

Instant Messaging Etiquette

The use of instant message, typically referred to as IM, can save a lot of time at work. Despite its ease and quickness, professionals should still be mindful of basic etiquette rules when using IM in the office.

Below are some good rules to follow:

- **Start with a short greeting** when starting a conversation over IM. Say “Hi” or “Hello” to check and make sure it’s a good time to chat. Otherwise you may be interrupting them.
- **Be aware of a status message.** Do not send someone an online chat if their status is “away” or “busy.” You may be disrupting their work by popping up in the middle of their computer screen.
- **Never write anything you wouldn’t say aloud.** Privacy isn’t guaranteed on chat. It’s easy to send a message to the wrong person by mistake, misread the privacy settings of a group, or even misinterpret a quick note. Remember that work chat is not the same as texting on your personal cell phone or talking at happy hour. So keep it professional.

A good rule: Don’t say anything you wouldn’t want your boss to read over your shoulder.

- **Remember the human behind the chat.** This is especially important if you’re providing customer service, live chatting about a help desk ticket, or otherwise interacting in a service capacity. Part of being professional is being respectful and friendly. Don’t abandon basic manners like greeting your recipient, saying please and thank you, and so on. If you’re chatting with someone for the first time, introduce yourself rather than immediately making a request.
- **Consider other methods of communication.** Frequent interruptions to a coworker may result in communication fatigue. Consider sending requests via email or through a support ticket to help prioritize work time.
- **Messaging, like all electronic means of communication, is available to support business purposes.** Although messaging usage may be very casual outside work, all communications in the workplace should be professional, considerate, and work-related. Remember, information from any messaging or chat services can be subpoenaed.
- **Be particularly cautious about joking,** humorous comments, and sharing personal information – not all coworkers welcome these comments. You may not even know if you have offended someone.
- **Do not share sensitive or confidential information.** Use more secure means to communicate this info.
- **Remember IM (or other chat tools) should be used for business purposes only.** Information from messaging and other chat services can be subpoenaed.