

Chat Rooms lead inevitably to Instant Messages. If you're in a chat room where no one seems to be talking, it's because everyone is exchanging Instant Messages.

Instant Messages (IMs) provide a convenient way for two members to chat privately. IMs are sort of a cross between email and chat rooms; they are private, like email, but they are live and interactive, like chat rooms. You can chat with several people at a time with Instant Messages, but each chat will be in a separate window in total privacy.

To send an IM to another member, choose Send Instant Message from the Members menu, or type Command-I. The other member must be signed on. If you send an IM to a member who is not signed on, you'll be informed that the person did not receive the IM. The IM will be deleted.

Use the Available? button to find out if the person is online and able to receive Instant Messages.

If the other person is in a free area such as Members' Online Support, you'll be told that they are able to receive Instant Messages. In fact, IMs can't be received in a free area. The message will be sent, but will never be received.

11.01 IM preferences

To set IM preferences, choose Preferences from the Members menu (or type Command-=). Then click Members Preferences. A check mark means the option is on.

Instant Message Notice. Flashes the letters IM over the AOL icon in the upper right hand corner of the monitor.

Incoming IMs to front. Brings new IM windows to the front of all other windows.

Play IM sounds. Plays the IM "tinkerbelle" sound when you receive an IM.

If you've never heard the IM tinkerbelle sound,
choose About America Online from the Apple Menu.

11.02 Turning IMs on and off

To turn off instant messages, address an IM to "\$im_off" (leave out the quotes), then click the Available? button. The system will respond with the message "You are now ignoring Instant Messages". IMs will be off until you turn them back on, or until you sign off.

To turn IMs back on, send an IM to "\$im_on" (again, don't type the quotes), then click the Available? button. The system will respond with the message "You are no longer ignoring Instant Messages".

11.03 IMs from the keyboard

To use IMs effectively, remember the following keyboard shortcuts:

SHORTCUT	EFFECT
Command-I	Creates an empty Instant Message.
Tab	Moves the cursor between the name field and the body of the message.
Return.	Moves the cursor to the beginning of the next line.
Enter	Sends the IM.

The enter key is on the numeric keypad, and is not the same as the return key on the QWERTY part of the keyboard. If your keyboard doesn't have an enter key, you can fake one by pressing Command-Return. There are no keyboard shortcuts for the Respond and Available? buttons.

11.04 Sending IM windows to the back

When an IM appears, you may want to finish what you're doing before reading it. If so, press any letter or number key. The window you were working in will come to the front. AOL provided this feature to ensure that you won't lose any keystrokes if an IM appears while you're typing. You can prevent IM windows from coming to the front by changing your IM preferences.

11.05 Saving IMs to disk

You can save an Instant Message conversation in two ways.

1. When the conversation is over, you can choose Save from the File menu. The complete text of the conversation will be saved to a file on your hard drive. You'll have to do this for each conversation.

2. Before or during the conversation, you can open an Instant Message log. Choose Logs from the File menu, select Instant Message, and click the Save button. When the conversation is over, choose Logs again, select Instant Message again, and click the Stop or Suspend buttons. One IM log can hold all of your IMs, even if they're from different people.