# Using BlueChat

## What you need to start

To participate in an STC Australia Chapter *BlueChat* session you need to:

- connect to the internet
- open a browser window (such as *Internet Explorer* or *FireFox*)
- have the meeting agenda close by
- understand and agree to follow the basic rules of participating in a chat session (page 1)

## Logging in to BlueChat

**1** In your web browser, go to **http://www.stc-aus.org.au/cgi/bluechat.cgi**.

**2** On the Welcome to BlueChat page, type your name.

This name is displayed in the chat log - we suggest you use your own name; if your name is common, perhaps add an identifying letter or your surname. For example, **Rex**, **Sue P**, or **John Smith**.

**Hint**: You can colour-code your displayed name. Look at the colour palette, pick a colour, then type ` followed by the number or symbol to make your name display in that colour. For example, `**4Rex** would display your name in red.

**3** Click **Login**. The *BlueChat* window displays with a confirmation message that you have "just entered this channel".

As others log in, their names will be listed above yours - the chat displays the most recent contribution at the top of the screen, with the oldest at the bottom.
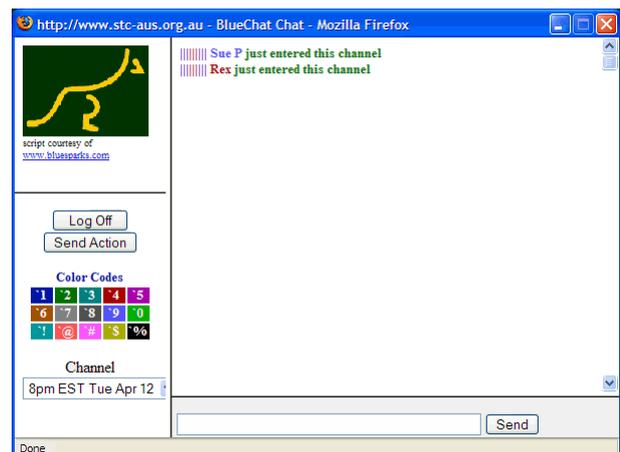
## Basic rules of participation

- Don't start until invited to do so by the moderator.

  Each person will have an opportunity to comment on a discussion thread. The moderator may signal a free-for-all session if there are not too many participants.

- When you are invited to participate and have something to add, please type one line of text at a time then click **Send**. You can send longer passages but the text entry area is quite small.

- BlueChat has no method of enforcing 'turns', so please:

    - follow the moderator's instructions

    - type **zzz** when you have finished so the next person knows when to begin.

- We welcome your opinions as long as they are expressed in a courteous and professional manner - no flaming.

- Avoid 'me too/I agree' responses with no supporting arguments unless you have been asked to vote on an issue.

- Be aware that you may be responding to a message that was posted a short while ago, so your reply may appear 'out of synch' with the other messages. If you are replying to a particular person's comment, try and address your comment to them so that others aren't confused. For example, to respond to Sue's comment about time zones, preface your comment with her name and the subject "**Sue - re: time zones.....**". Also, avoid the use of terms such as "it", "that" etc. when responding - no-one else is inside your head so they may not figure out what you're talking about!

*See also*: Hints about chatting (page 3)

# Refreshing the messages

- How quickly your *BlueChat* screen refreshes depends on your internet connection speed and other programs that may be competing for bandwidth at the same time.

- You can force your window to refresh by clicking **Send** (or pressing Enter) at any time - you don't need to have typed any text.

- Be careful of **Reload** (an option on the right-click shortcut menu). It logs you out and back in again, which may not be what you want.

# Disconnection issues

*BlueChat* doesn't always behave well. Of course, it may not be *BlueChat* - it could be your internet connection, or any connection between you and the discussion's host server. So on occasion, you may find that *BlueChat* is not refreshing every few seconds, or that it has dropped out entirely with a "page not found" message, or similar. If this happens to you:

1 Check the information on Refreshing the messages (page 2).

2 If that doesn't work, right-click in the main window and select **Reload**.

3 If none of the above steps work, click **Log Off** and log in (page 1) again.

# Browser issues

| Discussion window not opening | While *BlueChat* is designed to work in all browsers, there's no guarantee that your browser's version or your internet connection security or proxy set up will allow *BlueChat's* chat window to open. Some committee members behind corporate firewalls have had trouble with *Internet Explorer 6* on *Windows XP SP2* - switching to *FireFox* solved the problem for one committee member. *FireFox* is available as a free download from **http://www.mozilla.org**. |
|---|---|
| Font size is too small | If you have a wheel mouse, hold down CTRL as you scroll the wheel towards you to make the font bigger; scroll the wheel away from you to make the font smaller. |

# Hints about chatting

| | |
|---|---|
| Have something to say | Make comments that others want or need to read. If the conversation is lagging, contribute more. If it is full and flowing, make only your best comments. |
| Chat, not chitchat | Keep conversations professional and on the subject. |
| Everybody sees what you say | Remember that everyone sees everything you type and anyone can save a copy. Do not type anything you do not want everyone to remember forever. |
| Do not greet everyone individually | When entering the chat session, do not greet every participant one by one. A simple "Hi, all!" will do. |
| Address comments to a specific person | Distinguish comments for a specific person from those for the whole group. Begin the comment with the name of the person you want to respond to it. |
| Indicate the subject of a comment | Make clear which question/comment you are answering or what point you agree/disagree with. Begin your comment with a few words identifying its subject; for example: "Re the costs, we can economise by …" |
| "Over" | Give a signal that you are done. Radio operators typically say "over" at the end of a comment to signal that they are passing control over to the other person. Do likewise. Tack on a closing phrase or comment. We recommend you use "zzz". For example:<br><br>▪ I'd like to move on to the second item. OK? zzz<br><br>▪ How do the rest of you feel about this issue? zzz |
| "Over and out" | Say goodbye. When you are ready to leave or end a conversation, give a clear signal. Tell others that you are leaving. |
| Keep messages short | If in doubt, leave it out. If others need more information, they can request it. Limit messages to a maximum of three sentences, 50 words, or one idea. |
| Make only one point per message | Request only one action or decision per message. The recipient is likely to read and respond to the first request and miss the second. |
| Do not respond to all messages | Do not feel you have to respond to all messages. You do not reply to all the junk mail you receive. If a message angers you, wait until you calm down. Then decide if it even deserves a response. |

(adapted from William Horton, "Templates for Building e-Learning Courses" http://www.horton.com)