Introduction to Social Networking Twitter

Twitter is a social networking website that allows users to follow the posts (or "tweets") of other users they are interested in. Twitter users can be individuals, businesses, or other organizations. Twitter is a very fast, responsive mode of communication that is good for up-to-the-minute updates from individuals and organizations.

Tweets answer the basic question "What's happening?" They can be a maximum of 140 characters (including spaces) in length, and cover a variety of topics. Twitter users (sometimes known as "tweeps") may choose to tweet to their Twitter account via text message or smart phone app as well as through the Twitter website.

Please note: Twitter changes its interface frequently. Although we will do our best to keep this handout up to date, the most current information can always be found from Twitter's Help section: https://support.twitter.com/. Although the location of features may change, the basic function of Twitter remains the same. You may need to "click around" to find options that have been moved or re-named.

Creating an Account

1. Open your web browser and enter http://twitter.com in the address bar
2. From the Twitter homepage you can either sign in with an existing account, or create a new account – use the "New to Twitter?" form at right
3. The Twitter website requires that new users provide their full name and email address. A username and password must also be selected. Other Twitter users will be able to see your username and full name. Both of these names can be changed in your settings. Users must also read and agree to Twitter's Terms of Service Agreement before creating an account.

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Do You Follow?

The basic mode for interactions between users on Twitter is *following*. When you follow another user, it means that their tweets will appear for you to read when you log in to Twitter. They will also get a notification that you are following them.

By default, everyone's tweets are public. Unless you set your account to private, your tweets are accessible to anyone who visits your profile on the web at http://twitter.com/yourusername (even if they do not have a Twitter account). Following does not affect who can see your tweets. It does affect which users' tweets you see in your "twitterstream."

Tweets from users you follow show up here, in your "stream."

The following relationship is not necessarily reciprocal (unlike Facebook, and many other social networking sites, where both parties have to acknowledge that they are "friends.") Many organizations, politicians, and celebrities have thousands of followers on Facebook, but they do not necessarily Follow all their Followers.

Retweeting a tweet means that you are re-posting something posted by someone else on Twitter. When you retweet, your followers can see the original post even if they do not follow the person who originally posted it.

#Tag, you're it

Twitter users apply what are called hashtags to their tweets. A hashtag is like a simple category or label that is applied to the tweet. They take the format of a word or phrase (with no spaces) preceded by a number sign, like this: #followfriday. Hashtags may be specific to a region: for example, tweets related to the Edmonton area usually use the tag #yeg (which is Edmonton's airport code). Those for Strathcona County use #strathco; Sherwood Park, #ShPk. Hashtags are also commonly used for events, such as

#tsunami, which was used for the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami. In the aftermath of the earthquake, there were thousands of tweets per second using the hashtag.

There are also hashtags that relate to other things, some of them twitter-specific, such as #followfriday. This is a Twitter tradition in which, on Fridays, users suggest other twitter users their followers may want to follow.

You can use any word or phrase and make it into a hashtag by using the # symbol. People often use hashtags in ways that are playful and clever. You don't need to limit yourself to "official" hashtags like those listed above.

When a hashtag is posted on Twitter it becomes a link. Clicking on that hashtag will take you to a list of other tweets with the same tag. So in the example to the left, you could click on "#strathco" and see other Strathcona County-related tweets.

@You

Users on Twitter have a username they choose when they sign up (the library is SC_library, for example). When you are talking to or about another Twitter user, it is common to preface their username with an @ sign, with no space, like this: @SC_library. Like the # for hashtags, the @ sign for usernames creates a link to that person's profile. It also means that the user you mention will get a notification that you have addressed them. This makes it easier for people to communicate directly with other Twitter users.

Twitter Features

The Twitter website features a navigation bar at the top of the page:

1. **Home**: Return to your homepage. Displays an overview of what is happening on Twitter, your most recent tweets and those of the people you follow. For more information, see next section.
2. **Connect**: Functions related to other twitter users, including new followers, retweets of your tweets, and comments addressed to you with the @ sign
3. **Discover**: An overview of worldwide trends on Twitter, news stories, popular photos, and more.

4. **Search**: Search for tweets (use a hashtag or a keyword) or users (search by username or real name).
5. **Your Account**: Direct messages, your lists, your settings, and other functions related to your account can all be accessed from the pulldown menu. Click on the down arrow to see options.
6. **Compose New Tweet**: Clicking this button will give you a popup box in which to write a new tweet (see next section for more information).

Composing a Tweet

Click on the Compose New Tweet button ( ) on the navigation bar to compose a new tweet. A box will pop up with the question "What's happening?"
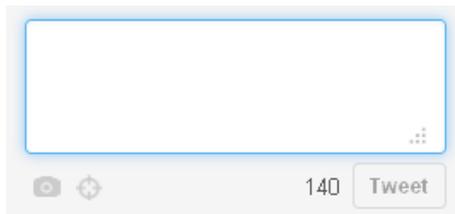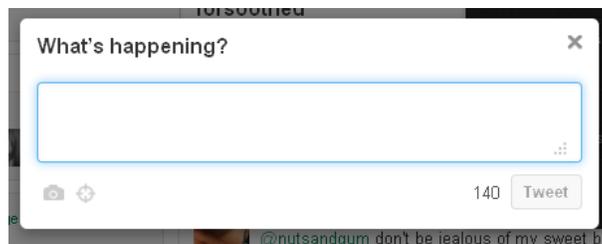
You can also type your new Tweet directly into the "Compose New Tweet" box on your homepage. A similar box will appear (shown at left).

On the bottom left-hand corner of the New Tweet box are options to attach a photo to your Tweet, or to add your location. The number in the bottom right-hand corner shows how many characters you have remaining room for in your tweet. Click the "Tweet" button to post.

You can include a URL (beginning with http:// or www.) in your tweet and Twitter will automatically make it into a clickable link.

What should I tweet about?

On Twitter, users can tweet as often or as infrequently as they like. Some choose not to tweet at all, but rather just follow other accounts they find interesting.

Similarly, there are few official restrictions on what users should tweet about, but it is advisable to tweet with caution. Messages posted on Twitter are accessible to anyone with internet access. Although privacy settings can be changed to keep tweets private (see information on *Account Settings and Privacy* below), it is best to view Twitter as a public conversation. Only post information that you would be comfortable sharing with strangers.

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The Home Page

When you first log in to Twitter, and whenever you click the Home button (Home), your Twitter homepage will be displayed. This page contains a variety of different types of information:

Your Account: an overview of your tweets and followers
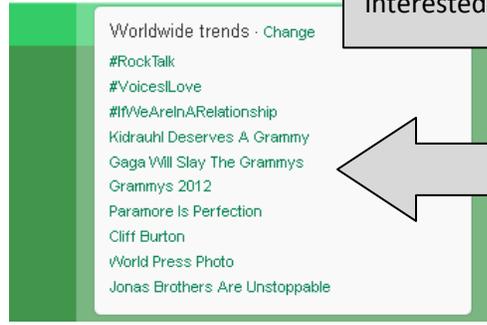
Quick way to write a new tweet

Who to Follow: Suggestions for other users you may be interested in.

Worldwide Trends: These are topics or hashtags that lots of users are discussing.

Twitter "stream" or timeline: Your own tweets, and those of the users you follow, will appear here in chronological order.

If you mouse over an individual tweet, four options will appear above the tweet text:

- By selecting "Reply", a pop-up window will appear which allows you to reply directly to the user's tweet. The @Theirname will be filled in for you automatically. Your post will then appear as a tweet on your profile and they will be notified that you have replied to them. (If you want to send a private message, select the Direct Messages option from the navigation bar instead.)
- For your own tweets, a "Delete" option will appear. This will let you remove a tweet from your profile. However, if anyone else has retweeted your tweet, their post cannot be deleted by you.
- By selecting "Favorite", this tweet will be added to your favorites list, which is accessible from the right side of the Home page. Your favorites are viewable by anyone.
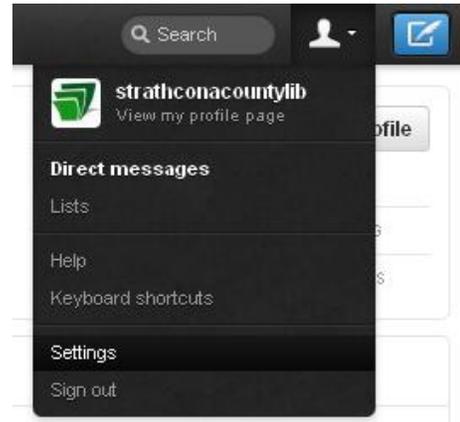
- By selecting "Retweet" this tweet will be repeated on your profile page, so that those who follow you can also see it.

Account Settings and Privacy

To personalize your account and access privacy settings, click on the pull down menu from the "Your Account" button on the top navigation bar.

Click "Settings". Scroll to the bottom of the page and you will see a number of settings that relate to your privacy. Some of the more important ones are shown below.

Tweet location: You can choose whether you want your location to be automatically attached to your tweets. If you turn this on, Twitter will determine your location automatically.

Tweet media: You can choose whether you want Twitter to filter media that may contain sensitive content which would include nudity and violence.

Tweet privacy: If you want your tweets to be kept private, select this box. Any twitter user who wants to access your tweets will then have to be approved by you.

HTTPS only: HTTPS is a more secure browser setting. Selecting this option will help keep your account more secure.

There are many more options in your account settings which you may want to explore. If you need help deciphering any of these settings, please refer to Twitter's own Help section at https://support.twitter.com/.