

Getting Started with Twitter

A quick guide for academics



What is Twitter?

Twitter is a micro-blogging site where users send short messages or 'tweets' to share information. Your followers can see your tweets in a rolling feed, called a timeline, when they log into the service. Tweets can either be trivial or they can be very valuable – such as highlighting key news, updates on websites, articles written by influential people. It's up to you who you follow! You can also create separate timelines or 'lists' to manage the tweets that come into your twitter feed.

Uses

Twitter can be used for networking, staying informed, sharing, building/raising a profile, brainstorming, career advancement etc. When used carefully, Twitter can save time, help keep you informed, and boost your profile. Not sure who to follow? Have a look at who other people are following and Twitter will suggest people whom you might like to follow.

Tweeting

You have 140 characters – so keep it simple and engaging. Write clearly, keep it useful and don't self-promote too much. Link to further sources and resources, if required. Link to newspapers articles, journal articles, and other publications that are relevant to your field and areas of interest. Use the correct keywords to attract the right people to your Tweets and to the links you have provided. Investigate your followers – you might want to follow them back.

Useful Twitter Vocabulary

Tweet – A tweet is a short (140 character) message, in answer to the simple question of 'what's happening?' It is much like the 'status updates' you complete on Facebook, your chance to advertise to the world, in brief, your thoughts, something that you are doing or something that you want to happen, or to tweet about something you've found.

Followers – These are people who follow you. Each tweet that you sent out will be seen by your followers. Anyone can follow you, just as you can follow anyone. Remember – to see that person's tweets you have to follow them too!

Following– There are people that you follow but who may not necessarily follow you. You can start following people, institutions (and even groups) which are of interest to you.

Lists – Lists are created to manage the tweets you see in your interface. For example, you can set up a list entitled 'Language teaching' and, under that list, mark all the people you follow who regularly tweet about that topic. By clicking on that list alone you will see any recent tweets, which are of interest to you and keep everything in good order.

Hashtag (#) - Twitter is a great tool to enter into discussion or debate. A simple glimpse of the Twitter homepage will show you the current trending topics (those topics attracting a lot of attention at the moment). If you want your tweet to reach a certain audience then include that hashtag in it (see example below). A lot of conferences, events and even classes use specific hashtags in order to make it easier for their audience to follow events and join the conversation remotely.



 **Retweet (RT)** – Sometimes you might want to re-tweet to your followers something interesting that another person has already tweeted. Twitter has a facility where you can simply click on the ‘retweet’ button to send this tweet to your followers. You also have the option to ‘retweet with comment’ where you can add your own comment to the original tweet. Here is an example of retweet:



@ mention (or public reply) – Want to reply to a specific person? Then start your tweet with their @username. If your tweet starts with a person’s @username, only people who follow you both will see this tweet in their timeline. If you start your tweet anything else, it will be publically visible to all. NB: in all cases, people can see your tweets by accessing your profile page. If you are looking for privacy, see Direct Messages below.

Direct Message (or DM) – If you want to send a private message to a specific individual you can send them a direct message where they will be the only ones who will be able to read your message. However, you can only send a direct message to someone who you follow and who follows you back.

 **Favourite** – If you want to easily find a specific tweet for later use, click on the heart-shaped icon to favourite a tweet. You can retrieve your favourites from your profile.

Do's and Don'ts for your Twitter Profile

People will choose whether or not to follow you based on your profile description. Here are a few tips to ensure that your profile gets noticed.

DO include a photo or an image. It gives the impression that you’re an individual and not spam.

DO include the link to your webpage, staff profile, blog or LinkedIn profile to enable potential followers to find out more about you.

DO provide as much information in 140 characters about who you are and your research interests.

DON'T leave your profile blank. People will not follow you if they don't know anything about you.

DON'T choose an informal or vague profile name. Use your own name (or a variation of it) in order to make it easier for people to find you.