CHAPTER

11

Chats with learners

Chats are private, one-to-one conversations between each learner and your site: a question before they buy, a doubt in the middle of a course, a note that they will miss Tuesday. This chapter shows you how learners reach you, how to answer from your one inbox, how to write to a learner first, and what to do when the safety filter holds a message. By the end you will know how to keep your inbox tidy and never leave a learner waiting.

WHERE
Manage → Chats, and the Chat link on each row of Manage → Learners

TIME NEEDED
Nothing to set up; a few minutes a day to answer

BEFORE YOU START
A plan that includes Chats

PLAN
Included on some plans and a small monthly add-on on others; the plan cards show which.

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How Chats work

Every learner gets **one chat** with your site, and it lasts as long as they learn with you. There are no tickets, no subjects and nothing to open or close. Whatever they write, today or in six months, lands in the same conversation, so you always have the whole history in front of you when you answer.

The other side of each chat is your **site**, not one particular person. You answer from one inbox for the whole site, under **Manage → Chats**. Your name goes on each message you send.

Chats are plain text. There are no attachments or screenshots; if you need to share a file, put it in a lesson or send a link.

Is Chats on your plan?

Chats is included on some plans and sold as a small monthly add-on on others, which you switch on from **Manage → Your RacingOwl plan → Add-ons**. The plan cards on **Manage → Your RacingOwl plan** and racingowl.com/pricing say which plans include it. To move plan, see Choosing your RacingOwl plan.

When your plan does not include Chats:

- the **Chats** link is not shown in your site's menu, so learners have nowhere to write from;
- **Manage → Chats** still opens and you can still **read** every chat you already have, but a note at the top explains that Chats are not included in your plan and names the plan to move to, with a **Your RacingOwl plan** button, and there is no reply box;
- a learner who opens their chat sees that your site is not taking messages at the moment, and that their conversation is kept and they will be able to write again if that changes.

Nothing is ever deleted when Chats stops being available. Switch it back on and every conversation carries on where it was.

How learners reach you

A signed-in learner sees a **Chats** link in your site's menu. It opens a page headed "Chat with" and your site's name: "A private chat between you and the people running this site. Only you and they can see it." Below is the conversation, oldest first, and a box that says "Ask a question, or just say hello". Before they have written anything, it invites them to ask you anything, and says you will see it in your inbox and answer there.

Learners can also read and answer all their chats, with every site they learn on, from the **Chats** tab of **All my learning** on racingowl.com. It is the same conversation either way.

Writing to you is one of the acts that makes somebody a learner of your site. If your site is full, a person who has never joined cannot start a chat; see Managing your learners.

> **WHAT YOUR LEARNER SEES.**
> Their own messages and yours, each with the writer's name and the time, refreshing by itself every few seconds while the page is open. When you reply they get a notification in their bell, and on their phone if they have turned phone alerts on. There is no email for an ordinary chat message.

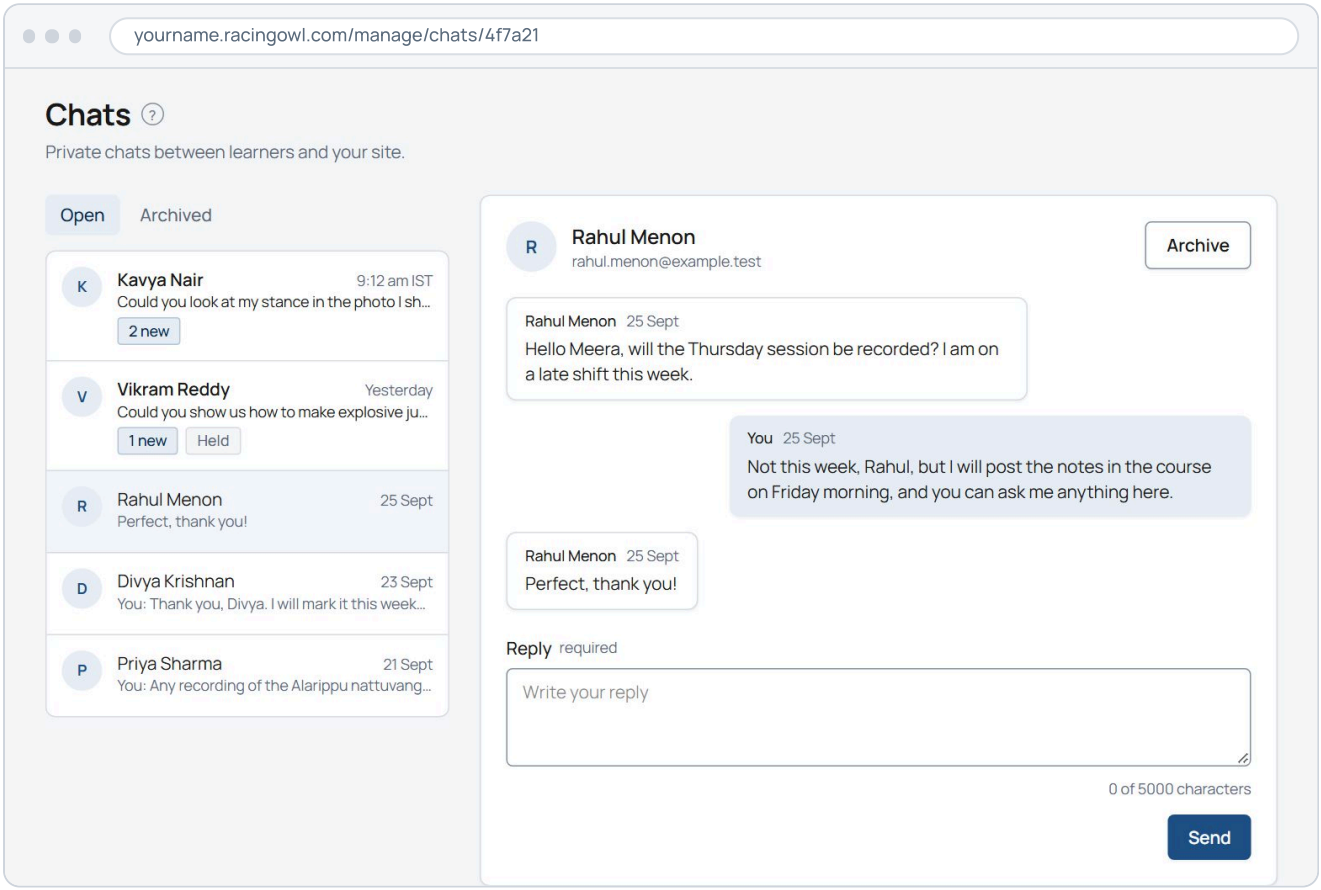
Your inbox

Open **Manage → Chats**. When learners are waiting, the menu shows a count in brackets, for example **Chats (3)**: that is the number of chats with a learner message you have not read, not the number of messages. Three lines from one learner over lunch are one thing to do.

The inbox has two views, **Open** and **Archived**, as buttons at the top of the list. The list shows every chat, newest activity first. Each row has:

- the learner's photo and name;
- when the last message was sent: "2 minutes ago", a time such as "6:05 pm IST", "Yesterday", or a date;
- a one-line preview of the newest message, starting "You:" when your side wrote it;
- a **3 new** badge when there are messages you have not read, with the name in bold;
- a **Held** badge while a message in the chat is held by the safety filter;
- a red **Reported to RacingOwl** badge while the learner's report about the chat is open.

Press a row and the chat opens beside the list, so you never leave the one window to pick the next learner. On a phone, the list gives way to the chat, with a **Back to all** link. With no chat open, the space on the right says "Pick a chat to read it and reply." The inbox refreshes itself every few seconds while it is open.



The inbox: learners on the left, with New and Held badges; the open chat on the right with Archive and the reply box.

The **?** beside the heading explains the inbox in two short paragraphs, and a one-time tour points out the list and the reply box.

Answering a learner

1. **Open the chat.** Press the learner's row in the inbox. Their name and email address are at the top. Opening a chat marks it read, for the whole site.
2. **Read back.** The whole history is there, oldest at the top, your side's messages marked "You".
3. **Write your reply.** In the **Reply** box ("Write your reply"), type your answer. Plain text, up to 5,000 characters.
4. **Send.** Press **Send**. It appears in the chat at once, and the learner is notified.

> TIP.
> Learners are not emailed about chat messages, so an answer only reaches them when they next open your site or check their phone. If something is urgent, say so in the first line, and keep answers short enough to read in a notification.

How you hear about new chats

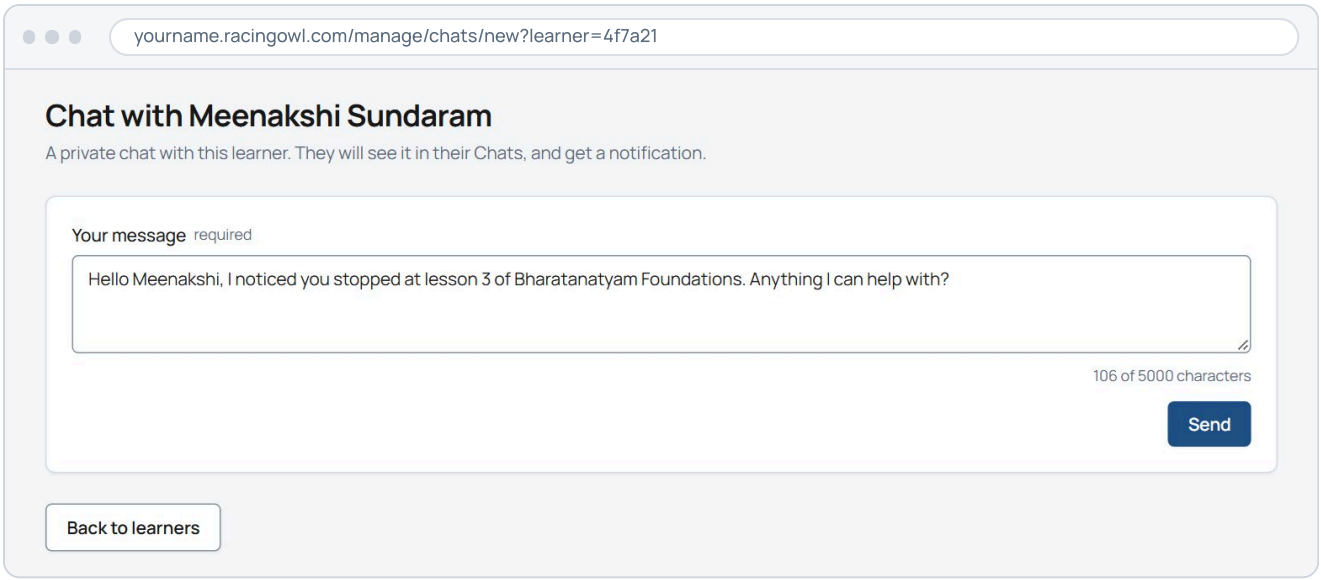
When a learner writes, everyone who runs your site gets a notification in the bell, and on the phone if phone alerts are switched on (see Notifications and keeping your site safe). Notifications for one chat are gathered together, so several messages in a row buzz your phone once. There is no email and no WhatsApp message for a new chat. The Chats count in the Manage menu is the reliable place to check.

Writing to a learner first

You do not have to wait for a learner to write. From **Manage → Learners**, press **Chat** at the end of their row. A good time to do this is when you have sorted the table by **Progress** and found somebody who enrolled and stalled.

1. **Press Chat on their row.** A page opens headed "Chat with" and their name: "A private chat with this learner. They will see it in their Chats, and get a notification."
2. **Write your message.** In **Your message**, write what you want to say.
3. **Send.** Press **Send**. You land in the chat in your inbox.

If you already have a chat with that learner, your message simply goes into it; nothing is duplicated. You can only write to people who are learners of your site. **Back to learners** returns you to the table.



Writing first: the page the Chat link on the Learners page opens.

Archiving

Archiving is a way to tidy a chat away once it is dealt with. Open the chat and press **Archive**. It moves to the **Archived** view. Nothing is deleted, and the learner is not told.

An archived chat comes back to **Open** by itself the moment the learner writes again. To bring one back yourself, open it from the **Archived** view and press **Move to open**.

When a learner leaves your site, their chat is archived automatically. You can still read it.

Held messages: Release to the conversation, or Remove

Every chat message, from either side, is read by the same automatic safety filter that reads your discussions. In a chat, only language associated with dangerous or illegal content is held. Ordinary bad language goes through; in a private conversation, the person it was said to can report it if they need to.

When a message is held:

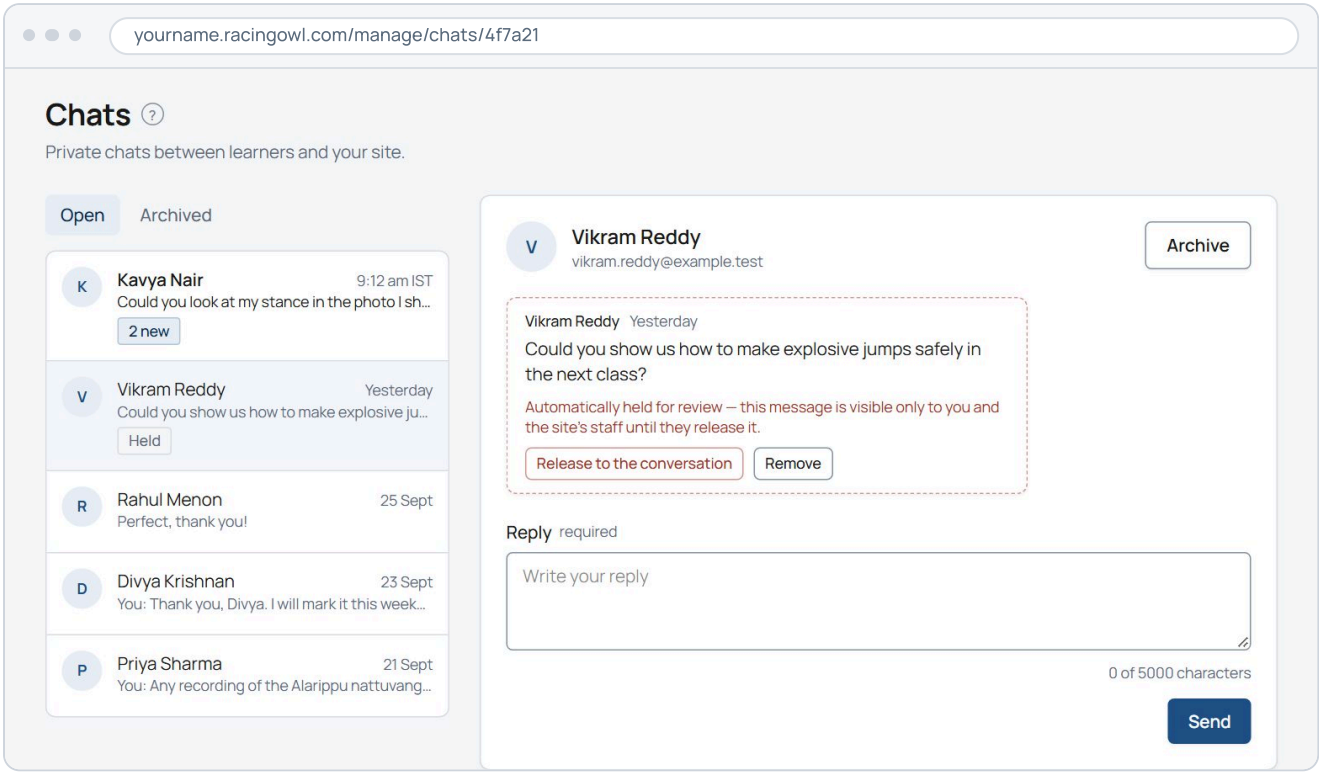
- it is saved, and shown to its writer and to the people who run your site, with a dashed red border and a note saying it is held;
- the other side does not see it until it is released;
- RacingOwl's own team is emailed;
- the chat shows a **Held** badge in your inbox until the message is released or removed.

Held chat messages do not appear in **Manage → Reports**. You deal with them inside the chat itself.

A message the learner wrote

You still get the notification, because you are the one who decides. Open the chat and read the held message. Under it are two buttons:

- **Release to the conversation**, if it is fine. Filters are blunt: a first-aid course or a history lesson can trip them. The message becomes part of the chat as normal.
- **Remove**, if it is not. Removing takes the message out of the chat for both sides. RacingOwl keeps a copy, in case it is needed later.



A held learner message in the chat, with Release to the conversation and Remove.

WHAT YOUR LEARNER SEES.

Their own held message, in full, with the note "Held automatically by the safety filter, not by a person. Your teacher will release it if it is fine." When you release it, it simply becomes an ordinary message. A message from your side that is held shows them only a placeholder, not the words. A removed message is shown to nobody, on either side.

A message your side wrote

You cannot release a held message that your own side wrote. Under it you see "Only RacingOwl can release a message the site wrote. You can remove it and write it again." and a **Remove** button. The hold is the learner's one automatic protection in a private chat, so the person who wrote the message cannot be the one to lift it.

You have two choices:

- press **Remove** and write the message again in other words; or
- leave it. RacingOwl was emailed when it was held, and releases it if it was a false alarm. When that happens the learner is notified as if you had just sent it.

When a learner reports a chat

Under their chat, a learner can open **Report this chat to RacingOwl** and say in a sentence what is wrong. The report goes to RacingOwl, never to you, because in a private chat you are the other party. RacingOwl receives the last few messages and looks at it.

While the report is open, your inbox shows a red **Reported to RacingOwl** badge on that chat, and at the top of the open chat. You can carry on the conversation normally. If you think the report is about a misunderstanding, it is fine to say so calmly in the chat, or to write to us through **Ask RacingOwl** (see Ask RacingOwl).

Chats and the other ways to reach your learners

RacingOwl gives you several ways to talk to learners, and each suits a different job. Choosing the right one keeps your inbox manageable and makes sure the message is seen.

Tool	Who sees it	How they hear about it	Best for
Chats	One learner and the people running your site	A notification in the bell and on the phone	Questions, private matters, nudging somebody who has stalled
Course discussion	Everyone your discussion setting allows	Notifications to people following it	Questions whose answers help the whole class
Topics	Anyone signed in to RacingOwl	Notifications to people following it; your home page	Announcements and site-wide conversations
Email learners	Everyone on your site, or one course's learners	An email, up to three a day	Timetable changes, launches, anything everyone must read
WhatsApp alerts	Learners with a verified number	A WhatsApp message	Fixed alerts only: receipts, failed payments, membership reminders, class reminders

See Discussions and reviews, Managing your learners and WhatsApp alerts for your learners for the other four.

Good practice

- **Answer within a day.** Most chats arrive before a purchase or in the middle of a lesson. A quick answer to the first kind often makes the sale; a quick answer to the second keeps the learner going.
- **Turn on phone alerts** from your dashboard's **Turn on phone alerts** card, so a new chat reaches your phone.
- **Move repeated questions into the course.** If three learners ask the same thing, add a line to the lesson, or post the answer in the course discussion where everyone can see it.

- **Keep private things private.** Payment problems, personal circumstances and marks belong in Chats, not in a public discussion.
- **Archive what is done.** An Open view with only the chats still needing you is quicker to work through.

Common questions

Q My learners say there is no Chats link on my site.

The link only appears when your plan includes Chats, and only for a learner who is signed in. Open **Manage → Chats**: if your plan does not include it, a note at the top says so and which plan to move to.

Q Can learners chat with each other?

No. Each chat is between one learner and your site. Learners talk to each other in the course discussions and on your Topics page.

Q Can I send a file or a picture?

No. Chats are text only. Put the file in a lesson, or share a link to it.

Q I pressed Chat on a learner and the page says "New chat" instead of their name.

The heading only looks up names from the first page of your learner table. Your message still goes to the right learner; you land in their chat once you press Send.

Q Can I delete a chat?

No. You can archive it to tidy it away. The only messages that can be removed are held ones.

Q Does a learner get an email when I reply?

No. They get a notification in their bell and on their phone if they have switched phone alerts on. If you need to reach everyone about something important, use **Email learners** (see Managing your learners).

Q A learner deleted their account. What happens to our chat?

It stays in your archive, with their messages under "Deleted learner". Their name and email address are removed.

Q My message to a learner is stuck as Held. What do I do?

Only RacingOwl can release a message your side wrote. Remove it and write it again in other words, or leave it for RacingOwl, who were told when it was held.

Related: Managing your learners, Discussions and reviews, Notifications and keeping your site safe, Choosing your RacingOwl plan.

THE REST OF THE GUIDE

This is chapter 11 of 17 of the RacingOwl Trainer's Guide. The full guide, every other chapter as its own PDF, and the online version are at racingowl.com/trainer-guide. Stuck? Press **Ask RacingOwl** at the bottom right of any Manage page.