Twitter is a micro-blogging service that lets you post status updates of your activities, known as ‘tweets’. The nature of twitter is that tweets need to be short and sweet as tweets can only contain **140 characters or less**, including spaces and punctuation. It is useful as a communication tool for concise messages or links to longer messages and news items.

On Twitter, you can follow the updates of people, events or topics you are interested in by **Following** them. People may choose to follow you in return and this allows you to share ideas, links and information with your ‘followers’ and the public in real time. Twitter can be a powerful communication tool that you can use in a number of different ways and many universities already have a twitter presence.

Below is a screen capture of [Dr Karl’s twitter stream](https://twitter.com/DrKarl). Let’s take a look at the different sections of a twitter page.

- Your most recent tweet appears in larger text at the top of the page.
- Older tweets appear down the page, chronologically.
- If you want to follow a person, click on the **Follow** icon below their name.
- A person’s name, location and biography is displayed over here.
- The number of followers you have is recorded here.
- The number of tweets you have posted is listed here.
- The people that you are following are listed here.
- You can sign up to the RSS feed for tweets too.
So… can anyone tweet?

Yes.

If you want to try out Twitter then access the [http://twitter.com](http://twitter.com) website and sign up for a free account. Once you’ve signed up, try searching for your colleagues or topics of interest. Once you find some people you’re interested in following, simply click on the ‘Follow’ button to follow their status updates. That’s it!

Then start posting your own tweets.

Tweet like a pro

Once you start using Twitter you’ll need a grasp of the (tw)erminology so that you know what people are talking about. There are a few conventions which allow you to do different things.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Follow a user</th>
<th>To receive updates on twitter you need to <strong>Follow</strong> people. You can choose to follow as many, or as few, as you like.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Popular tweeters like <a href="http://twitter.com/barackObama">@barackObama</a> and <a href="http://twitter.com/StephenFry">@StephenFry</a> have millions of followers, but don’t let that dissuade you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentions and replies</td>
<td>To reply to another user or mention them within a tweet, simply add an ‘@’ symbol before their username. The user who has been mentioned in your tweet will be able to see what you’ve posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT or ReTweet</td>
<td>Many users like the RT feature of Twitter which lets you <strong>ReTweet</strong> what somebody else has posted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorites</td>
<td>If you discover tweets that you really like, you can choose to <strong>Favorite</strong> them (just as you can with webpages). This allows you to quickly and easily find them again.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hashtags (#)

But how do you find anything of importance or relevance, given the vast amount of information, both useful and useless, that is being tweeted every day? This is where hashtags come into play. A hashtag is the ‘#’ symbol followed by a key term which can be used to keep track of an event or topic.

This means that if anyone searches for ‘#blendedlearning’, then all of the tweets with that hashtag will appear.
Uses of Twitter in Teaching and Learning

So how can you harness the power of Twitter in your teaching? You can use Twitter in a number of different ways:

- See what the world is tweeting about (via trending topics and #tags)
- Keep up to date with breaking news and current affairs (the Kevin Rudd #spill of the Australian leadership was broken first by a journalist via twitter)
- Ask your students to use a hashtag whenever posting on topics relating to your unit. This will enable students to search for your unit’s hashtag and allow them to share and compile useful resources and ideas.
- You can use a widget to embed a twitter feed within your Blackboard unit.
- Ask students to tweet queries to a live twitter stream during your classes. Although this does need to be managed effectively; in-class tweets can provide you with the opportunity to answer questions just in time. Take a look at this post with recommendations on 'In-Class Tweeting in a large lecture class'.
- Find out what’s going on at online conferences that you are unable to attend by following the conference hashtags and keynote speakers.
- Twitter allows you to engage with professionals who you may never get the opportunity to meet or interact with in the real world. Following professionals in your field can provide you (and your students) with insight into different fields of interest, both personal and professional.

From an academic’s point of view; there are ‘7 Things you should know about Micro-blogging’ (Educause).

Another great site to bookmark and explore is How to use Twitter for Social Learning. This site contains over 200 + articles and resources about using Twitter for Learning and is a great resource.

Different Twitter Applications

There are multiple ways to use and access twitter; from logging into the Twitter.com website to tweeting via an app off your iPhone or your iPad or Blackberry.

But all you really need is access to a web browser connected to the Internet.

However, many people prefer the convenience of tweeting from a mobile phone. This has the added benefit of letting you capture photos or media to include within your tweets. It also means that you have the flexibility to tweet information while not being tied to your computer (which let’s face it, doesn’t make for the most interesting tweets!).

There are lots of great (free) Twitter applications out there. Check out the Top 21 Twitter Applications according to TechCrunch.

Want to learn more about Twitter?
Check out some of the following online resources:
• **Twitter from a newbie’s perspective** – Kathleen McGeady is a primary school teacher in Victoria, Australia. Read about her experiences and suggestions regarding using Twitter for the first time.

• **The Twitter Guide Book** – Mashable provides a comprehensive guide book explaining everything from the Basics of Twitter, to how to build your Twitter community, Twitter for Business, Sharing on Twitter and how to Manage your Twitter Stream.

• **50 Ways to Use Twitter in the Classroom** – Here are 50 ideas on ways in which you can incorporate Twitter into important and lasting lessons.

• **The only twitter applications list you’ll ever need** – Twitter clients, services and applications you can use to get the most out of Twitter.

• **Top 7 Twitter Tutorials on YouTube** - "Whether you want to get your best friend started on Twitter or want the scoop on some of Twitter’s best desktop apps, these YouTube videos will keep you entertained while educating you about various aspects of the Twitterverse."

Do you use Twitter at Curtin? If you’d like to share your experiences and how you are utilising Twitter within (or outside of) the university, [send us an email](mailto:) and let us know what you’re doing. We’d love to write about you and add you to the [Case Studies](#) section of the Centre for eLearning website.