

Twitter 101: Beginner's Tips

Okay, you have a Twitter account. Now what?

If you don't have a Twitter account and want to set one up, refer to my article [Twitter 101: Creating an Account](#) for step-by-step instructions.

Before we get into details, it's vital to understand what you want out of Twitter. If your co-worker is urging you to join and you have no agenda, you'll have a different experience and approach than I do.

I use Twitter to connect with people, and this builds my fiction platform. **Since I want to connect with a large audience and I don't need to be considered an expert in my field, my goal is to follow a wide range and number of new people.**

People buy fiction from authors they like. Readers want to connect with authors, so fiction authors are wise to avoid being exclusive on Twitter. What do I mean by exclusive? I mean only following friends. Look, no one can keep up with a thousand followers' tweets, but no one expects you to. That's what lists are for. We'll talk about them later.

If you are a non-fiction writer, a publishing professional, or in a field where being considered an expert will help you, by all means be exclusive. The quality of your connections count. But also, be friendly and share quality links often.

Also, decide now who you will follow back. I wrote a blog post about this a few weeks ago, [Twitter Limits](#). A quick recap: I don't follow back

- businesses unrelated to publishing
- anyone with a provocative profile picture
- anyone who doesn't tweet in English
- anyone with an egg for a profile picture (usually spammers) and
- anyone who's profile includes "social marketing expert," "help me help you," or any other keyword that sounds like a sale's pitch.

Your list might look different than mine--that's fine.

So let's get started!

When you sign into Twitter, your home screen will show up. Across the top will be a search box and buttons for Home, Profile, Messages, and Who to Follow. The upper right hand corner will have your profile picture and a drop-down menu to edit your settings and profile.

The **Home** button is a link to your main Twitter page, **Profile** takes you to a list of all the tweets you send, **Messages** is where you read or write direct messages (the Twitter equivalent to e-mail), **Who to Follow** suggests people to follow.

Below this is your Twitter feed. The tweets of people you follow will continuously update in the **Timeline**, the main tab above the feed. Next to it, is a tab named **Mentions**. If you click on it, any tweets directed to you will show up here. For example, my mentions all have [@jillkemerer](#) in them. The tweet may have other names too. You want to head to this tab whenever you check in. To make the most of Twitter, be friendly. If someone initiates a conversation, you'll see it here.

Move your browser to the tweet, and a few buttons will show up below it. You can set the tweet as a favorite, you can retweet it, or **you can reply**. To continue a conversation, click on reply. A pop-up box will appear with the person's username. Type in your reply and click Tweet. Easy!

The **Retweet tab** allows you to see retweets by you, retweets by others, or your tweets retweeted. If someone says something funny or shares a terrific link, go ahead and retweet it. Doing this does two things: promotes the person who originally shared the link (promoting others is a key component of successful social networking, aka building a platform) and it gives your followers information. If you consistently retweet great content from other sites, you'll find more followers.

The **Searches tab** brings up all of your saved searches. Hashtags (#) group conversations. For instance, if you type #amwriting into the search box (at the top of the screen), a list of tweets will show up with people talking about writing. This is a great way to connect with other writers. You can follow interesting people, reply to them, and type in your own #amwriting tweet. Hundreds, probably thousands of hashtags exist.

The **Lists tab** shows all of the lists you created. It took me a while to create a list because at first I only followed people I knew from blogging. But as my network grew, my friends' tweets got lost in the shuffle. I quickly added them all to a list. Then my network continued to grow so I made more lists. Whenever you follow a new person, you can add them to a list by clicking on the button that looks like a lined piece of paper. Either "create new list" or check the box next to an existing link. Of course, you can uncheck the box at any time.

Lists do three things for me.

1. They keep me connected to my friends.
2. They allow me to connect regularly with new friends.
3. They help me share quality information with my followers.

A quick note about lists. I try to share links from publishing industry professionals to keep others informed of interesting news. I created a Business list where I add agents, editors, top information authors like James Scott Bell, Donald Maass, and Michael Hyatt, as well as NYTimes, and WSJ (Wall Street Journal). All I have to do is check this list, scan for interesting topics, click on the link and read the article to decide if I should share it or not.

On the right side of the screen, you'll see your profile picture, number of tweets, a link to who is following you and a link to who you are following. **It's good to regularly check to see who is following you.** This allows you to follow back anyone who interests you. It also alerts you to any spammers. You'll also see a link for Listed. This informs you if someone has added you to their list.

If you get a spammer or someone who just seems off to you, feel free to either **Block** them or **Block and Report for Spam**. Click on the picture of the gear next to their name for these options.

Now that you know your way around Twitter, **you can start finding people you know to follow them.** On your Home page, look at the right side under the Followers and Following links. You'll see a list of Trends and next to it, a list of Who to Follow. Below **Who to Follow** is a link to **Refresh Suggestions** (new people will show up), **Browse Interests** (type in an interest and anyone else who has tweeted about it will show up), or **Find Friends**.

Click on **Find Friends** and a new screen will appear. You will be given the option to find friends through an e-mail account. It's entirely up to you if you want to grant Twitter access to your e-mail contacts or your Linked In account. You can also type in a name at the top of the screen. Anyone with the name or one similar will show up. I do have difficulty finding people with this method because Twitter is very picky about spaces and such, but I've found many friends this way.

Another great way to find fellow bloggers is to go directly to their blog and click on the social media buttons to follow them. **Bloggers who use any social media site with the intent to build a platform SHOULD PROVIDE LINKS to their accounts on their blog.**

A brief mention about etiquette. If someone mentions you in a #WW (Writer Wednesday) or #FF (Follow Friday), reply and thank them. If you like their tweets, follow them back. If someone retweets one of your blog posts, thank them. **They are actively promoting you by doing this.** How many people actively promote you? Show them some love!

I know this is a ton of information, but I assure you, actually using Twitter takes little time once you know what you're doing.

When you move beyond the beginner phase, consider downloading a free service such as TweetDeck or HootSuite. These services streamline your Twitter experience and allow you to see several lists, mentions, direct messages, and so forth on one screen. I love TweetDeck for the ease of keeping track of people I follow. It's also a snap to retweet things and to reply to several people at once. I can't recommend this site enough.

Happy Tweeting!