Twitter for K12 Educators: A Primer for Sprigeo

Twitter Basics

Origins

Founded in 2006, Twitter is a social broadcast network that enables people and organizations to publicly share brief messages, or “Tweets,” instantly around the world. Available in over 35 languages, Twitter has more than 288 million monthly active users—77 percent of whom live outside of the United States. Limiting Tweets to 140 characters distills information to its essence and encourages conversation among users. There’s no single purpose for a Tweet; indeed, some users rely on the platform to connect with the world without tweeting themselves. There are as many users as reasons to tweet: activists to mobilize political action, brands to promote products, and news agencies to report breaking stories. Other users leverage Twitter to follow their favorite celebrities or to join conversations on topics or hobbies of interest. Still others use it to chronicle events as they unfold in real time, snapping photos and recording video from the app.

The “At-Sign” (@)

The origin of the @ symbol, or the “at-sign,” is shrouded in mystery. Once used by Spanish and Portuguese merchants as a unit of weight around 25 pounds, the symbol is now a hallmark of the digital era. In essence, the at-sign links a personal identifier to a hostname like “example.com.” From this comes the standard format of an email address: name@example.com. The at-sign has evolved from a digital place marker into quick links to users on Twitter and other social media platforms. The “@reply,” or the at-sign placed before a username, enables real-time conversations on Twitter. Instead of writing someone at “name@example.com,” for instance, you can simply respond by adding “@name” to a Tweet. Many businesses invite users to contact them via Twitter rather than email so they can respond to inquiries immediately.

Hashtags (#)

Brevity promotes creativity—so much so, in fact, that users pioneered many of the features that define Twitter today. The hashtag is the most tangible example. Using the hash character

(#), hashtags add metadata to a Tweet and thereby group it with related content. Hashtags sort content into conversations about anything ranging from tentpole events, such as #Oscars for the annual Academy Awards ceremony, to forums that stretch back years, like the debate surrounding Net Neutrality (#NetNeutrality). As hashtags become widespread, so have norms governing their usage. In general, hashtags should be brief, relevant, and number no more than two or three per Tweet. There are some limitations, of course: you can't make a hashtag from numbers or words spaced apart. But the same is generally true on other social media platforms that have adopted hashtags in recent years.

Signing Up for a Twitter Account

Web

1. Go to http://twitter.com and find the sign up box, or go directly to https://twitter.com/signup.
2. Enter your **full name**, **email address**, and a **password**.
3. Click **Sign up for Twitter**.
4. On the next page, you can select a **username** (usernames are unique identifiers on Twitter)—type your own or choose one that's been suggested. The interface will notify you if the username you want is available.
5. **Double-check** your name, email address, password, and username.
6. Click **Create my account.** You may be asked to complete a Captcha to confirm that you're human.
7. Twitter will send a **confirmation email** to the email address you entered. Click the link in that email to confirm your email address and account.

iPhone (Apple iOS)

1. If you haven't already installed the Twitter for iPhone app, go to about.twitter.com/products/iphone and follow the instructions on that page.
2. Once the app is installed on your iPhone, you can log in with an existing account or sign up for a new account directly from the app.
3. Tap the blue **Sign up** button on the welcome screen and fill out the fields asking for your **name**, **phone number or email address**, **desired username**, and **password**.
4. If your desired username is already taken, it will turn red and a message will drop down below the username field telling you to choose a new username.
5. Once you've chosen a username that has not been taken, a blue checkmark will appear next to the username.
6. When you have completed the form, tap **Sign up**.

7. If you provided a phone number while signing up, Twitter will immediately send you an SMS text message with a code to verify your number. Enter the verification code in the box provided.
8. A message will pop up telling you your account has been successfully created.

Android (Google)

1. Open the app and tap the **Sign up** button.
2. On the next page, fill in your **account information** (name, username, email address, and password).
3. After entering your name, you can choose from one of the suggested usernames, or type in an available username of your choosing.

Note: If you provided an email address when signing up, Twitter send you a confirmation email. You must confirm your email address in order for it to be fully associated with your Twitter account so you can receive important notifications regarding your account.

Posting a Tweet

Web

1. **Sign in** to your Twitter account.
2. **Type your Tweet** into the box at the top of your Home timeline, or click the **Tweet** button in the top navigation bar.
3. Make sure your update is **fewer than 140 characters**. We'll count the characters for you! Remaining characters show up as a number below the box.
4. **Tip:** Read about how to include photos in your Tweet here, and how to include a video in your Tweet here.
5. Click the Tweet button to **post the Tweet** to your profile.
6. You will immediately see your Tweet in the timeline on your homepage.

iPhone (Apple iOS)

1. Tap the **compose Tweet icon** in the top menu on the right.
2. Compose your 140-character message and tap **Tweet**.
3. The Tweet will be successfully posted to your profile.

Pro tip: Have a Tweet in progress you're not ready to post? Tap the **X** in the Tweet composer box and select **Save draft**. Access it (and other drafts) later by tapping the **draft icon** in the bottom menu of the Tweet composer.

Android (Google)

1. Tap on **What's happening?** from the menu bar at the bottom.
2. Enter your 140-character message.
3. When you're ready to post your message, tap **Tweet**.
4. A notification will appear in the status bar on your device and will go away once the Tweet successfully sends.

Twitter as a Learning Tool

News and Trending Hashtags

Twitter is an indispensable tool for citizen journalists, who increasingly break news before news vans have even warmed their engines. Where dispatches from a desktop computer once were, instantaneous storytelling from smartphones will be. Twitter and social media at large have democratized journalism, throwing the news cycle into high gear. In 2000, the timeframe to break news was typically a few hours; now, it's a few minutes. That anyone can broadcast a story from anywhere is more significant that it seems at first glance. Once funneled through newspapers, radio, and television, news today can come anyone with a mobile device and a story to tell. Naturally, there are anxieties about the validity of citizen journalism on social media—unfamiliarity with journalistic ethics, mistakes an editor would normally catch, an intent to falsify. But as with Wikipedia—now proven to be more accurate than traditional encyclopedias—, the wisdom of the crowd converges on a balanced viewpoint.

Twitter began to drive the news cycle as early as January 15, 2009, when a bird strike caused a U.S. Airways flight to plunge into the Hudson River. A witness tweeted a photo of the crash as he hopped on a ferry to rescue passengers, propelling him to fame and Twitter into the public limelight. In the following year, the platform would become central to documenting news. Starting in 2010, smartphone-wielding activists from Tunis to Taksim Square used Twitter to broadcast their ideas, mobilize protesters, and challenge regimes that, at the time, underestimated the power of technology to effect social change. The platform has since become the engine of the news cycle, with legacy media engaging users alongside independent news producers. On March 11, 2011, Japanese users tweeted warnings about the tsunami that barreled towards the coast after a magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck 43 miles offshore. News outlets later took to Twitter to notify followers of the fallout at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. In August 2014, police barricades in Ferguson, Missouri, blocked national and local journalists from recording clashes between protesters and law enforcement after a local police officer shot an unarmed teenager. But it didn't prevent protesters from tweeting raw footage with the hashtag #Ferguson—footage that would later appear on the evening news. Similarly, the massacre at the offices of the French satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in

January 2015 not only yielded an outpouring of support for victims, but through the hashtag #JeSuisCharlie reaffirmed the value of free expression in democratic societies.

Connecting with Subject Matter Experts

Anyone with an Internet connection can view a user's Tweets. The upside of such openness is that with the right dose of hashtags and/or @replies, expert advice is widely available. There's wisdom in the aggregate, and Twitter is, in many ways, an endless conversation between aggregates. With a single Tweet, users can solicit opinions on a product or service. Frequently called "crowdsourcing," this technique is most potent in conversations arranged by groups with a common interest. One day, a non-profit might host a bimonthly conversation for parents to help their children use social media responsibly. The next, a career advice guru might hold afternoon office hours for job applicants. Both the non-profit and career expert act as moderator and encourage participants to share insights. Such conversations aren't just informative but free sources of expertise.

Conversations are but one way to obtain expert advice on Twitter. For those seeking product information or rapid customer service, another way is to send @replies. Many businesses have set up a Twitter account—sometimes, more than one. Of those businesses, many hire full-time social media experts whose responsibility is to man their social media accounts. Some businesses even link @replies to their Twitter account to their customer support interface, rapidly yielding a response from an actual person. Just as Twitter is public, so are complaints @replied to a company's official account. To safeguard its reputation, then, companies must respond in real time—a benefit both to them and consumer alike. Companies with robust support operations (e.g., online retailers, mobile and broadband providers) often have support accounts to which customers can send an @reply and expect a response within minutes, even seconds. Though brief, @replying is far quicker than navigating an automated phone network or composing an email that generates a canned auto-response.

Twitter in Schools and Learning Communities

Twitter has as many uses as it does users. Ever since the platform launched in 2007, educators have pioneered digital teaching techniques that were unthinkable just a few years before. Closest to Twitter's original purpose are logistical uses, such as sending reminders for project deadlines, exams, and field trips. Newer features like group direct messages (DMs) enable students to coordinate projects with one another, while a suite of third-party applications add features like polling and live broadcasting. Some educators also create class-specific accounts at the beginning of the term and share the login credentials with students, parents, and administrators, who use the account as a digital bulletin board.

As useful as it is to coordinate logistics via Twitter, it's not the only form of communication it facilitates. Educators also weave the platform into the fabric of their lesson plans—particularly

for interacting outside of class. Class periods are arbitrary blocks of time that can interrupt conversations as they peak. Using Twitter, teachers can revive the conversation other in the day with a provocative question to motivate students as they complete a related assignment. Twitter can supplement assignments, but also be part of them. Just as students might live-tweet during a sporting event, they can also live-tweet questions and reactions to an assigned film or a live performance. They can also tweet focus questions in preparation for a class discussion. Interacting often involves sharing. For Twitter-based assignments, students can curate lists of relevant accounts and hashtags in a given subject area from which they glean content to share with other students. While curation is key to navigating the glut of online content, it's also pivotal to grasping the basics of research.

Interacting and consuming information on Twitter are but two of its pedagogical uses. It's also, increasingly, a creative space. Today's students have little memory of the world before the Internet. To upload photos or to cobble together clips into a mashup is, for anyone born after 1990, a given. While not all students are tech-savvy wunderkinds, educators can encourage them to learn by creating with technology. Learning involves doing. A social studies lesson on the media, then, might produce mock news stories with Twitter's photo and video features. By creating news, students will become their sharpest consumers. Teachers could assign students to create a parody account of a figure who they'll pretend to be for the duration of the course. Parody accounts are particularly beneficial in humanities courses—to imitate the style of this author or the thought of that historical figure, for instance; but they can also be used in other disciplines to imitate famous scientists, economists, and philosophers. Though imitation can be silly, it's also a way of entering the mental world of another person, and with it, honing social emotional learning skills.

Reporting

When an issue is reported or flagged by a user, it's sent to one of several teams responsible for policy enforcement. These teams review reports for Twitter Rules (https://twitter.com/rules) and Terms of Service (https://twitter.com/tos) violations and, if applicable, take action on the reported account. In most circumstances, they also follow up with the reporter to inform them of any actions that have been taken. In some cases, such as spam, Twitter uses automated signals to aid in our reviews and removals of accounts.

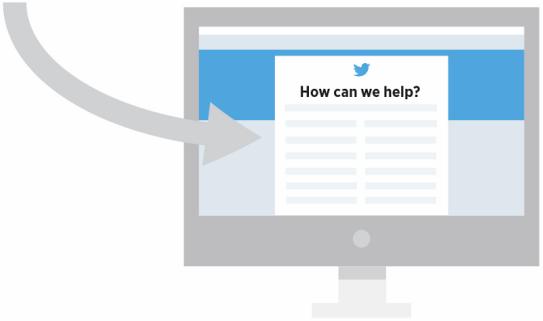
Twitter Reporting Guide: How to Submit a Report

1. Go to https://support.twitter.com.

2. For account- and feature-related problems, select **Troubleshooting**. This section offers solutions to common problems about logging in, managing an account, and using other features on Twitter.

3. For information about policy violations, select **Policies & Violations**. This section contains all of Twitter's policies and explains how to report violations.

4. Navigate to the section that best describes the issue you've encountered. Clicking on any section will guide you through a reporting form. To complete the form, provide all necessary information it asks for, such as contact information and a brief description of the issue.



5. Twitter automatically sends you a confirmation email containing a case number to the address provided in the form.

6. A Twitter specialist reviews the issue.

7. Upon reaching a decision or to request more information, Twitter will contact you.

Reporting Abuse: Preliminary Steps

Twitter prohibits targeted harassment and abuse. Engaging in such behavior leads first to warnings then to temporary or permanent account suspension. Twitter also forbids posting specific and direct violent threats on its platform. As with other behavior infractions, we issue warnings that either result in case resolution or account suspension. We also encourage users to report illegal behavior to law enforcement in order that the threat may be evaluated properly and, if applicable, the behavior prosecuted.

Anyone can report abusive behavior directly from a Tweet or profile—even if he or she doesn't have a Twitter account. To ensure that the behavior you've witnessed on Twitter constitutes abuse and to file a report if it does, please take the following steps:

1. Review Twitter's abuse policy: http://bit.ly/1DinAZf.
2. If the behavior you've witnessed doesn't appear in the abuse policy, also review our policies concerning media (http://bit.ly/1zmjxJd) and posting private information (http://bit.ly/1zMNFOU).
3. A complete list of policies is available on our Help Center: https://support.twitter.com/groups/56-policies-violations.

Web

To report abusive content to Twitter, navigate to the "Report a Tweet" option found on each Tweet or fill out one of the online forms on the Twitter Help Center (https://support.twitter.com/forms/abusiveuser) to message our highly trained safety team. Completing a report requires that you specify the username of the accused, links to Tweets, a thorough description of the problem, your email address, your location (local laws may apply), your Twitter username (optional), and a digital signature.

Mobile

To report an abusive Tweet:

1. Navigate to the Tweet you'd like to report.
2. Click or tap the **More** icon (••• icon on web and iOS; icon on Android).
3. Select **Report**.
4. Select **It's abusive or harmful**.
5. Next we'll ask you to provide additional information about the issue you're reporting.
6. Once you've submitted your report, we'll provide recommendations for additional actions you can take to improve your Twitter experience.

To report an abusive profile:

1. Go to the user's profile and click the **gear icon**
2. Select **Report**.
3. Select **They're being abusive or harmful**.
4. Next we'll ask you to provide additional information about the issue you're reporting.
5. Once you've submitted your report, we'll provide recommendations for additional actions you can take to improve your Twitter experience.

Twitter Tools to Control User Experience

Over the course of 48 hours, there are one billion new Tweets. While it's impossible to monitor this much content proactively, our Terms of Service and the Twitter Rules govern how people should behave on our platform. Upon receiving a report of a potential violation of these rules, we use automated and manual tools to communicate with users, conduct an investigation, and take action accordingly. Other than the Twitter Rules, there's a number of Twitter tools—or user controls—to promote safety and educate users about how to control their online experience.

Mute

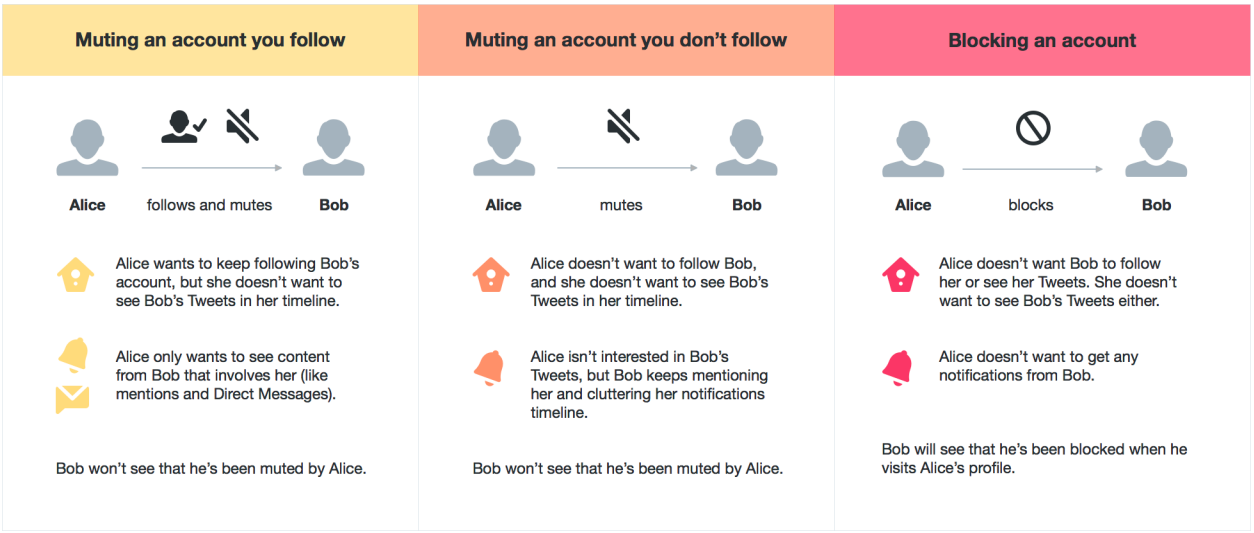
Sometimes, simply ignoring the user can end an altercation. Abusive users often lose interest once they realize that you will not respond. You can hide a user's Tweets from your timeline without blocking them by using the mute function. A red mute icon visible only to you will appear on their profile and remain until you unmute them.

Unfollow

Users can unfollow others if they no longer wish to see that person's Tweets in their home timeline. Unless his or her Tweets are protected, you can still view a user's Tweets by visiting his or her profile. You can unfollow Twitter users from your following list and from a user's profile page or by SMS/text message. Note that anyone who reports another account as spam unfollows it automatically.

Block

Use the block function to stop a user from following you, tagging you in photos, or accessing your Tweets. Any @replies or mentions from a blocked user will not appear in your mentions tab (although these Tweets may still appear in search).



Protect your Tweets

If you want to control who sees your updates, you may choose to protect your Tweets, which will only be visible to followers whom you approve. Similar to other social media sites, users with protected accounts can approve requests from other users to follow their accounts on a case-by-case basis. Additionally, only approved users are able to view or search for Tweets on a protected account. Opting for a protected account prevents unwanted followers from viewing their content.

Flag Media

If you believe that an image or video should be brought to the attention of the Twitter team for review, please report it by clicking on the "••• More" button located beneath the image. You can also label your own media for the appropriate viewers and select whose media appear on your timeline. Twitter asks users to mark their Tweets as "sensitive" if they contain content such as nudity, violence, or medical procedures. The default setting for sensitive media requires Twitter users to click through a warning message before viewing the content. Anyone who would prefer to remove this protective barrier may do so by changing his or her account settings.