

Twitter tips for authors

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Twitter is like a huge party: thousands of people having thousands of conversations about thousands of different topics. Daunting, even for the most social of butterflies. So how do you reduce the noise and tune in to specific conversations? How do you find your friends and make new ones? How do you eavesdrop on the best conversations?

Here are my tips:

- *Complete your profile*

People are more likely to follow you if you have a completed profile. Make sure you have a good profile picture, a good-quality picture for your Twitter background and a short bio. To edit your profile, log in and go to [twitter.com/\[yourtwittername\]](https://twitter.com/[yourtwittername]). Click 'Edit Profile' on the right-hand side.

- *Plan ahead*

Planning can be a lifeline when it comes to social media. Not all of us are naturally spontaneous and most of us are busy.

List three to five topics you're comfortable tweeting about, then draft a list of tweets in a document. Using an application such as Buffer, Tweetdeck or Hootsuite, you can schedule these to go out in the future, so you are not tied to your desk.

- *Time your tweets*

When you tweet something, your followers will see it among all the tweets by the people they follow. This means that your tweet can quickly become buried. To increase your chances of being seen, time your tweets for when most people are looking at Twitter: 7.45–9am (commuter hour), 12.30–1pm and after 9.30pm. Thursday is a peak day for social media activity. And don't forget the weekends. Twitter is 24/7.

- *Repetition, repetition... repetition*

The most successful Twitter accounts have a narrow remit and are consistent. The poet @george_szirtes is a great example – he posts lines of poetry inspired by his daily activities and his followers know what to expect.

Accounts such as @middleclassprob (irreverent tweets of people's 'middle-class problems') and @SoVeryBritish (no prizes for guessing that one) have garnered thousands of followers by doing one thing over and over again. If you feel reluctant to tweet as yourself, consider using Twitter to create a project like that.

@middleclassprob was picked up by Random House and turned into a book.

- *Be genuine and generous*

Twitter is only effective if you genuinely *want* to discover new people and forge new connections. If you use Twitter only to get

noticed (and self-promote) you will not reap the rewards. Retweet other people, reply to them and 'mention' them in positive ways. Digital karma is real, and it will reward you.

- *Use hashtags to join the conversation*

Hashtags help you reach beyond your existing followers. Here is a simple tweet with and without hashtags:

We want to hear from artists and photographers who would like to feature in Visual Verse. Tweet us websites or portfolios.

We want to hear from #artists + #photographers who would like to feature in <http://visualverse.org>. Tweet us websites or portfolios. #amwriting #art

By using hashtags (effectively keywords) this tweet will appear when anyone searches for #artists, #photographers, #art or #amwriting (a popular hashtag among writers).

Remember that party analogy? Hashtags are how you navigate those big crowds and tune in to the conversations you want to hear, or become a part of. You can either use hashtags to *replace* words in a tweet or at the *end* of a tweet.

- *Use mentions to connect*

Using someone's Twitter handle within a tweet is called a 'mention'. Like hashtags, mentions allow you to connect with others and increase your followers. For instance:

Alison Barrow @alisonbarrow Jul 20

Writing advice from @TheakstonCrime #3: "Don't get it right, get it written," @rorybremner

In the example above, @TheakstonCrime and @rorybremner are the Twitter handles, and both of these users will get notifications to say that @alisonbarrow has mentioned them in a tweet. If they then retweet this message it will potentially be seen by the 6,500 followers of @TheakstonCrime and the 56,000 of @rorybremner.

The placement of the mention is important:

if you put it anywhere in the body of your tweet, as above, the tweet will appear in all of your followers' streams (the tweets visible to them when they go on to Twitter);

if you place the mention at the *very start* of a tweet, only the person you are mentioning, plus anyone who follows both you and that person, will see the tweet in their stream;

if you do want *all* of your followers to see the tweet, however, you can place a symbol in front of it, the most common being a full stop, like this: *.@mention*.

- *Be more appealing – use links, images and video*

The most-shared tweets are those with a link in them. Where possible, share links to articles, reviews and websites to make your tweets more engaging. Simply copy and paste the URL (web address) into the body of the tweet.

To add an image click ‘add photo’ when you are constructing a new tweet. To add video, paste a YouTube link into the body of the tweet. Visual content vastly improves the chances of your tweet being retweeted by others.

Kristen Harrison is founder of The Curved House, www.thecurvedhouse.com, and is the SoA’s web and social media trainer.

At the Curved House’s #100WebbyTips hashtag on Twitter, Kristin lists her favourite resources and gives examples of the best writer profiles on Twitter.

The SoA’s Twitter handle is @Soc_of_Authors.

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