buddy feature to learn your screen name or whether you have an account.

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Privacy tab.
3. In the Allow other users to see and the Allow users who know my e-mail address to find boxes, select the options you prefer.
4. Click OK to save the settings and close the dialog.

## Turning Smilies On or Off

You can control whether online symbols (also known as smilies) appear in your Instant Message windows. To see which smilies can appear in your Instant Message windows, see the topic [Creating Smilies Automatically](#).

1. Click the AOL Instant Messenger menu button (located in the lower left corner of your Buddy List window), then click Options, and then Edit Preferences.
2. Click the Misc tab.
3. If you do not want to see the smilie icons in your Instant Message windows, select the Disable graphical smilies option. The Smilies submenu will also be removed from the Insert menu (accessed by clicking the right mouse button in a message).  
If you want to see the smilie icons in your Instant Message windows, deselect the Disable graphical smilies option.
4. Click OK to save the setting and close the dialog.

