

Chat sites

What does a chat site do?

A chat site is a website that allows you to speak with other people via your computer. You can hold conversations in a similar way to having a telephone conversation with lots of people at the same time, except that rather than actually speaking you type what you want to say, so that you read what each other are saying.

Unlike a message board or an email, the chat room runs in real time. This means that what you see has only just been said, and ensures that you can converse freely and naturally, just as you would if you were having a conversation with someone.

What chat sites offer is the opportunity to meet and talk with other people online. The site simply presents a 'room' online where people can go to speak to one another.

How do I chat online?

Most chat rooms will ask you to log in with the nickname that you use for chatting and your password before you can chat. If it is your first time on a particular site you'll have to register a name and password, which you can then use when you revisit the site to chat.

In order to register to chat you'll need to enter a valid email address so that the administrators of the chat site can contact you if need be and, if you forget your password for the chat site, it can be emailed to you automatically as a reminder.

The process of chatting is surprisingly simple, and varies little from site to site. As a rule you will have a large box on your screen which is where what people are saying to one another appears.

If you want to **'say'** something you will need to type what you want to say and either click on a button (usually marked 'send') or hit the return key on your keyboard.

At first this can seem quite intimidating for many people who might not have had much experience with computers, or who might have difficulty using a keyboard.

As people 'chat' the text scrolls up the page, and when a group of people are involved in an online conversation it can initially seem quite difficult to keep up with the pace of things, especially if a client is unfamiliar with computers.

Some chatters find it easier the first time to simply watch the conversations, rather than take an active part, as it allows them sufficient time to get used to the speed that information can appear, and to familiarise themselves with how the site works.

Netiquette

There are certain unwritten rules that are used on chat sites to ensure that people understand one another without risk of confusion, and to establish basic good conduct. These rules have become known as 'netiquette' and apply to how best to deal with other chatters, and what is expected of you as a chatter.

It is expected that a chatter would be polite and welcoming to other chatters, and obviously bad language is not encouraged. For example CAPITAL LETTERS can indicate that you are shouting or angry. Some people might find this offensive; while others might just politely point out that you don't need to shout.

Similarly, when chatting with a group of people, it helps keep things clear if you address the person to whom you are talking.

Chat room safety

The online social world is just like the 'real world' and offers the same opportunities for friendships and fun, but also many of the same problems. Once chatters know the online 'Rules of the Road' they can take advantage of all the things the internet can offer, knowing how to protect themselves.

The risk of encountering someone online who is up to no good is slim and as long as you are aware of potential dangers, the risk is negligible.

It is always worthwhile remembering that, whilst there is no immediate physical risk from chatting online, by following a few simple rules you can ensure that you are chatting safely.

Never give out your personal details – your home address, telephone number, full name, etc. Most people you meet online are there, like you, for a chat and nothing more, but you don't always know who you are talking to, or who might be 'listening' in, so it's best to guard your privacy.

People might not be who they say they are. One disadvantage of chatting online is that we can't see who we're speaking to, and whilst we have no reason to believe that someone would lie to us, it is important to remember that if someone was so inclined, they could be dishonest.

Meeting online friends - If you do make friends online and decide that you want to meet face to face, always ensure that someone knows where you are and that you meet in a public place. Even better, take a friend along with you!

Confidentiality - Never say anything in a chat room that you wouldn't say in public. You can chat perfectly naturally, just as you might if you were chatting with someone face to face, but remember not to say anything which you might later regret, or which you would feel uncomfortable with others knowing what you said.

As long as people follow these few simple guidelines for chatting they will be able to make the most of the opportunities for social contact and meeting new friends that chat sites can offer.

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