

Twitter For Academics

(@UCSF and elsewhere)



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Why Be on Twitter?

Social media may strike some busy academics as a waste of time. But using a channel like Twitter strategically and purposefully can have significant paybacks.

How are faculty at UCSF and elsewhere using Twitter for professional advancement?

1. Disseminate Research Findings

“Health care professionals and particularly those in the field of academic medicine are finding the social platform powerful when it comes to disseminating new research findings. New **findings are reaching a wider audience** more quickly than they used to, thanks to Twitter.”

“Twitter Is Trending in Academic Medicine” Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 2017

“Social media dissemination of research may be of **particular benefit to women**, since it does not rely on mentorship or conference invitations — areas in which women tend to be disadvantaged.”

The New England Journal of Medicine, 2018

“Twitter is an easy way to disseminate our research because a lot of media follow it. I post a plain language summary about the work on my blog, then tweet out the link.”

Stanton Glantz, PhD

2. Broaden Professional Networks

Social media and Twitter in particular are effective pathways to forge connections with peers and professional groups around areas and topics of interest.

“If you work at the intersection of multiple disciplines, there are few places better (or more fun) than Twitter to be part of multiple networks.”

Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, PhD, MD, MAS

“#EpiTwitter is full of brilliant, generous colleagues who point the way to cool new research, explain challenging technical concepts, share teaching ideas, offer professional development advice, celebrate scientific successes, and do it all without wasting character count.”

Maria Glymour, ScD, MS

3. Increase Influence

Establishing a presence on Twitter and promoting special expertise greatly increases the odds of being seen and contacted by media representatives and other influencers.

“Direct-messaging on Twitter is the number-one way journalists contact me nowadays.”

Monica R. McLemore RN, MPH, PhD

4. Build Community

Twitter is more than a one-way communication tool. It allows for conversation among its users, creating a robust community focused on shared interests.

“#scitwitter captures the day-to-day of science; the frustrations, the triumphs, and the celebrations. It contains both the mundane and the extraordinary. It is simultaneously an escape and an inspiration. Most importantly however, it is where we come together as a living, breathing community to voice our concerns and to coordinate our actions.”

Hani Goodarzi, PhD

Getting Started: Setting Up Your Twitter Account

For step-by-step instructions on the mechanics of tweeting, a definition of terms, FAQ, and much more go to: <https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter>

The following are recommendations specifically for academics setting up a new account.

Your Twitter Handle: Recognizable is Best



You need to decide on your “handle” or user name, which will be preceded by “@”
Note there is a character limit of 15 characters for your handle. Your full name, which will also appear in your posts, can be longer. See example above.

We recommend using your actual name or variation thereof, if your name is already taken, or if it exceeds 15 characters¹.

Examples:

- @RAdamsDudleyMD
- @ProfGlantz
- @Ashworth_SF
- @Jelliffe_Pawlow
- @ShainLab

¹ character limitations as of July 2019 – may change in the future.

Because your full name will appear in your tweets as well, you also have the option to use a nickname as your handle:

- @kickassscience1 (Jeff Bluestone)
- @selectagent (India Hook-Barnard)

The disadvantage is that when someone tags you in their tweets with your handle, **readers not familiar with your handle may not recognize you.**

Your Avatar: Be Visible!



Your avatar is the picture in the circle that will accompany all your tweets.

For professional accounts, we strongly recommend using a good-contrast headshot.

Alternatively, you could use a symbol that is related to your field (such as DNA.)

Remember that on mobile phones (which is how most users access Twitter) the avatar picture will be **very, very small**, so avoid using overly complex images or graphics, or more than one or two words of text.

Your Bio: Why They Should Know You

Your bio is the short blurb that lets potential followers know who you are and what topics you are likely to tweet. Often, users will decide to follow you (or not) based on your bio.

Your bio is the place to **establish “your brand”** – who are you on Twitter and what’s your purpose there? Do you want to be seen as an independent voice and opinion-maker or as a scientist who speaks as part of an institution? Are you planning to keep your tweets strictly to your professional field or use it for personal purposes?

Either way, you will need to be concise – the character limit for your bio is 160¹.

¹ character limitations as of July 2019 – may change in the future.

It will be helpful to look at the accounts of a few of your peers to see what they list in their bios. Typically, academic bios contain:

- title, affiliation(s)
- topics of special expertise and/or interest
- website or profile
- disclaimer (“tweets are my own”)

Start By Following Others

The best way to get started on Twitter is by following other accounts that are pertinent to your interests, including:

- your institution ([@UCSF](#)), your department, your division, if they are on Twitter
- your colleagues
- collaborators at other institutions
- professional organizations
- news sources and journals

TIP: Follow colleagues who are active on Twitter and regularly share pertinent information. Find positive models to emulate.

*

TIP: The @UCSF institutional account maintains a number of lists which you can subscribe to and/or use as sources for people to follow.

Like Often / Retweet (Without Comments) Sparingly / Reply to Engage

Creating a professional twitter profile doesn't require you to start tweeting right away. It's not a bad strategy to take your time and just follow others and familiarize yourself with the Twitter environment.

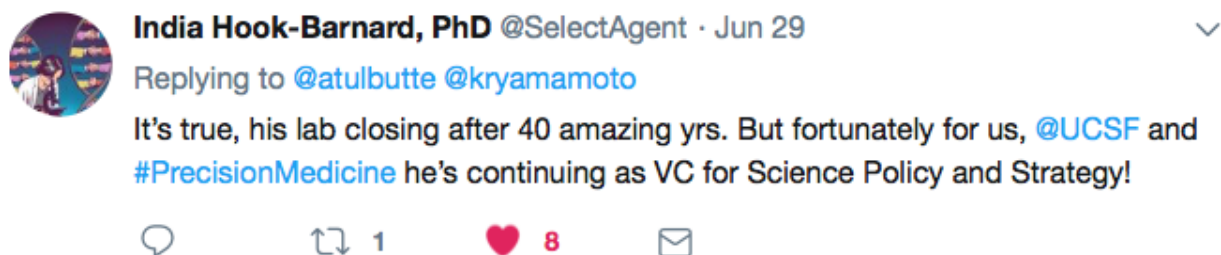
To start engaging, consider “likes.” They are easy and not as trivial as some might think.

Everyone appreciates being seen. It takes no effort to click “like” on someone’s tweets, and it may just prompt them to follow you.

Caveat: Be aware that everything you “like” will be added to a list visible on your profile. This is a great bookmarking tool, but it also means everyone can access this list of everything you've liked and may interpret your likes as an endorsements of people or ideas.

Similarly, retweeting other people’s tweets is easy. However, avoid the temptation to constantly retweet without adding something of your own. If a potential follower looks at your profile and only sees retweets and no original content, they may not want to follow you. Also, many users suppress retweets so as to only see original posts (or retweets with comments.)

Another way to engage is replying to tweets. Many successful Twitter users reply often, and it is an excellent way to engage with people you want to connect with.



What To Tweet?

- your publications, presentations, milestones
- short comments on news in your area of expertise
- congratulating others on their achievements (they will return the favor!)
- comments during events and conferences (see appendix: “Event and Conference Tweeting”)

A useful tweet might include:

- a link to more information
- a photo or video
- hashtags (#cancer #PrecisionMedicine)
- tagging colleagues (@AtulButte) or organizations (@UCSF, @UCSFPrecision, @NIH) – this may prompt them to retweet your tweet, thereby expanding the audience and potentially your followers.

What Not To Tweet

UCSF encourages and promotes involvement in all online communications. To help new users understand potential pitfalls, the University has developed clear guidelines:

<https://www.ucsf.edu/about/social-media-overview/social-media-best-practices>

The main principle to keep in mind is that individuals can state their title and affiliation with an institution but must not appear as officially speaking on behalf of the University. A short disclaimer (“views are my own”) is recommended.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, please contact socialmedia@ucsf.edu

Gaining Traction: How To Acquire (a Critical Mass of) Followers



Simply being on Twitter, interacting with a few followers and listening in to conversations may be sufficient for some academics. However, if you wish to gain impact, consider some of the strategies below.

(Strategies based partly on insidehighered.com/advice/2016/10/19/how-academics-can-use-twitter-most-effectively-essay)

Share

- Share other people's work. Tag them when you do it (@ProfX.) If it appeared in a journal, tag them (@Nature), and they will likely retweet your tweet.
- Share your own work. If people like what they read from you, they'll follow you.
- Try to add value to the public conversation. Share the kind of information you would want to read yourself.
- "Pin" one tweet to the top of your personal page that will always stay there -- use it to link to something you've written.

Engage

- Be generous with *likes*, respond to others.
- Use meaningful hashtags: #PrecisionMedicine, #Genomics, #PopulationHealth

Follow

- Follow plenty of other accounts. Use lists to manage the people you follow (see next section.)
- Don't only follow people who follow you. But if someone does follow you or interact with you often, consider following them, too.

Quality not Quantity

- Take satisfaction in the quality, not the quantity, of your followers. 50 meaningful connections represent more value than 500 "bots".
- **Especially in the beginning, be thoughtful about posting on Twitter. One or two well-crafted tweets a week will gain you more in the long run than a flurry of retweets.**

Stay Positive (or at Least Neutral)

- If you disagree with someone else, keep responses fact-based and polite.
- If you receive abusive tweets or messages, **block immediately, then report the user via Twitter's reporting tool.**
- Note that if you block someone, they won't be able to see your tweets anymore. (You can also mute users, in which case they can still see your tweets, but you don't see theirs.)

Personal or Professional?

Whether or not you use your Twitter account strictly for dissemination of facts or insert your personal or political opinions depends on your goals – what is your “brand?”

- Many academics focus on networking, research dissemination, and information gathering, and avoid controversial tweets.
- Others include advocacy and activism as part of their professional role, e.g. to support health-related causes or at-risk populations.
- Some choose to have two accounts, one for professional use and a personal one that is disassociated from their academic role.

If you have questions about how to navigate personal opinions within your professional Twitter account, please contact socialmedia@ucsf.edu

Make sure to also read the institutional guidelines for social media:

<https://www.ucsf.edu/about/social-media-overview/social-media-best-practices>

Power Tweeting: Amplify Your Influence

Tweets	Following	Followers	Likes	Lists
1,867	1,068	3,227	1,444	1

Congratulations! You've established your presence on Twitter, are regularly active, and have a few dozen or perhaps even a couple of hundred followers. How do you keep the momentum going? What are some of the tricks that will turn you into a true "power tweeter?"

Connect

- Ask questions. One of the best ways to connect with peers on Twitter is by asking open-ended questions in your feed. You'll start conversations and get people thinking, sharing, and connecting.
- Start a conversation. Always admired a certain researcher? Start a conversation with them on Twitter by asking questions or discussing your reaction to their latest work.
- Ask for help. Whether you need assistance in writing a paper or finding collaborators, Twitter is full of people who'd love to help.
- Seek out relevant followers who have a large following.
- Share your take on the latest research. Read a book that would interest others? Share it.

Promote

- Promote your Twitter account in other forums. **Add your Twitter handle to your email signature and to your UCSF profile.** Consider including it on your business card or on your presentation slides, or on your personal or team website as a means of contacting you.

Plan

- Plan ahead. Time your tweets so that they fall in advance of big events, publications, and other professional aspects you might tweet about.
- Live-tweet events (see appendix.)
- Use a tool such as Buffer or Hootsuite to schedule tweets in advance.

Illustrate

- Share photos, videos, and graphics. A tweet with a picture attached will get more attention than text only.
- Twitter has an easy-to-use function to create a photo collage.
(<https://toolkit.loomly.com/twitter-collage>)

(Tips above excerpted and adapted from <https://www.bestcollegesonline.com/blog/100-serious-twitter-tips-for-academics-2/>)

Organize / Prioritize

- Make Twitter lists. When you follow someone or an organization, add them to the appropriate list (e.g. VIPs, Colleagues, Professional Organizations, Media.) This enables you to prioritize posts from some accounts and only look at others occasionally.
- Turn off retweets from all or selected users.
- Save hashtags that you come back to often (you can do this any time you search for a hashtag).

Add Impact

- If you need to tell a more complex story, create a thread (by responding repeatedly to your own post).

Timing and Scheduling

- Consider the location of your followers (local, national, international) and the times they are likely to look at Twitter.
- Experiment with tweeting at different times. Check your analytics!
- Tuesday morning is when many academic journals publish.
- Tuesday through Thursday is the best time to reach journalists.
- Use Twitter memes such as “Follow Friday” (#FF) to recommend colleagues worth following (and someone might do it for you.)
- Make use of short periods of “down time” to tweet (in the shuttle, at the airport, waiting in line for coffee).

(Tips above shared in a talk by Monica McLemore, one of UCSF’s “power tweeters” (@mclmoremr))

Use Conferences as Opportunities to Connect

See Appendix 2 for tips on how to tweet during conferences (also applicable in general.)

Appendix 1: UCSF Resources and Policies

University Relations

UC San Francisco encourages and promotes community involvement in all online communications. Please make sure to familiarize yourself with UCSF's social media guidelines <https://www.ucsf.edu/about/social-media-overview/social-media-best-practices>

For any questions about the use of social media, contact socialmedia@ucsf.edu

The @UCSF institutional account maintains a number of lists which you can subscribe to and/or use as sources for people to follow, see <https://twitter.com/UCSF/lists>

If you believe you should be on one of these lists and aren't, contact them at the email above.

Departmental Accounts and Communicators

Many UCSF departments, divisions, and organizations have Twitter accounts. Make sure you are following these (as well as the main @UCSF account) and that they are following you! Find out who manages the account and connect with that person for mutual retweets and amplifications.

Appendix 2: Live Tweeting During Conferences and Events

- 1. Use the approved hashtag EVERY TIME.**
 - a. Try this: Include the hashtag in every tweet about the conference, before, during and after the event. Yes, even in replies.
- 2. Start tweeting a few days in advance. You'll get to know other Twitter super-users and start building relationships while the overall chatter is low.**
 - a. Try this: 3-5 days before the conference begins, tweet that you'll be in attendance, which subject areas you're watching, sessions that have piqued your interest, etc. Engage with others who are tweeting early as well.
- 3. Be yourself: Keep it professional but let your personality shine through.**
 - a. Try this: Imagine that you're at a networking event or happy hour – be casual, informal, friendly, take selfies with other conference-goers. Just don't post anything you wouldn't want your boss to see.
- 4. Twitter's a two-way street – posting original content is great, but engaging with others is how you build relationships and gain followers.**
 - a. Try this: Many people rush to be the first to post a speaker's pithy quote. If you find others are live-tweeting the same talk as you, retweet them and reply to their tweets instead of jumping on the live-coverage bandwagon.
- 5. Follow others, especially those you want to connect with.**
 - a. Try this: During the conference, use Twitter to reach out to someone you'd like to connect with and ask them to coffee or invite them to meet up at a networking event. Twitter-users often check their mentions more often than their emails during conferences.

More tips for live-tweeting: <https://www.researchtoaction.org/2018/05/live-tweeting-conferences-top-10-tips-for-research-uptake/>