



## Instant Messaging Text Messaging, and Video Chatting

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Online communication is a popular activity for many people, and there are now more ways than ever to stay in touch using the web. This is your “cheat sheet” for three of the most widely used methods—Instant Messaging, Video Chatting, and Text Messaging. Take some time to practice with these tools, and you’ll soon be communicating like a pro!

### Instant Messaging: Choosing a Provider

There are four major IM services used in this country. You can visit one of these sites to register an account and download the necessary software:

**AOL Instant Messenger (AIM):** [www.aim.com](http://www.aim.com)

**Google Talk (GTalk) :** [www.google.com/talk](http://www.google.com/talk) (note: does not offer video chat)

**Windows Live Messenger (or MSN Messenger):** [get.live.com/messenger](http://get.live.com/messenger)

**Yahoo! Messenger:** [messenger.yahoo.com](http://messenger.yahoo.com)

There is no charge to sign up for and use one of these Instant Messenger programs. These providers generally offer the same set of features, so there no “best” or “worst” service to sign on with. If you already have an email account with one of these four, it’s probably easiest to use the same service for your IM profile.

Once you’ve registered, you will be prompted to download the corresponding software. Once you’ve got this installed, simply start the program and log in with your new account name.

### What if my contacts all use different providers?

Not everyone will have an IM account on the same network. If you’d like to stay in touch with all your friends, you can register accounts with all four providers. But having to log in to four different places can be a pain. To remedy this situation, you can use Meebo ([www.meebo.com](http://www.meebo.com)), which is a website that aggregates all your IM accounts in one place. After you’ve configured your Meebo profile, one login will be all you need to access all your IM accounts. You don’t have to use Meebo if you wish to Instant Message people, but if you plan on having multiple accounts it does help keep your accounts organized.

### Making Friends

Each IM program has its own version of the “Buddy List.” This is the Instant Messenger equivalent of an address book, where you can keep track of your close friends and regular IM contacts.

### Chat Etiquette

Instant Messaging is by nature an informal process. Because conversations go so quickly, there is less of a concern over proper grammar and long sentences. Many people even compress common phrases into even smaller acronyms, such as “BRB” for “be right back,” or “LOL” for “laughing out loud.” (You can see an online glossary of these terms at <http://www.aim.com/acronyms.adp>.) Feel free to keep things loose with your IM buddies. Don’t forget to have fun with your IM conversations!

### Need more help?

The library is excited to offer reference service via Instant Messenger. Starting October 3rd, you can send us a message via AIM, Windows Live, Yahoo!, and Google Talk. Our ID is “askskokie” for all four providers. You can also visit the library’s help page, [http://www.skokielibrary.info/s\\_info/getref.asp](http://www.skokielibrary.info/s_info/getref.asp) and chat with us directly.



## Video chatting

Three of the Big Four IM providers (AIM, Windows Live, and Yahoo!) offer a video chat option. Once you've downloaded your IM software, you typically don't need any extra software to video chat. You will, however, need a webcam.

### Choosing a Webcam

Many computers now come with built-in webcams (this is particularly true for Apple computers.) If your machine doesn't have one of these, it is easy to buy one. There are many, many different webcams available, with prices ranging from \$20 to \$350. The number of choices may seem overwhelming, so focus on these features in order to find the best device for your budget.

**Compatibility:** Make sure your computer's processor speed and RAM meet the minimum requirements of the webcam. On a PC, you can check this by clicking on the Start Menu, then clicking on Control Panel, then System. The "General" tab will list your computer's specs.

**Resolution:** This measures the quality of the image captured by the webcam. This is typically indicated with a number (like 640 x 480), which tells you how many pixels make up an overall image. The higher this number is, the clearer the image will become. Some webcams also measure their image resolution in Megapixels, much like a digital still camera.

**Frame Rate:** Some cameras also indicate how many "frames" (think frames of a movie reel) - they can display per second. Again, the higher this number is, the clearer and less "choppy" the video will appear. 30 frames per second is a good benchmark for a decent webcam.

**Adjustability:** Even if a camera has a high megapixel rating and frame rate, the image will suffer if the lens is unable to adapt to changes in lighting. Look for a webcam that offers "auto tuning" to adjust for brightness and contrast. The camera should allow you to tune it manually, as well, for more precise adjustments.

**Camera Control:** Cameras can generally be mounted on a flat surface, on a tripod, or to a laptop. Look for a device that works best for the way your personal workspace is set up. Many webcams also have a "tracking" feature that helps it to follow your face if you move around.

**Microphone:** Some cameras have a built-in microphone, while others require a headset. Headsets generally offer clearer sound, but not everyone is comfortable wearing one.

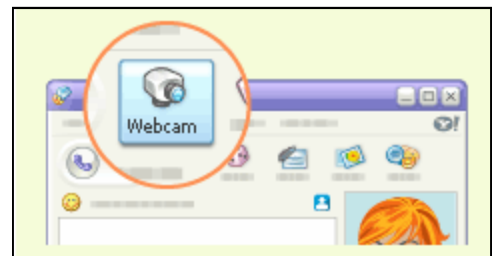
**Software:** Many webcams come bundled with programs that allow you to insert special video effects into your recordings. This is generally for those who plan to make slideshows or home movies with their device. If you just plan to use your camera for videochatting, the software that you downloaded with your IM provider should be enough.

Product Details	
Port Connection	USB 1.1 or 2.0
Maximum Still-Image Resolution	5.0MP
Built-In Microphone	Yes
Camera Design	For notebooks
Portable	Yes
Maximum Video Image Resolution	1.3MP
Included Software	Live! Cam Center, muvee autoProducer, Creative Photo Manager, Creative Calendar, SightSpeed, OrbSecure
System Requirements	Intel® Pentium® 4 or AMD processor running at 1.8GHz or faster; Windows 2000, XP or 64-bit XP; 256MB RAM; 500MB hard drive space; CD-ROM drive; USB port; SoundBlaster or other Windows-compatible sound card

### Getting Set Up

Webcams typically come with a program that allows you to "focus" your camera and take basic still and video images. It's a good idea to install and run this program before you start video chatting in earnest, as it will allow you to determine the ideal placement of the camera on your workspace.

If you already have an Instant Messenger profile, getting set up for video chat works in much the same way. Log into your Messenger program (either AIM, Windows/MSN, or Yahoo! - Google does not offer video chat yet), and turn on the "webcam" indicator as shown above. This will tell those on your Buddy List that you are available for video chat. They can then click on your name, and the software will connect you.



Once you start video chatting, you'll want to remember to talk **to** the webcam in order to maintain "eye contact" with your friends. This can be tricky to learn at first, as you'll be compelled to talk to the image of your friend on your monitor. Once you get the hang of it, video chatting will become more natural. Just relax, and converse as you would in a regular face-to-face conversation. Don't forget to have fun!

## Text Messaging

Most cell phones now offer text messaging as a built-in feature. Using a protocol called SMS or Short Message Service, you can send brief notes to other cell phone users. You can even send text messages to your IM friends. Here are a few suggestions for becoming an expert texter.

**A Word of Warning:** Depending on your wireless plan, you may incur certain charges or restrictions governing the use of your phone's text messaging features. Some plans offer unlimited messages, while others only give you a specific allotment of messages per month. (Sometimes, this allotment counts received messages as well as sent messages, so be careful.) If you're not sure, double-check your contract so as to avoid unnecessary charges.

### Let Your Fingers do the Talking!

Getting the hang of T9 can be confusing at first. The trick to using it is to ignore the word displayed on your screen until you've finished typing it out. As you add letters, T9 selects the most common word that uses that combination of keystrokes. The more letters you type, the greater the likelihood that T9's entry matches up with your word. If there are multiple words matching that number combination, you can cycle through the list by pressing the "Next" key on your keypad (typically "0.")

Let's say you want send a text to your friend George. To say "Hi George" on your phone's regular "multi-tap" mode, you would type:

H I \_ G E O R G E  
44 444 # 444 33 666 777 4 33

If you happen to hit one key too many times, you'll have to cycle through the letters again. If you switch your text-entry mode to T9, the same message is spelled:

HI\_GEORGE  
44#436743

By only having to hit one key for each letter you save yourself a great deal of time and frustration. T9 does have a steep learning curve at first, but once you get the hang of it, texting should become second nature. For more practice using T9, visit <http://www.nuance.com/t9/textinput/> and click on the T9 Demo.

### Texting Your IM Friends

If you have friends who use AIM, you can use your phone to send them instant messages. You can do this by sending a message to 265010. In the body of this message, type in your friend's profile name, followed by your message. (It will look like this: im.george hi there!) Once they respond to your initial text, you can simply reply to their message without having to fill in the profile name again.

If you have an AIM account of your own, you can configure your Buddy List to include cell phone numbers. Visit <http://mobile.aol.com> to set up your AIM account.

### Using Google SMS

We all use Google for quick answers on the Web. But did you know you can also use Google to get information through your phone? By sending a text message to 466453, you can look up addresses, phone numbers, weather and traffic reports, sports scores, movie times, and much more!

Visit [www.google.com/mobile/sms](http://www.google.com/mobile/sms) for the complete list of services Google offers through text messaging. You can try it out for yourself by entering your question into the "phone" displayed on the page.

With all of these services, the key thing is to have fun. Find a buddy - a relative who might be more familiar with the tools, or a friend who's also just starting out - and practice IM, video chat, and text messaging. As you gain more experience, you'll surely find a new favorite way to stay in touch with your friends and family.

## Helpful Links:

### Instant Messaging Providers:

AIM: [www.aim.com](http://www.aim.com)

Google Talk: [www.google.com/talk](http://www.google.com/talk)

Windows Live (MSN) Messenger: [get.live.com/messenger](http://get.live.com/messenger)

Yahoo! Messenger: [messenger.yahoo.com](http://messenger.yahoo.com)

Meebo (combines all your IM accounts): [www.meebo.com](http://www.meebo.com)

### Online Glossary of IM acronyms:

[www.aim.com/acronyms.adp](http://www.aim.com/acronyms.adp)

### Ask a Librarian via Instant Message:

Send an IM to askskokie (via AIM, Google Talk, Windows/MSN Messenger, or Yahoo), or visit [www.skokielibrary.info/s\\_info/getref.asp](http://www.skokielibrary.info/s_info/getref.asp)

### Webcam Recommendations:

CNet: [www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com)

(direct link to reviews: [tinyurl.com/2dyq9b](http://tinyurl.com/2dyq9b))

PC Magazine: [www.pcmag.com](http://www.pcmag.com)

(direct link for webcam reviews: [tinyurl.com/yq8usy](http://tinyurl.com/yq8usy))

### Help setting up video chat with your IM software:

<http://messenger.yahoo.com/superwebcam.php>

Yahoo! Messenger has a brief explanation of how to activate your webcam for IM. The other providers don't have a nice a help page, but the method for getting set up is very similar.

### Practice with Text Messaging:

[www.nuance.com/t9/textinput](http://www.nuance.com/t9/textinput) (click on "T9 Text Input Demo")

### Set up your phone for Text-to-AIM:

[mobile1.aol.com/mobileaim/im2cell](http://mobile1.aol.com/mobileaim/im2cell)

### Use Google via text message:

[www.google.com/sms](http://www.google.com/sms)

### Upcoming Tuesday Tech Talks:

Mark your calendars for more great technology classes at Skokie Public Library!

Talks are held in the Radmacher Meeting Room . No advance registration is required.

November 6th at 7:00 PM: Downloadable Audiobooks

Reader's Services Coordinator Ricki Nordmeyer will lead this talk on everything you ever wanted to know about downloadable media.

December 4th at 7:00pm: Going Once... Going Twice... eBay for Beginners

Bruce Brigell, Coordinator of Information Services will give you the tools and tricks needed to become a successful buyer and seller. Experienced eBay users are welcome to share their tips with others!



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