

So what is Twitter?

It's a platform wherein users **share their thoughts, news, information and jokes** in **140 characters** of text or less.

Profiles are (usually) public — anyone in the world can see what you write, unless you elect to make your profile private.

Users "follow" each other in order to keep tabs on and converse with specific people.

On Twitter, following someone is not necessarily an admission of friendship, but nonetheless affords interaction and conversation — at least in short bursts.

The first step is to understand and master the vernacular. There are certain words and jargon native to Twitter that you may already have heard in passing. These terms and their abbreviations are essential for understanding the network.

- **Tweet:** A 140-character message.
- **Retweet (RT):** Re-sharing or giving credit to someone else's tweet.
- **Feed:** The stream of tweets you see on your homepage. It's comprised of updates from users you follow.
- **Handle:** Your username.
- **Mention (@):** A way to reference another user by his username in a tweet (e.g. @ZurichLife). Users are notified when @mentioned. It's a way to conduct discussions with other users in a public realm.
- **Direct Message (DM):** A private message between two people. You can decide whether to accept a Direct Message from any Twitter user, or only from users you are following. You may only DM a user who follows you.
- **Hashtag (#):** A way to denote a topic of conversation or participate in a larger linked discussion (e.g. #PensionsSummit, #TackleYourFeelings). A hashtag is a discovery tool that allows others to find tweets, based on topics. You can also click on a hashtag to see all the tweets that mention it in real time — even from people you don't follow.

Twitter is an experience. The more you use it, the more enjoyable and resourceful it will become. Do stick with it, as it can pay dividends in great conversation and personal connections with people around the world.

1. Signing Up

In order to engage in conversation, you must introduce yourself. By creating a handle (see glossary above) you can quickly describe who you are. A handle is essentially your address or calling card, and is how people will interact with you and include you in conversation.

Your profile pic, header image and bio should also reflect who you are. Where possible, you should use your actual picture and real name, so people feel more comfortable interacting with you.

2. Following and Followers

Twitter could be described as a crowded hall. Picture people milling about, having conversations and some are staring at the ceiling. It's a lot to take in all at once, but if you hone in on a few people that seem interesting and start a genuine conversation, you might encounter a new and interesting network of contacts. Before you know it, you'll have a nice little group of people with common interests.

Once you've squared away your username, photo and bio (e.g. work for Zurich, opinions are mine, RT not endorsement), you need to seek out people to follow. You can find them in a few different ways.

Our advice is to follow people you know, at first. When you open your account, Twitter's algorithm doesn't know you very well, and thus, cannot logically suggest people for you to follow, just yet. It merely suggests random celebrities and other folks with thousands of followers. Therefore, following people you know will make your initial foray more worthwhile.

Once you get rolling, Twitter will give you better follow suggestions, based on the industries/fields associated with your interests. With time, you'll become adept at discerning who is worth following and who is not. There's no set strategy for this — it's completely up to you and your own personal tastes. If someone follows you, there's no requirement to follow them. If someone is tweeting too much and clogging your feed, feel free to unfollow him immediately.

3. Entering the Fray

Now that you've been observing the updates and musings of those you follow, it's time to join the conversation. You could try to send a 140-character observation into the ether and hope someone sees it, but there's a better way to engage with people around your interests.

The next time you see a particularly fascinating tweet, click "reply" and add your two cents.

Interacting with ordinary people is a great way to get the hang of the "@mention"

(just use the "@" sign before that person's handle). Clicking "expand" or "view conversation" on a tweet will display all the responses that message received, including tweets from people you aren't following. You can see when someone follows or @mentions you in the @Connect tab at the top of the page.

You might also notice a vertical blue line connecting some tweets. When two or more users you follow are involved in a conversation, Twitter automatically groups those messages together on your timeline, displayed chronologically from when the most recent tweet was sent. Up to three messages in the conversation will appear on your timeline, connected by the vertical line. If there are more than three messages in the conversation, click on any one to view the entire conversation.

Once you feel comfortable with these tools, it's time to start interacting with more influential Twitter users. Twitter gives you the power to directly connect with government officials, celebrities and cultural movers and shakers. By @mentioning specific people, the odds that they see your conversation increase drastically. Who knows? They might even respond or retweet to their own personal audiences.

4. Direct Communication

Another way to communicate with Twitter is through direct messaging (DM). The messages are private, between you and the receiver, but keep in mind what you say could still be leaked — so make sure whatever you send is something you'd feel comfortable having publicly posted.

A feature in settings allows users to choose whether they want to be able to receive messages from their followers, even if they didn't follow them back. To enable the feature, go to settings and look under the "Accounts" section, where you should see a check box marked "Receive

direct messages from any follower." At time of writing, the feature wasn't available for everyone. We'll update as more information becomes available.

5. Retweeting

Retweeting is a common way to share something interesting from someone you follow to your own set of followers. Pertinent information tends to spread virally via retweets. It's important to remember that a retweet should be thought of as quoting someone or citing a source.

There are a couple of ways to retweet someone. You may choose to simply hit the retweet button. When you click this button, the tweet will be sent to your set of followers, using the original tweeter's profile pic alongside a note that you have retweeted the post. You can also add your own comment to the retweet before you post it. The tweet will appear in your timeline, with your profile pic and your comment before the original tweet.

Again, these are two ways to perform essentially the same action. It's up to you to determine when it's appropriate to include a comment in your RT.

6. Hashtags

Hashtags label and indicate the subject matter of certain conversations taking place on Twitter. The hashtag is represented by the number sign "#." Putting one of these little symbols in front of a word or phrase indicates a subject you think is worth talking about. The words you use after the hashtag become searchable because Twitter tracks them. That is to say, if you click on a particular hashtag, you'll be able to see all tweets that have also used that hashtag. It's a grouping mechanism that allows you to get the general public's sense about a specific topic or issue.

This is a very convenient way to drop in on subjects as broad as [#Pensions](#) or as focused as [#TackleYourFeelings](#). Feel free to create your own subjects — just make sure you don't use any spaces between words in a hashtag. The Trends area will display content and hashtags that are trending globally but the settings can be changed to show only the topics trending in Ireland.

7. Mobile Apps

Twitter is all about what's happening *now*. And let's face it: Not a ton of interesting things happen at your desk. That's why it's important to keep up with Twitter while you're on the go.

Maybe you'll snap an excellent photo with your smartphone. Maybe a brilliant tweet will pop into your head while you're at the supermarket.

Twitter is available on both [iOS](#) and [Android](#) devices.

8. Crafting Your Voice

Now that you're up and running, focus on being yourself and crafting your online persona. When you start to situate yourself as an expert in a specific subject area, you'll notice that people will begin to follow you for advice and expertise. You may not know who they are, but that's perfectly acceptable. Twitter isn't about following people you already know; it's about engaging interesting people from all over the world.

As you start building your "brand" on Twitter, think about why people are following or talking to you. Are you an expert in a particular industry? Are you opinionated? Do you share great news articles or interesting photos?

The bottom line: Be authentic and true to your values and you'll quickly become a valuable member of the Twitter community.