

**What is Twitter?** Twitter is an online news and social networking service where users post and interact with messages known as tweets.

**Why use Twitter?** Twitter benefits from being a relatively open platform. Think of it like the yellow pages of the internet. Twitter democratizes conversation by allowing you to connect and communicate with others around the world without having to “follow” them like you would on other social media networks.

## Hashtags

*hashtag: A word or phrase preceded by a pound symbol (#) used within a post on social media to identify a topic or keyword and facilitate a search for it.*

Whenever a social media user includes a hashtag in their message, it can become indexed and discoverable on the social network by other users. When users click on a hashtag, they are directed to a page that aggregates use of that hashtag in real-time. This gives users access to other ongoing conversations surrounding the topic in question.

Including a hashtag in a post is as easy as typing a hash mark or pound sign (#) before a word or phrase (without spaces or punctuation). Hashtags are not case sensitive. The most important thing is to include the pound/hash sign!

**Remember, the primary functions of a hashtag are categorization and discoverability.** If your account is public, anyone on the social network can find your post when searching the hashtag. Likewise, to ensure that other accounts can see your message, make your Twitter account(s) public.



**Note:** On Twitter, as long as your account is public and your tweets aren't protected, your posts will show up in a hashtag search. Having your tweets listed as public is Twitter's default profile setting.

## Twitter basics

**Character limit:** Twitter only gives you 280 characters to compose your tweet. So, when writing tweets, don't save the best for last. Put your most valuable information front and center! Remember that if you're including a link in your tweet, the link will account for 23 characters. Photos no longer count toward your character count.

**How to compose a tweet:** Start by typing in the “What's happening?” box above your feed. You can also compose a tweet by clicking the tweet button on the top right corner of your screen.



**Pro tip:** Enhance your tweet with photos (up to four), videos, GIFs and polls. For best results, hold your camera horizontally when taking pictures and shooting videos that you'd like to post. Also, take pictures of people engaged in an activity or conversation. No one wants to see a picture of the back of people's heads.



**Handle/username:** Everyone on Twitter has a unique username (or handle). In order to talk to someone on Twitter, you have to address them by their username preceded by an @ symbol. For example, @AmerMedicalAssn is our username.



**Profile picture vs. cover photo:** A profile photo is the thumbnail that accompanies all of your tweets. Your cover photo is the big banner photo on your profile.

**Favorite:** Favorites are when someone clicks the little heart underneath your tweet. Favorite a tweet to show your agreement and/or appreciation. Favorites are also used for easy reference later on. You can go back and find the tweet in your “likes” tab. Note: Likes are public.



**Verified accounts:** A verified account is an account that has been deemed “legitimate” by Twitter. This helps clear up confusion between an actual brand, celebrity or journalist’s account and copycats. The AMA is verified. Verified accounts have a blue checkmark next to their handle.

**RT vs. Quote retweet:** A RT = retweet without comment. A quote retweet is a retweet with your own comment (or commentary) added, which will appear as coming from your handle above the original tweet you’re retweeting.

**Reply:** If you want to reply to someone who has posted an update on Twitter, just start your message with @[their handle] to direct it “at” them. However, remember this isn’t a private conversation!



**Pro tip:** When beginning a tweet with a handle, if you want your message to go out to all of your followers, make sure you include a period or some type of message in front of the “@”—otherwise, it will only go out to your mutual followers.

### Examples:

- @AmerMedicalAssn, do you have any recommended resources on combating physician #burnout?
- Hi @AmerMedicalAssn, I was discussing the implications of physician #burnout with my colleagues. Do you have any helpful resources on this topic?

**Mention:** When your tweet includes someone's handle, you are "mentioning" them. When someone tweets using your handle, that is them "mentioning" you. You can filter notifications by mentions.

**Direct message (DM):** In addition to public tweets, you can start a private conversation or group conversation with anyone who follows you. Additionally, anyone you don't know can send you a direct message if you've opted to receive direct messages from anyone or you've previously sent that person a direct message. To access the direct message function, navigate to the "Message" button located under the profile picture of another Twitter user.



**Pro tip:** You can receive messages from anyone if you check the box next to "Receive direct messages from anyone" in your [privacy and safety settings](#).



**Pro tip:** Anyone in a conversation can send direct messages to the group, and everyone in a group can see all messages even if everyone doesn't follow each other.



**Pro tip:** In group conversations anyone in the conversation can add other participants. However, newly added participants won't see the prior history of the conversation.

**Trends:** The most popularly used hashtags at the moment are considered to be "trending" on Twitter. You can see this list by looking at the column "Trends for You" located on the left-hand side of your screen.

**Lists:** Lists of Twitter users are a great way to arrange users—and their conversations—according to a similar characteristic or interest(s). You can create your own lists or view lists created by others. Lists can also be public or private.



**Pro tip:** Click [here](#) to access a list of AMA-affiliated twitter accounts, and click [here](#) to access our "First Follow" list—some of our go-to Twitter accounts for the latest in health care news.

**Follow the AMA on Twitter: @AmerMedicalAssn and @AMAmestudents**