Using Twitter

Are you new to Twitter and need a crash course in how to get started? Or are you keen to write better tweets or build your Twitter following? Read on for our advice.

Link up with like-minded researchers

Unlike on Facebook, where people connect with their friends and family, on Twitter most people follow others with similar interests or professions. This makes it a great opportunity to link up and share ideas, papers or news with other researchers within your particular niche, or those in parallel fields with some cross-over with your area – or in fact anyone with an interest in your work.

Set up an account

- Choose a password and a username, known as a 'handle'. Most people use their name or a variant of it.
- If it's a group account you could adopt the format @UniRdg_ xxxx where xxxx is a shortened version of your group, department, cluster or lab's name.
- Try to keep your handle short so that it's memorable and doesn't take up most of the tweet if someone tags it.
- Add a profile picture – twitter accounts without one look inactive.
- Fill in the short biography to explain who you are and try to give a sense of what topics you will tweet about so that people can find out if they might want to follow you (following means meaning add your Twitter messages to the ones that they see in their unique feed.) You can also include a link to a website, such as your departmental page or staff profile.

Build your community

- Find people to follow. The Twitter messages written by accounts you follow will show up in your feed, also called your timeline. But be selective – you will likely want your timeline to feel alive with interesting and informative tweets, not deluged with funny cat videos from your neighbour or special offers from your local car dealership.
- Decide what topics you're most interested in and then search by name for researchers, writers or commentators on those topics. You can also **search by topic or geographic area**.

- Once you find an account that tweets regularly on a topic you're interested in, see what that account follows to discover others interested in the same topic (to see everyone a person is following, click on the person's name and then click 'following'.)
- When you've found people to follow, engage them. Send them a link to an interesting article, or interact with them by replying to their tweets, mentioning articles they share or clicking 'favourite' on the tweets of interest (the heart icon underneath a tweet).

Learn the language

To engage with people, it helps to know some of Twitter's sometimes bewildering insider language and etiquette. You probably won't ever need or want to know what 'yassss', or 'Bruh' mean if you're over the age of 16, but some of the more common /useful acronyms you might come across include:

- ICYMI – in case you missed it
- DM – Direct message (a private messaging service within Twitter)
- TBT – Throw Back Thursday (a chance to re-surface old content)
- FF – Follow Friday
- OTD – On This Day (for anniversaries of major events)
- 'Via' or H/T (hat tip) – ways to give credit to someone who shared the information first

Use hashtags – but sparingly

Twitter users often add hashtags to enable others searching for that topic to find their tweet. They work well in specific instances — such as conferences, when you want to know what others are saying about a lecture or keynote speech, or on a particular topic of interest such as #AntiMicrobialResistance or #MedievalTwitter, trending events in the news such as #AustraliaFires, or world awareness days such as #EarthDay or #AlzheimersAwarenessDay. But hashtags have been overused and aren't always useful for finding things. Use them sparingly.

The rule of @

An important technical rule governs the use of the '@' sign, which is the beginning of every account's handle. If you start a tweet to someone with '@,' only that person and those who follow both of you will see the tweet. This is so you can have a semi-private conversation with that person without cluttering up others' timelines. To make the tweet appear in the timelines of everyone who follows you, add a word or character before the "@" sign, even just a full stop.

Write like a human

Tweets may be brief, but you want your interactions on twitter to be conversations and you will want to be understood. Write the way you speak. Let your tweets flow like sentences. Let your character show.

If you've got more to say than will fit in a tweet, you can create a thread of tweets telling a story – see **this amusing example from @MERL**.

Make lists

You can organise your twitter feed by creating different lists based on your interests and then adding people to them. When you want the news at 8am, pull up your media list, for example, and when you want to see what's going on in your specialist field of potato crop research or early modern medical history you can go to your list of fellow academics.

Tell people you're on Twitter

To build your community, you could add your handle to your presentations, your email signature, your staff profile page and your lab group page or blog, preceded by 'Follow me on Twitter:'