Chatgroups – synchronous groups
In a synchronous group, interactions take place in real time.

Some systems facilitate communication between two users, others between several users. Words are displayed as they are typed, character by character.

The communication is private and there is no moderator.
Related Unix developments allow to send an instant message to someone who is logged in and there is also a facility which allows people to send messages to more than one person. The chief example of this kind is *Internet Relay Chat (IRC)*. *IRC* was created in 1988, this allows several users to be simultaneously in touch with each other.
They connect to one of the servers and join one channel (chat room), each one devoted to a particular topic and prefixed by a hash symbol (#sport, #poetry).
A large network has got thousand of channels to connect people each of whom is identified by a session nickname.
Any user can create a new channel and become its operator.
Operators have total control of the channel and they decide who can join and who is banned. It is a text only medium. It allows private as well as public communication and it is not necessary to have a moderator.

Synchronous chats depart from the principles of face-to-face communication. The notion of turn-taking, as with asynchronous chat, is undermined.
It doesn’t occur all the times that A waits for B to finish his message before sending a reply. Often the users write simultaneously, sometimes in an overlapping mode.

In face-to-face conversations it doesn’t happen: interruptions succeed or they are crushed and overlapping speech is minimal.
The user’s screen is split into an upper half and a lower half, one half for A and the other for B. This split-screen makes difficult to follow the sequence of events involved in the interaction. You can ignore the last part of a message because you are already writing an answer. If you take a look at a message sequence, there is no way of knowing whether the interaction alternated neatly, or whether more messages were sent by A before B could send his reply.
With multiparty interactions the situation becomes more confusing.
You enter a chatgroup at a random point, so you don’t know how many people are involved and what they have been talking about.
The only thing you can do is to sit back and watch for a while, as suggested by some manners guide.
In a chatgroup you must adopt different conversational strategies and expectations about interaction. Even basic conventions (greeting and leave-taking) are adapted. There is no symmetry to the exchange. When you log in, the software sends a message to other users to communicate you are just arrived.
You can greet if you want, but few will reply. It is possible to send an automatic greeting (*Hi all*), but many consider people who use it to be rude, because it removes the personal element. You may also precede your leaving with a reason, but few will reply.

When you join in a conversation, you may send a comment relating to someone’s message.
The person who sent the message you commented can answer or not, but others may choose to react to it instead. Further new arrivals may react to a point without having read the earlier messages, so repetition is always possible.

Real-world time-scale cannot be taken for granted because the order of arriving messages is governed by factors completely outside the control of participants (providers processing capacity, computer speed), so this is not an ordinary conversation.
Lag is not a serious issue in asynchronous chatgroups, because there is no real time limit in the interaction and computer-mediated delays will not be noticed.

In synchronous chatgroups the situation is different. A delayed intervention can become irrelevant.

Chatgroup lags range from few seconds to the total disappearance of group members.
A particularly disturbing situation is the “Netsplit”, where one of the servers loses its connection with the others and all the people depending on that server suddenly sign off. Lag experience and multiparty interactions could be some of the factors which influence the overall length of the messages. People are under pressure to keep their messages short.
Paragraph-like divisions are extremely rare, contributions tend to be single sentences and there is a widespread use of abbreviations. Short utterances help to promote rapid distribution and make the conversation more similar to a real-time interaction. Short messages, rapidly distributed and coming from many sources make participants to the chat group overlap.
Example of overlappings in a conversation between 5 participants:

<ashna> hi jatt
<Dave-G> kally I was only joking around
<Jatt> ashna: hello?
<kally> dave-g it was funny
<ashna> how are u jatt
<LUCKMAN> ssa all
<Dave-G> kally you da woman!
<Jatt> ashna: do we know eachother?.I’m ok how are you
***LUCKMAN has left channel #PUNJAB
<kally> dave-g good stuff :)
<Jatt> kally: so hows school life, life in general, love life, family life?
<ashna> jatt no we don’t know each other, I fine
<Jatt> ashna: where r ya from?
Messages interrupt each other. If we have a closer look at the conversation, we notice that there are basically 2 exchanges. Ashna and Jatt are carrying on 1 conversation:

<ashna> hi jatt
<Jatt> ashna: hello?
<ashna> how are u jatt
<Jatt> ashna: do we know each other?.I’m ok how are you
<ashna> jatt no we don’t know each other, I fine
<Jatt> ashna: where r ya from?

Dave-G and Kally are carrying on another and Jatt tries to start another conversation with Kally.
Further confusion arises if one message is repeated. People who posted messages and receive no response, send them more than once.

Usually people keep on talking to prove to others that they are still involved in the conversation. Silence is ambiguous, it could reflect inattention, absence or a deliberate refusal to communicate.
Nicknames are a distinctive feature of synchronous chatgroup language. Some use of nicks is also found in asynchronous groups and in e-mail addresses. Unlike traditional nicknames, they are influenced by extraneous factors. First of all, traditionally nicknames are given by other people while on the Internet you choose your nick.
The core principle is that nicknames are not owned, it is possible that someone else had already chosen the nick you wished. If this happens you must choose something else. So the task is to create something special and distinctive that other people will not hit upon in order to keep the same nick every time you log in to a group.
As with all self-selected names, people get attached to them. They identify you and tell something about you.

People who feel that they belong to a group will wish to retain their nick to make them recognizable each time.

It is not easy to find out a nick, users are restricted to a single string of characters. People usually play with typography and morphology and give birth to interesting creations.
As displayed in one study, usually nicks relate to characteristics of the self (shydude, sleepless), but they can also be funny or typographically playful (cLoNehEAd). Nicks can be changed every time.

They provide a very important means of maintaining semantic threads in a potentially incoherent situation.
In complex interactions members name each other to make clear their intended recipient. Nicks enable people to link sets of messages to each other.

They have got the same role of gaze and body movement in face-to-face conversation involving several people (in talking to several people, I can address my recipient by making eye-contact in order to make clear to whom I’m speaking).
Naming is possible only in telephone conferences or radio programmes, where the participants cannot see each others. In synchronous chatgroups topics change very quickly. Some remarks act as distractions and pull the conversation in unpredictable directions.
Experienced members can talk about different topics simultaneously.

Many formal features of synchronous chatgroups make this variety of Netspeak highly distinctive.

One of these features is the nick-initiated lineation with name in angle brackets.

Another is the identification of message-types generated by the software.
In IRC (*Internet Relay Chat*) the triple-asterisk identifies the system messages. These messages give information about who is joining or leaving, which participants are present and whether somebody has changed identity.

In IRC actions or comments are introduced by a single asterisk: when somebody types `/me` and an action, the software substitutes the person’s nick and expresses the action as a commentary-like narrative, usually using the third person.
Example:
If <DC> type:
/me is totally confused
On the screen it will appear:
*DC is totally confused
Many sources of visual distinctiveness are also present, smileys, rebus-like abbreviations give sentences an unfamiliar look. Character sequences in nicks are also unusual (aLoHa!). Question marks and exclamation marks are present, while internal sentence punctuation tends to be absent.
Misspellings and typographical errors are present and capitalization is ignored. Grammar presents highly colloquial constructions and non-standard usage. The omission of the copular verb is very common as well as non-standard concord between subject and verb (*i fine, me is 31, you feeling better now?*).
Nonce-formations are common and new jargon emerges. Some people used to type –*bamf* to mark their final sentence before leaving, it comes from the *X-Men* comic book, where one character makes the noise before teleporting. Neologisms, slang and jargon vary from group to group but chatgroups rely upon such processes as a way of affirming group identity.
Some channels ban coloured texts, but it depends on the chatgroup.
It does exist a group memory, so some misspellings for example may have privileged use in a group just because it attracted everyone’s attention at some time.
The anonymity is one of the most interesting features of the chatgroups.
Given the anonymity of some members, language is used to maintain the identity of the group.

When we find anonymous participants, the only thing we have to find out something about them is their language.

Subconsciously participants will be paying special attention to everyone’s choice of words.
Although the ideal involvement is one of trusting, everyone knows that the Internet could be a dangerous medium.

It is quite difficult to become quickly adept to a new variety of language, so it is possible to detect forgeries. For example it is possible to find out a male in a female chatroom.

Usually males send longer messages, make stronger assertions, are engaged in more self-promotion, make fewer apologies and ask fewer questions.
The distinction between asynchronous and synchronous chatgroups is not absolute. If someone is offline, a message can be stored in that person’s buffer to be read later. Issues related to Netspseak can apply to both kinds of chatgroups: no flaming, harassment, advertising, be careful about privacy and security.
Why chatgroups are successful?
Crystal gives 2 reasons:
1) What do people want from chatgroups? If the answer is “information exchange” there must be a problem. Actually chatgroups provide social interaction. The atmosphere is most of all recreational. You will not find facts but opinions to react to.
2) When the social advantages are so great, people make enormous semantic allowances. Some authors believe that the linguistic confusion could be attractive because the social gains, an anonymous, experimental world, are so great. The shared linguistic behaviour fosters a new form of community.
This kind of community has been called “hyperpersonal”, because communication seems to transcend the individual exchange, being more focused in the group.