



Introducing Twitter

Twitter (twitter.com/) is a tool designed for social networking, micro-blogging or aggregating information such as news and opinions. Micro-blogging is a short form of blogging where users post their thoughts on any topic in short snippets. With Twitter, users have only 140 characters to post or 'tweet' an answer to the default Twitter question, 'What are you doing today?'. For educational purposes, Twitter can be used to select content from a wide range of sources or to create professional and collegial networks. Like most educational institutions, The University of Queensland has a Twitter account to post 'uqnews online' updates for UQ and the wider community.

Key features

- Easy categorisation: use the 'hashtag' symbol (#) before a relevant keyword or phrase to categorise Tweets. For more information, see support.twitter.com/articles/49309#.
- Easy search: enter your search query into the search box at the top of the page. Results will show a combination of news, photos, videos or people. Search results can be refined or saved, see here for more information: support.twitter.com/articles/132700-using-twitter-search#
- You can customise Twitter to access content of your choice from other people, news outlets or organisations.
- Each post or tweet can contain links to articles, images or videos.
- Users can 'follow', or be 'followed' by, other people, special interest groups or professional associations.
- Messages from people or organisations you follow will appear on your Twitter homepage, called your 'timeline', which will refresh each time you log in.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the Twitter web site

Why use Twitter?

The features of Twitter can afford social presence, teacher presence, student engagement and informal learning. Grossesk & Holotescu (2008) claim that Twitter can be used for the following purposes:

- Metacognition (reflective learning), which has been shown to benefit comprehension and retention.
- Collaboration across schools and countries (for example, students leave phone-tweets as they come across real-world examples of what they are studying in class, or as they conduct fieldwork).
- Exploring the potential of micro-blogging in formal and informal settings. When linked to a course or class blog, Twitter can offer students opportunities to discuss different kinds of online discourse, considering voice, purpose and audience; organize ideas; reflect and send notes; and manage meet-ups or serendipitous discoveries.

Activities using Twitter

Educators from K-12 to university are using Twitter to actively engage students in their learning through information acquisition, critical thinking and collaborative activities. The following are some example activities:

- Post supplementary materials: Retweet articles, news stories, opinions and other interesting tidbits relevant to a specific class as an excellent, convenient supplement to classroom lectures.
- Facilitate discussions: Take supplementary material postings one step further by requiring students to post their own succinct responses to the main theses and open up intelligent discussions with one another.
- Post maths or science puzzles: micro-blog a daily problem for students to solve and tweet back the answer.
- Summarise: At the conclusion of each lecture, ask students to type a 140-character or less summary of what they have learned, and perhaps pose any questions to be considered in the next class.

(Adapted from '50 ways to use twitter in the classroom')

Dunlap & Lowenthal (2009) discuss how they have used Twitter in their teaching:

- Several students are posting comments to Twitter while they watch a political debate. They provide commentary, along with several thousand others who are also in Twitter while watching the debate.
- A student is working on an assignment and is wondering about embedding music into a slideshow presentation. He tweets a question to the group and gets a response from Patrick (his professor) and a practicing professional. Both point the student to different online resources that explain how to embed music and provide examples to deconstruct. Within a half hour, the student has embedded music in his slideshow presentation.
- A student is reading something in the textbook and has a question about the chapter on multimodal learning. She immediately tweets (i.e., posts) her question to the Twitter community, and gets three responses within ten minutes—two responses from classmates, and one from Joni (her professor). This leads to several subsequent posts, including comments from two practicing professionals

Instructions to using Twitter

Getting Started with Twitter

support.twitter.com/articles/215585-getting-started-with-twitter

Guide to using Twitter in your teaching practice

blogs.kqed.org/education/how-to-use-twitter-in-your-teaching-practice/

How to use Twitter, Digital Trends

www.digitaltrends.com/social-media/how-to-use-twitter/

References

Dunlap, J. C., & Lowenthal, P. R. (2009). Tweeting the night away: Using Twitter to enhance social presence. *Journal of Information Systems Education*, 20(2), 129-135.

Grosbeck, G., & Holotescu, C. (2008, April). Can we use Twitter for educational activities. In 4th international scientific conference, eLearning and software for education, Bucharest, Romania

Resources

EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 7 things you should know about... twitter, EDUCAUSE, Tech. Rep. (2007), www.educause.edu/eli

50 ways to use Twitter in the classroom
www.teachhub.com/50-ways-use-twitter-classroom

The Teacher's guide to Twitter
Edudemic- Connecting education & technology
www.edudemic.com/guides/guide-to-twitter/

Do Now is a weekly activity for students to engage and respond to current issues using social media tools like Twitter. Do Now aims to build civic engagement and digital literacy.
blogs.kqed.org/education/about-do-now/

Further Information:

For further information, such as case studies, resources and references see the Social Media for Teaching and Learning website: www.uq.edu.au/tediteach/social-media-tools
Contact: Anthea Leggett, Learning Designer, TEL (a.leggett1@uq.edu.au).