

GETTING STARTED ON TWITTER AS A SCIENTIST

“Using Twitter can be more than just a social media activity. It can be a real career incubator in which researchers can develop their professional circles, launch new research projects and get helped by the community at various stages of the projects”. In a PLOS Computational Biology paper experienced scientific Twitter users share ‘Ten simple rules for getting started on Twitter as a scientists’ [1]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1051/eprn/2020511>

Scientists can use social media platforms such as Twitter to the advantage of their professional work. Early career scientists ask advice from peers and senior scientist and find mentors and jobs; senior scientist announce jobs, find employees and new students and be a role model for young researchers; they all use the platform to reach out and inform their followers about their study, work and ambitions. Here, we quote and summarise the ten simple useful rules from Ref. [1] to get started:

1. *Start somewhere, but show up.* Creating a Twitter-account is easy. You could do it now while reading this EPN Special Issue and start following the EPN account @EuroPhysicsNews. You could share what you have read in this issue and comment on it. Once started, make a habit to regular show up, get informed and post information for example about your research or a conference you are attending.
2. *Discover opportunities in academia.* Twitter has become a valuable source of information. You can follow other scientists, colleagues and your students; or granting agencies, laboratories and dedicated career columns in popular research journals. Early-career scientists can observe the process of creating national or international research projects. Senior researchers can openly share ideas through Twitter which may lead to the development of new concepts before becoming fully-fledged research projects.
3. *Tweet stuff.* The power of Twitter is its potential for interactions with fellow scientists. Ask them their opinion when (re)tweeting their post; and ask scientists questions about their work: they are using Twitter because they intend to interact.
4. *Learn the rules.* Diplomacy is one of the key components to building a scientific reputation. Check the social media guidelines and rules of your institute. Be careful about subtweeting people. Avoid sharing pictures with people, unless they have explicitly given you permission. Do not respond impulsively when someone is critical towards your research on Twitter.
5. *Take care of yourself.* Online conversation can go off the rails and you might need to protect yourself from trolls and nasty discussions. Be selective on whom you follow and be prepared to mute or block people.
6. *Build your own community.* You do not have to follow everyone who follows you and vice versa. You can follow important people in your field or communicate directly with people who would otherwise not find out about your work and field. Share and explain papers that might be interesting for people outside your field.

7. *Interface with real life.* Twitter makes networking more easy and less scary. It is a good way to stay in touch after a conference. Knowing a bit about the interests in research will make it easier to talk to people again on the next conference. Exchange Twitter accounts. You can use the direct messaging option of Twitter to make private contact.

8. *Spread your message.* Whenever you have a scientific accomplishment, you can share the information by sharing a link to a preprint or a vacancy notice. Summarise the content, include an image and an appropriate hashtag.

9. *Be a real person.* Even if you use Twitter only for professional purposes, consider opening up a little bit to show your followers you are a real person. For example you may mention a nice book or a concert that you visited.

10. *Great power and great responsibility.* Once your reach a substantial number of followers, you will need to spend a bit more time to think about what you tweet. You are a role model now. On the other hand, a large Twitter network can help you spreading important ideas and helping people learn about opportunities you know about.

Twitter has trade-offs between quantity and quality. It is a nice and useful tool to communicate with people and organisations in your scientific community. It is also inhabited by bots which tend to follow you and flood you with a lot of unwanted content. Importantly, you should remember that Twitter’s business model is based on advertising and you should be aware that some content aims to sell you products. However, Twitter is still strongly recommended for people who needs to develop themselves in academia and tighten bonds e.g. with researchers overseas. ■

Reference

- [1] Veronika Cheplygina, Felienne Hermans, Casper Albers, Natalia Bielczyk, Ionica Smeets, PLOS Comput Biol 16(2): e1007513. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1007513> (2020)

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