

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

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Staff Materials: IM Tips

- Treat the IM exchange just like you would an exchange at the Reference Desk. All regular reference interview skills apply!
- URLs automatically become clickable hyperlinks in Trillian and most IM clients.
- Use online sources as much as possible. It allows the user to see the source as well.
- Explain what you're doing whenever you can. E.g.: if you need to go look for something, let the person know ("Give me a few minutes to look for that").
- If your search is taking longer than expected (e.g.: slow response time from the source you are consulting), explain what's going on to the user. He/she can't see what you're searching!
- Send attachments if you need to. Trillian allows you to attach a document during the chat. If they cannot receive the attachment (some firewalls prevent this), get their e-mail address & e-mail it to them after the session.
- Type short messages when you can. When you have to resort to long sentences, hit "Return" at regular intervals so that the user can see what you've typed so far.
- When either you or the user is typing a message, Trillian lets you know at the bottom-left of the chat screen.
- IM tends to be less formal than e-mail. Don't expect proper punctuation & capitalization!
- "Net Lingo" or "IM Lingo" uses acronyms as shorthand for commonly used phrases (e.g.: IMO=in my opinion; BRB=be right back; etc.). If you don't understand the use of a particular acronym, don't be afraid to ask! There are a number of helpful sites that demystify IM Lingo, AOL's List is one of the most comprehensive: <http://www.aim.com/acronyms.adp?aolp>.