

St Anne's College Guidelines for Social Media Engagement

These guidelines are intended for anyone who uses social media to engage in a St Anne's College context – whether on a private Twitter or Facebook account on which you identify yourself as a member of College, in a Facebook group intended for members of College, or on College-related 'dark social', i.e. WhatsApp groups.

Please also make sure that you adhere to wider policies on use of social media including the University of Oxford's guidance for [staff](#) and [students](#).

Introduction

The term 'social media' describes web services and tools such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube that allow you to interact with others in the sharing of information, opinions and content. With social media, the emphasis is very much on building communities of interest and encouraging people to participate, rather than simply broadcasting information.

Social media can help you in many ways in your role, for example to:

- Communicate with the public
- Consult and engage
- Be transparent and accountable
- Access help and support from other experts

All information conveyed through social media should be considered public. It should be assumed that unless particular restrictions are put in place all such information could end up anywhere at any time.

Be careful with private accounts - remember; personal views can too easily get read as the College's or wider University's views.

Social media principles

1. **Be aware that social media posts have a long life.** Anything you post in a public space will live there for a very long time and may be copied, re-purposed and redistributed in different contexts from the one in which it was posted. Even though posts can be deleted they will have already appeared in other users' timelines, and may have already been shared, saved on website archives or been screenshotted.
2. **Don't fire off posts in anger or frustration.** Consider what you have written carefully before posting and, if you have any doubts, don't ignore them; come back to it later or ask a colleague to check it. Remember, you are personally responsible for what you write.
3. **Protect privacy.** You are personally responsible for the content you publish. Use available privacy settings, and never give out your postal address or phone numbers. Limit the personal data you publish.
4. **Identify yourself - name and, when relevant, role at St Anne's** - when you do wish to highlight your research or related matters, and write in the first person.

5. **Own your posts.** If you publish content to any website outside of St Anne's and it has something to do with work you do or subjects associated with the College, include a statement, such as: "These are my own views, not those of my employer." Write in the first person ('I think...'). These are your opinions and you take personal responsibility for them.
6. **Respect the law.** Respect copyright, fair use and financial disclosure laws. Don't post libellous content. Do not post anything which could be construed as harassment or hate speech. Under most laws it is the individual that is liable for any breach of UK or international law. Remember, laws of other nations may apply to any posts. Do not be fooled by the informal nature of social media – the law still applies and a disclaimer will not protect you e.g. a UK Local Authority has utilised US law to access a Twitter account.
7. **Respect your audience and peers.** Don't use personal insults, obscenity, or engage in any conduct that would not be acceptable in the workplace. You should protect others' privacy and take care around topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory—such as politics and religion. People may disagree with what you say and express it in many ways, from the helpful to the downright rude. Rise above it and ensure your engagement is constructive and positive. Remember, some comments are not worthy of a response.
8. **Consider policy and confidentiality.** Respect what you can legitimately say about St Anne's in public - don't provide confidential or other proprietary information. Bear in mind any policies or initiatives relating to the area you are posting on, and don't contradict them. Don't share any documents if you are at all unsure that they are appropriate to be shared in a public domain. Don't report on conversations that happened at St Anne's and are meant to be private. If in doubt, ask the person the information was sourced from.
9. **Consider reputation.** Your own and the College's. Conversing with people is what social media is all about, but if you receive or come across a comment online that could cause reputational damage to either you or St Anne's, please let the Communications Officer and/or the Principal know as soon as possible. Bear in mind that any response could be taken as speaking on behalf of St Anne's and spread as such across social media sites.
10. **Think about how you are presenting yourself and who you are talking to.** Be aware of your association with St Anne's and the University in online social networks. If you identify yourself as working here, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues and stakeholders. When there is contact with national journalists on social networks, you should treat it like any usual media enquiry and contact the Communications Officer, copying in the University of Oxford [news office](#).
11. **Have integrity.** Encourage constructive criticism and deliberation and be honest about your thinking. Be cordial, professional and the first to correct your own mistakes. Don't alter previous posts without indicating that you have done so (and when), or delete comments just because they are critical – chances are you will be found out and exposed. Owning up to a mistake on social media is a good opportunity to be human.
12. **Write about what you know.** You add value by contributing views, opinions and perspective on topics you know something about. The image of St Anne's is best represented by its

people and what you publish will reflect on College, so be aware that you can potentially damage the College's reputation by posting on subjects where you are not an expert or are not aware of all the facts.

13. **Provide timely responses.** A key point of social media is to participate in conversations and receive replies to your posts. If someone who replies expects a response, try to respond in a timely manner, even if you do need to reflect or look something up. Where you have a lot of comments, you don't need to respond individually to every comment, but could post one response that references a selection of comments.
14. **Be responsible.** Be sensible with the amount you use social media websites, and don't forget your other work. Even though you are using social media in a work context, it should constitute a small amount of your work. Don't neglect other commitments.
15. **Be secure.** Do not use the same password for all social media sites, and definitely do not use the same passwords on social media sites as you would in the office or sites containing your personal or payment card information. Do not post information that you do not want to be public, even if the site seems secure. Remember, many of these sites may not have safe practices concerning the privacy or storage of your information and are often the target of hackers.
16. **Be sure.** Read the terms and conditions of use of a site and abide by them; failure to comply may have consequences you were unaware of. Some sites have privacy settings or secure areas that make you feel you can make comments securely between friends. Sometimes, more people can view these than you realise at the time you post, and the information could be released under subpoena laws without your knowledge.
17. **Be aware of Freedom of Information (FOI).** Information or comments posted on social media sites may be subject to FOI and data protection requests.

The basics

For the nuts and bolts of how Twitter works, read Twitter's own [Getting started with Twitter](#) guidance. There are also help pages for [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

The different channels are broadly accepted as meeting slightly different needs. Facebook, for example, can work particularly well for communities wanting to discuss particular topics, whereas Twitter is more of a fast-moving newsfeed and way to directly engage with people. YouTube can allow you to access large numbers of members of the public with the right content, and LinkedIn is great for more career related topics. But there are no hard and fast rules — it's the message, not the medium, which determines who you reach and engage with.

The simple rule to remember is that the principles covering the use of social and other digital media are the same as those that apply for any other activity:

1. Honesty about who you are
2. Clarity that your opinions are your own personal ones
3. Respect and humility in all communication
4. Good judgment in sharing only public information

5. Awareness that what you say is permanent

Where to begin

If you're establishing a new social media account, taking one over from a colleague or revamping the way you do things, there are a few essentials to think about:

- Why are you doing this? Because you feel you should, or because you have identified a genuine need for it and have clear objectives?
- Who is the audience? Do you know if those people use the social media channel you're proposing to establish a presence on? For example, if you want to directly engage children in science, is Twitter the place to do that?
- What will the content of the channel be? How will you source or produce content?
- How much resource will that require, and do you have enough to achieve your aims?

We won't all want or need to have a presence on all channels. It's much better to think through the objectives and realities of a social media presence and decide against it than it is to establish one and then allow it to lie fallow. It's also fine to close down accounts that are no longer meeting your needs.

Make sure you consider channels together. How will your professional Twitter account work with your YouTube account? Do they have the same audiences with different content, or potentially different audiences for the same content? Will the same person/people be responsible for it? How will you coordinate them?

Don't assume that you can set up a social media profile and it will look after itself. Social media requires investment in time, often on a daily basis. There's no set rule for how often you need to post, but it should look as if it is being maintained when people visit it. Don't post for the sake of it, but don't be afraid of repeating posts about the same thing, particularly on Twitter when tweets will disappear quickly out of your followers' timelines.

Names, appearance and branding

If you decide to use multiple platforms, it's a good idea to keep your appearance consistent across all social media channels so that you are recognisable. For example, the St Anne's College accounts display our beaver mascot and feature photographs of College across both Facebook and Twitter.

Try as much as possible to keep your name consistent across all profiles to reduce confusion.

Channels come with the option of including a short bio. Always fill this in – it's an opportunity to grab the attention of your audience. Write the bio in the first person – social media is all about being human. Take advantage of the opportunity to link back to your research group pages on the St Anne's College website.

People may decide whether to follow/like/subscribe to a channel within seconds, so make it easy for them to see what you're about.

Who tweets? Teams and working

In terms of who actually has access to accounts, it's a good idea to keep this to a handful of people at most, for example research group pages. This is to ensure that the style and tone of your social media content has some consistency (therefore helping you build and maintain a 'voice') and so that you know who is responsible for each piece of communication which goes out. It also reduces the chance of duplication and confusion. You might want to create a rota for who is looking after social media on particular days.

Tone and style

One of the things that sets social media apart from some other communications activities is that it's an opportunity — and a requirement — to be human.

Try to adopt an informal, conversational style. It's a chance to engage with people on a personal level, as if you were talking to them at a conference.

Be respectful. This may be an informal space, but offensive language, personal insults and other disrespectful behaviour are just as unacceptable here as in your work environment. Remember that you're representing the College and yourselves.

Emoji

Emoji offer the opportunity to be more informal, save space in character-restricted contexts, and highlight posts by drawing the eye. Beware the double meaning of some emoji though.

Remember that the same emoji present differently on different devices and platforms, so avoid using ones that differ greatly between platforms and run the risk of being misinterpreted.

Emojipedia shows how different emoji look in different systems.

Our use of emoji should be a natural extension of how we speak anyway, and use those that we think will resonate with and be understandable by our audience. Assuming that only a small portion of our audience will be extensive emoji users, we should therefore keep things simple.

Emoji should be part of a post, rather than making up the entire thing. Use them sparingly and with impact, rather than making posts completely unreadable.

What and when to post

Remember that social media is about being part of a community — as well as posting your own content, share interesting and relevant things of others that you think your followers might be interested in.

Another important part of being a community member is crediting people. If you've found out about something from another social media account, say so. If you're using [creative commons](#) licensed images, add a credit.

As well as sending out information, take a look at what other people are saying and, if appropriate, get involved. Carve out your niche. Produce content about what you — or your group — know. Add value by contributing expert views and opinions. But take the opportunity to be human and go off-topic occasionally as well.

Try to avoid automated posting, particularly the obvious kind where the same content is posted across all your social networks. For example, though it saves time, it can look obvious if all your tweets are being posted to your Facebook page using a service like Hootsuite.

Keep things brief. Even on channels where you have no constraints on how much you write, less is often more, particularly on Twitter and Facebook.

Engaging with comments and questions

One of the aspects of social media that people are most concerned about is opening up to engagement with your audience — both positive and negative. But this is the whole point of social media, so you should be prepared to interact with people.

Sometimes people might mention you in a negative way, or in a way that is clearly intended to draw you into a difficult debate, but which is not a direct question. At this stage, deciding whether to reply is dependent on whether the account appears to exist purely or largely to cause trouble, and whether there is misinformation that requires correction.

Remember, some comments are not worthy of a response, and I'd not recommend responding to comments which are abusive. Sometimes you may start to engage with someone and it will become clear that you're not going to be able to have a constructive conversation, in which case it's fine to stop the interaction, or suggest that it is moved to another medium. If you're concerned about an interaction, get in touch with the Communications Officer for support.

If you receive responses that are difficult to deal with within character limits, or look like there may be better discussed in private, you can suggest they email — it's generally not a good idea to have an argument in public (unless you want to do so to demonstrate your position on something).

Hashtags

Hashtags are used largely on Twitter and Instagram as a way of collecting together posts on a particular topic e.g. #cellimaging. It's a good idea to use a hashtag if appropriate because they can make searching easier (though anyone searching for the words 'cell imaging' in search bar would obviously find those tweets too). Try not to use more than a couple of hashtags in one tweet — they change the colour of the words, so using too many can render a tweet unreadable.

Where hashtags really come into their own is for events, whether they are real-world conferences or scheduled Twitter Q&As. When lots of people from a conference are tweeting using the same hashtag, their collective tweets can become a useful resource for people who couldn't attend the event, or as ways of identifying themes within a conference itself (they also help with arranging to meet up afterwards). Some hashtags will have a short life specifically for one event, others such as #MRCFestival have longevity.

When choosing a hashtag:

- Make it unique (or as close to unique as possible). The whole point of hashtags is that they help to cut through the noise. Check what's available – if the acronym for your research symposium is also used as a hashtag to discuss dog grooming and DIY, it's not going to be of much use!
- Make it short. People don't want to use valuable characters on using your hashtag – make it easy for them (and yourself).
- Make it relevant (and therefore more memorable). #d3pf9 may be unique, but it's not going to be easy to remember as the hashtag for a conference on open data, or help people know what you're talking about.
- Think about future-proofing a hashtag. If your event is called Cell Splash and you'd like to run it on a yearly basis, are #CellSplash2021 and #CellSplash2022 free of any conflicts or does it pull up something already in existence?
- Before you invent a hashtag think: 'Do I really need one? Will it get used?' If not consider using a topic hashtag. For example "Heard about lots of great #immunology research today at our event."

Tweet in good time to let people know what your hashtag is, and use it in any promotional material you produce. If you don't make up a hashtag, someone else might, so it's best to make it fit in with your theme.

Evaluation

You can only evaluate your success on social media if you know what your objectives were in the first place.

For example, if you've stated that your aim for your Twitter account is to engage with and stimulate discussion among a specific research community, you'll want to be looking at parameters like the kinds of followers you have (ie whether they are in that community), the engagement rates for your tweets, and your rates for responding rather than broadcasting. Your number of Twitter followers is less important, because the people you're trying to reach are relatively small in number and finite.

If, on the other hand, you've stated that you want to reach a broad public audience with the aim of boosting attendees at your annual science festival, the overall number of followers is more important, as is looking at the number of festival attendees and asking them where they heard about the event.

At a smaller scale, you can use analytics to look at which of your tweets, Facebook posts etc has done the 'best' in terms of what you think is most important (ie the reach of a particular post or engagement in terms of clicks, favourites and likes). This will help you understand what your audience is interested in and how it likes information to be presented.

Most social media channels offer a basic level of analytics for free. Twitter's analytics can be found at analytics.twitter.com. If you're logged in to Twitter, it will take you straight to an analytics dashboard. Facebook and YouTube analytics can be found in the dashboard.

Before you hit tweet...

- Is that definitely the most engaging way you can express that idea?
- Could it be shorter/simpler and say the same thing?
- Is there a picture/video/audio? If so, can we use it and how should we credit it? Who should we tag in the picture?
- Have you added an image description for accessibility (this is known as alt text, which screen-readers can read in place of images).
- Are there any relevant hashtags?
- Which handles could you include to increase reach? Could you tag someone in the photo?
- Is this the best time to tweet this particular thing? If not, schedule.