



All About Twitter

Basics

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a service for friends, family, businesses, agencies and the media to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages. It is available on your desktop or laptop computer, and Twitter has an app for smartphones and tablets. People post Tweets, which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text. These messages are posted to your profile, sent to your followers, and are searchable using Twitter search. Twitter excels at providing real-time information. The media uses Twitter extensively. It is the place to turn in a disaster to get immediate information. Of course, not all sources on Twitter are to be trusted, but its crowd-sourced nature can give you a good idea what's happening in an incident.

What is a Tweet?

A Tweet is any message posted to Twitter which may contain photos, videos, links and up to 140 characters of text. You cannot edit a Tweet once you post it, but you can delete it.

What Does it Mean to Follow Someone?

Following someone means that you've chosen to subscribe to their Twitter updates by hitting the "Follow" button on their Twitter page. Every time they post a new message, it will appear on your Twitter home page.

What About My Followers?

Your followers read your Tweets. If your Tweets are public, anyone who runs a search for a keyword in your Tweet may be able to see that message. Your Tweets are public by default.

Best Practice

Twitter is real-time and is viewable by the public at large. The media uses Twitter extensively. It is the place to turn in a disaster to get immediate information. Of course, not all sources on Twitter are to be trusted, but its crowd-sourced nature can give you a good idea what's happening in an incident. Post your own incident info as quickly as you can: it will establish you as the go-to source who is on top of what's happening.

Keep your tweets short. 100-120 characters gives others space to add comments for retweets.

Tweet frequently. The life of a tweet can be as little as 5-25 minutes before it gets pushed far down the feed.

Use Twitter Lists to make lists of key media, public agencies, social media sources, or others you want to monitor.

Create a hashtag right away for your emergency, and keep it short so it doesn't take too much space away from your main message. Everyone will start using the hashtag that is first out of the gate to label the event.

Include photos whenever you can, and upload your images to Twitter directly rather than post them to Twitter from, say, Instagram. Twitter will show the image right in the feed when you upload it directly, but will only show a text link to Instagram.

Don't start a tweet with an "@" sign or Twitter will assume it's a reply and will only share it with followers.

Glossary of Key Twitter Terms

@	The @ sign is used to call out usernames in Tweets: "Hello @twitter!" People will use your @username to mention you in Tweets, send you a message or link to your profile.
@username	A username is how you're identified on Twitter, and is always preceded immediately by the @ symbol. For instance, Kerry Shearer is @kerryshearer.
Block	If you block a Twitter user, that account will be unable to follow you or add you to their Twitter lists, and you will not receive a notification if they mention you in a Tweet.
Direct Message	Use Direct Messages to have private conversations with people you follow who also follow you. They do not appear in public for anyone else to read. Messages have a 140-character limit and can contain text, hashtags, links, photos and video.
Favorite	Favoriting a Tweet with the star icon indicates that you liked a specific Tweet or are saving it to read later. You can find all of your favorite Tweets by clicking on the favorites link on your profile page.
Geolocation, geotagging	The use of location data in Tweets (a geolocation or geotag) tells others where you are in real time. You can access the option to "Tweet With Your Location" at the bottom of the "Compose Tweet" box.
Hashtag	A hashtag is any word or phrase immediately preceded by the # symbol. When you click on a hashtag, you'll see other Tweets containing the same keyword or topic. A hashtag is like a filing label: it allows others to search and find all the tweets labeled with that hashtag. A hashtag can be serious, like #MontanaFire, or funny, like #SoDarnTired. You can decide how to hashtag your tweet or event, or use popular hashtags others are using.
List	From your own account, you can create a group list of other Twitter users by topic or interest (e.g., a list of friends, coworkers, celebrities, athletes). Twitter lists also contain a timeline of Tweets from the specific users that were added to the list, offering you a way to follow individual accounts as a group on Twitter.
Mention	Mentioning other users in your Tweet by including the @ sign followed directly by their username is called a "mention." Also refers to Tweets in which your @username was included.
Notifications	The Notifications timeline displays your interactions with other Twitter users, like mentions, favorites, Retweets and who has recently followed you. If you request it, we send notifications to you via SMS or through the Twitter for iPhone or Twitter for Android apps.
Pinned Tweets	Pin a Tweet to the top of your profile page to keep it above the flow of time-ordered Tweets.
Profile	Your profile displays information you choose to share publicly, as well as all of the Tweets you've posted. Your profile along with your @username identify you on Twitter.
@ Reply	A response to another user's Tweet that begins with the @username of the person you're replying to is known as a reply. It's a public message that anyone can view if your tweets are public. Reply by clicking the "reply" button next to the Tweet you'd like to respond to.
Retweet (RT)	A Tweet that you forward to your followers is known as a Retweet. Often used to pass along news or other valuable discoveries that others have posted on Twitter, Retweets always retain original attribution.
Twitter Chat	A Twitter chat happens when several people get together on Twitter at once to share ideas with one another. They do this by using a specific hashtag. For example, every Sunday, bloggers participate in #blogchat.