



THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO TWITTER

(Don't Panic)



By Karan Bhatt
Final Year MBBS

Twitter 101

What is Twitter?

Twitter is a free online service that allows its users to write and read brief 140-character messages called “tweets” to be seen by friends, or “followers”. It was founded in 2006 and has gone from strength to strength since then, growing into a social networking juggernaut. The service boasts hundreds of millions of users, and broadcasts half a billion tweets every day worldwide. It is one of the top ten most visited sites on the entire Internet and it has truly revolutionised the way in which information is disseminated on the web.

How do people use Twitter?

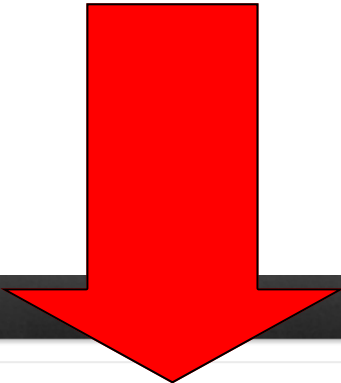
- ⇒ **To connect:** Most people start tweeting to establish connections and be a part of Twitter’s community, or just to get their voices heard. Twitter allows its hundreds of millions of users across the globe to hear each other’s thoughts and connect with people with similar ideas, interests, and passions.
- ⇒ **To record:** Some people tweet to take notes on life—at conferences, events, or just walking around. Twitter can allow you to jog your own memory later about something that happened or something new you discovered. Everyone who follows you knows about it, and you’ve a way of remembering it too.
- ⇒ **To share:** Some people use Twitter to share what they know or what they read online. They may tweet links to great articles and resources or interesting items, or they may tweet original thoughts, ideas, and tricks. Some tweet notes from speeches or classes, and others share snippets of their inner monologue. Even with so many users, someone is bound to find it informative or interesting.
- ⇒ **To stay in touch:** Twitter can send public or private notes to your friends. Connecting via Twitter is a great way to preserve an initial contact, such as at an event or conference, in a way that lets you gradually get to know them more over time.


Where do I start?

You can get going in a couple of easy steps:

- 1) Create a profile on *www.Twitter.com*—all you need is an email address.
- 2) Create a username that *describes you best but is also short—fewer than 15 characters is ideal*. Remember that Twitter is all about brevity. For example, @Y5admin would be much better than @YearFiveAdministration, or @EthicsUCLMS better than @EthicsatUniversityCollegeMedicalSchool. You can also change your username at any time if you're unhappy with it by going into the settings menu.

And you're away!



 Have an account? [Sign in](#) ▼

Join Twitter today.

Enter your first and last name.

☒ Keep me signed-in on this computer.

By clicking the button, you agree to the terms below:

These Terms of Service ("Terms") govern your access to and use of the services, including our various websites, SMS, APIs, email notifications,

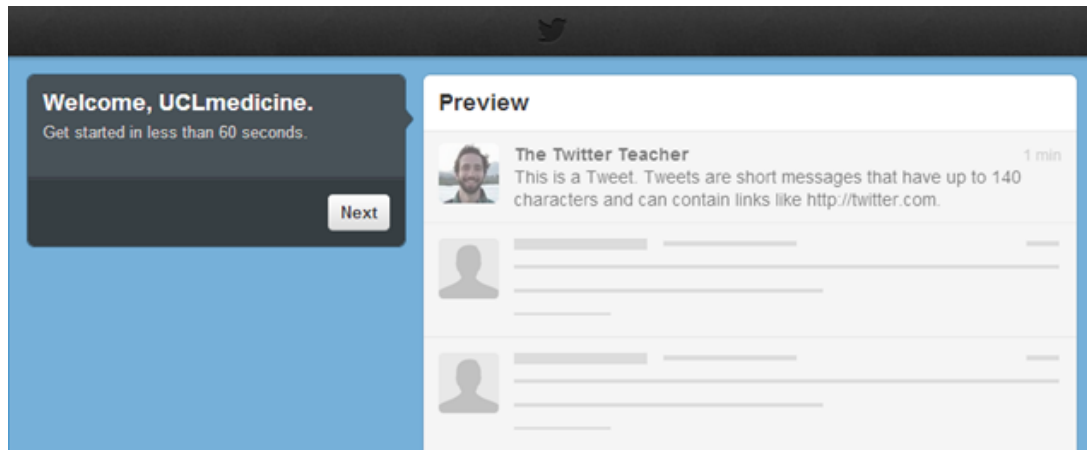
Printable versions:
[Terms of Service](#) · [Privacy Policy](#)

[Create my account](#)

Note: Others will be able to find you by name, username or email. Your email will not be shown publicly. You can change your privacy settings at any time.

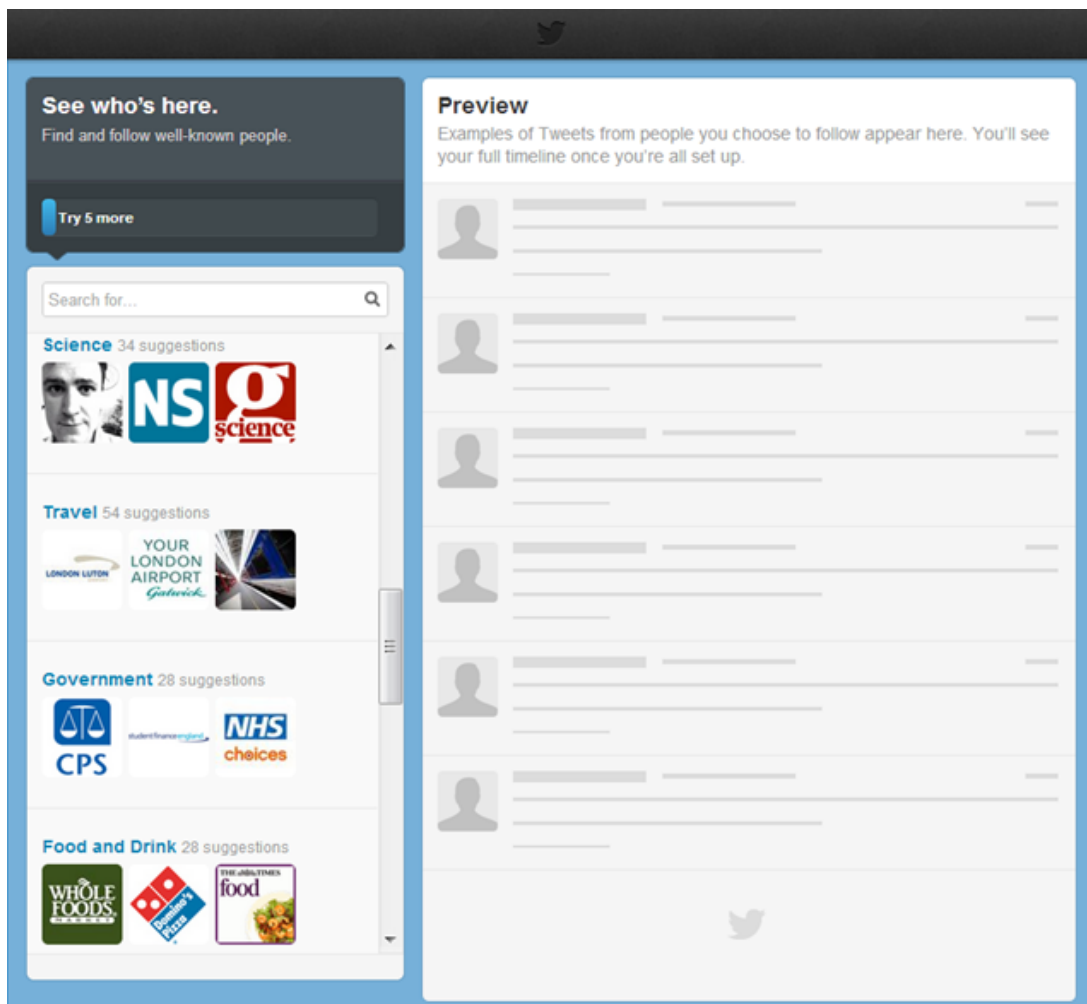
What do I do next?

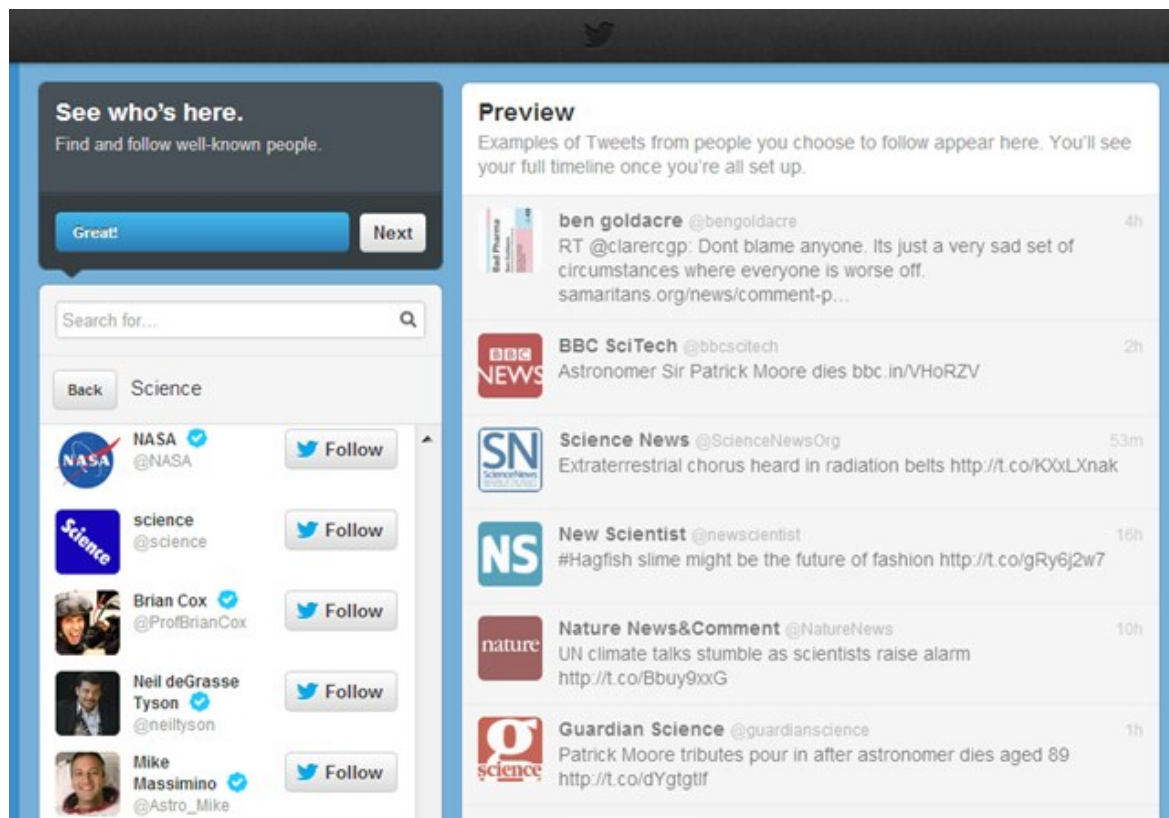
Once you've decided on a username, you have to go through a few **short formalities** before you can start tweeting. I've created an example account called **@UCLmedicine** to illustrate my examples below. First you get a welcome screen, like this:



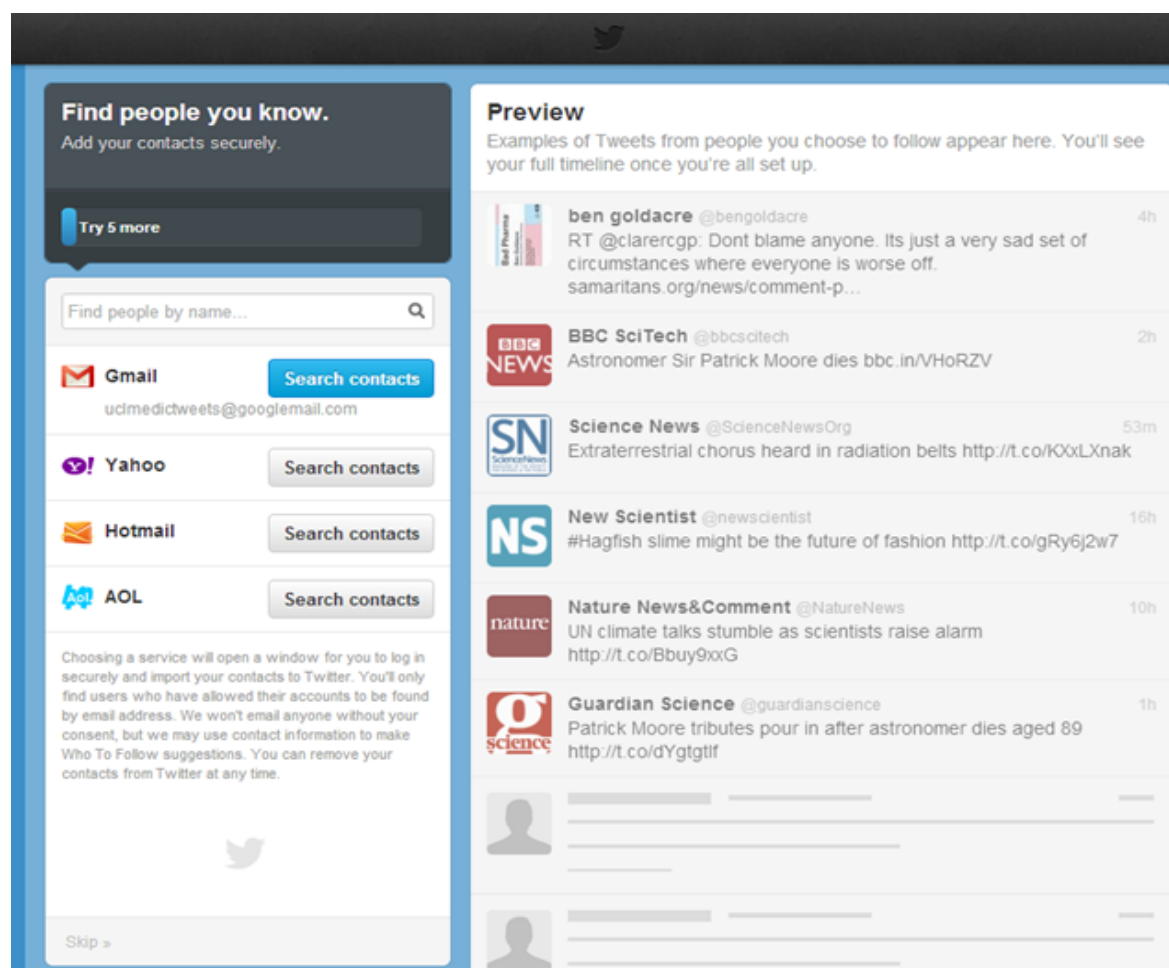
Then you're asked to follow at least five people, choosing from various **areas of interest**. I've chosen a few from the science section, as you'll see.

Then click "Next".

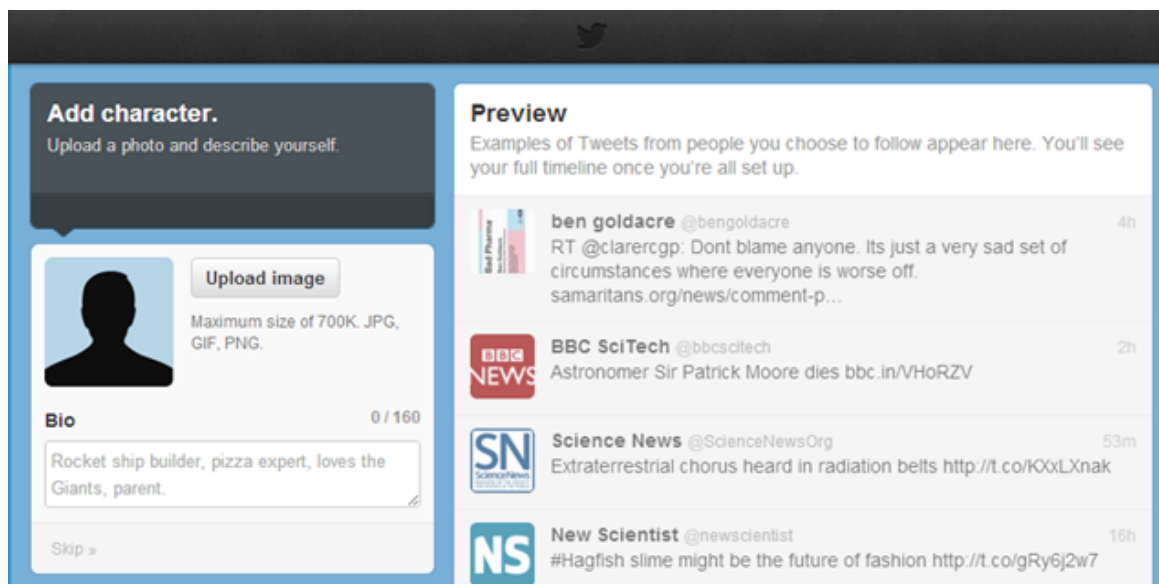




You can then decide to search from people from your email contacts, if you like. Alternatively, just click "Skip »" in the bottom-left corner to progress to the next stage.



Next it's time for you to upload an image for your account and write a brief description for your bio. This makes you as identifiable as you want to be—by your name and role, or just by specific interests, for example. You can skip through this stage, as with the last, but I highly recommend that you at least write a couple of brief sentences, and then click "Done".



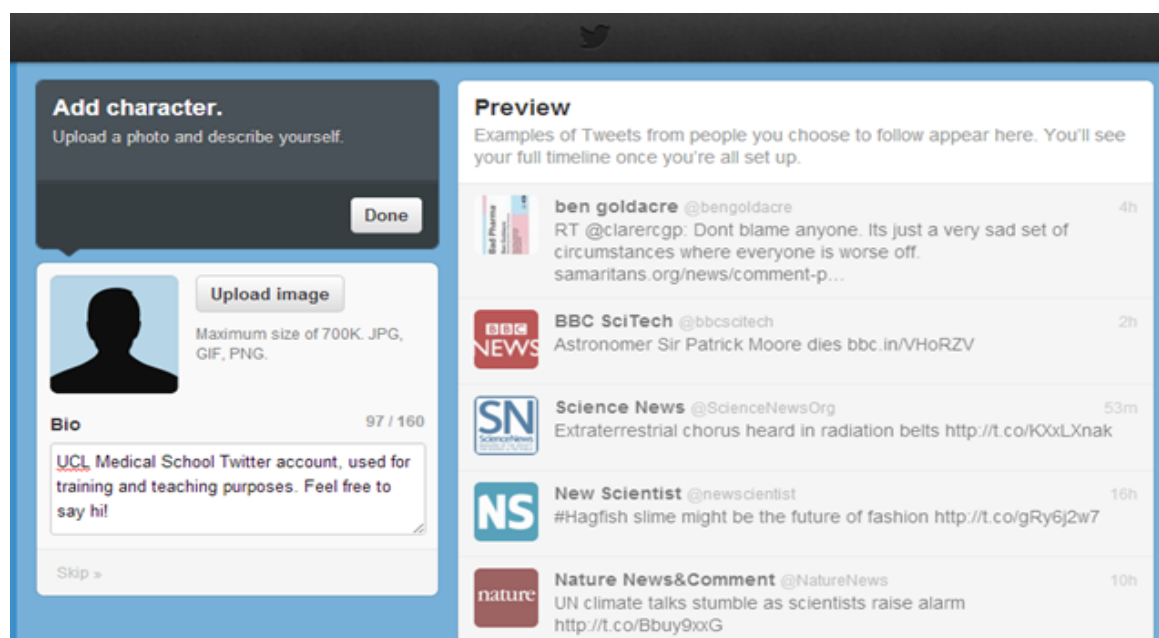
Add character.
Upload a photo and describe yourself.

Upload image
Maximum size of 700K. JPG, GIF, PNG.

Bio 0 / 160
Rocket ship builder, pizza expert, loves the Giants, parent.

Preview
Examples of Tweets from people you choose to follow appear here. You'll see your full timeline once you're all set up.

- ben goldacre** @bengoldacre 4h
RT @clarercgp: Dont blame anyone. Its just a very sad set of circumstances where everyone is worse off. samaritans.org/news/comment-p...
- BBC SciTech** @bbcsdtech 2h
Astronomer Sir Patrick Moore dies bbc.in/VHoRZV
- Science News** @ScienceNewsOrg 53m
Extraterrestrial chorus heard in radiation belts <http://t.co/KXxLXnak>
- New Scientist** @newsdentist 16h
#Hagfish slime might be the future of fashion <http://t.co/gRy6j2w7>



Add character.
Upload a photo and describe yourself.

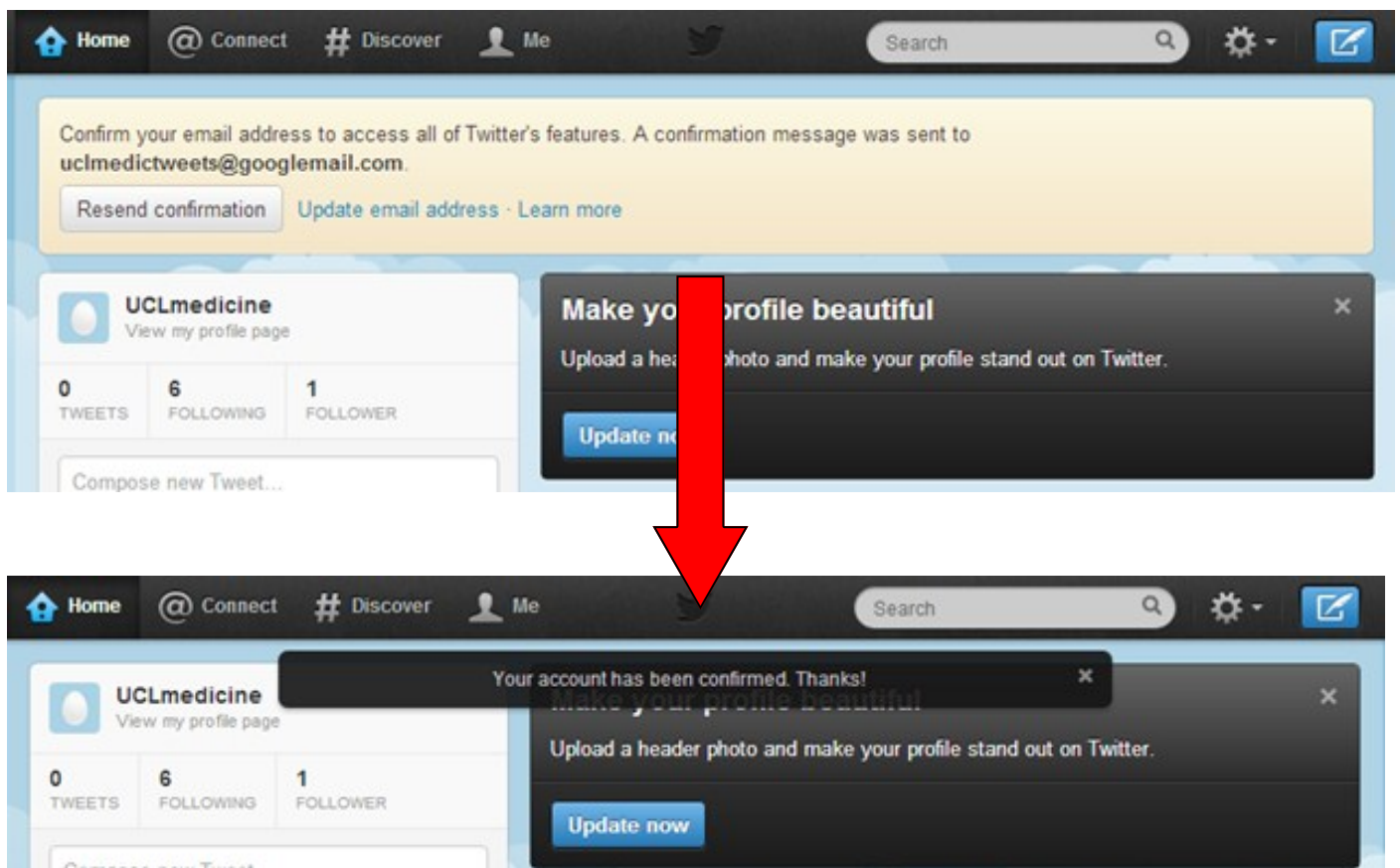
Upload image
Maximum size of 700K. JPG, GIF, PNG.

Bio 97 / 160
UCL Medical School Twitter account, used for training and teaching purposes. Feel free to say hi!

Preview
Examples of Tweets from people you choose to follow appear here. You'll see your full timeline once you're all set up.

- ben goldacre** @bengoldacre 4h
RT @clarercgp: Dont blame anyone. Its just a very sad set of circumstances where everyone is worse off. samaritans.org/news/comment-p...
- BBC SciTech** @bbcsdtech 2h
Astronomer Sir Patrick Moore dies bbc.in/VHoRZV
- Science News** @ScienceNewsOrg 53m
Extraterrestrial chorus heard in radiation belts <http://t.co/KXxLXnak>
- New Scientist** @newsdentist 16h
#Hagfish slime might be the future of fashion <http://t.co/gRy6j2w7>
- Nature News&Comment** @NatureNews 10h
UN climate talks stumble as scientists raise alarm <http://t.co/Bbuy9xxG>

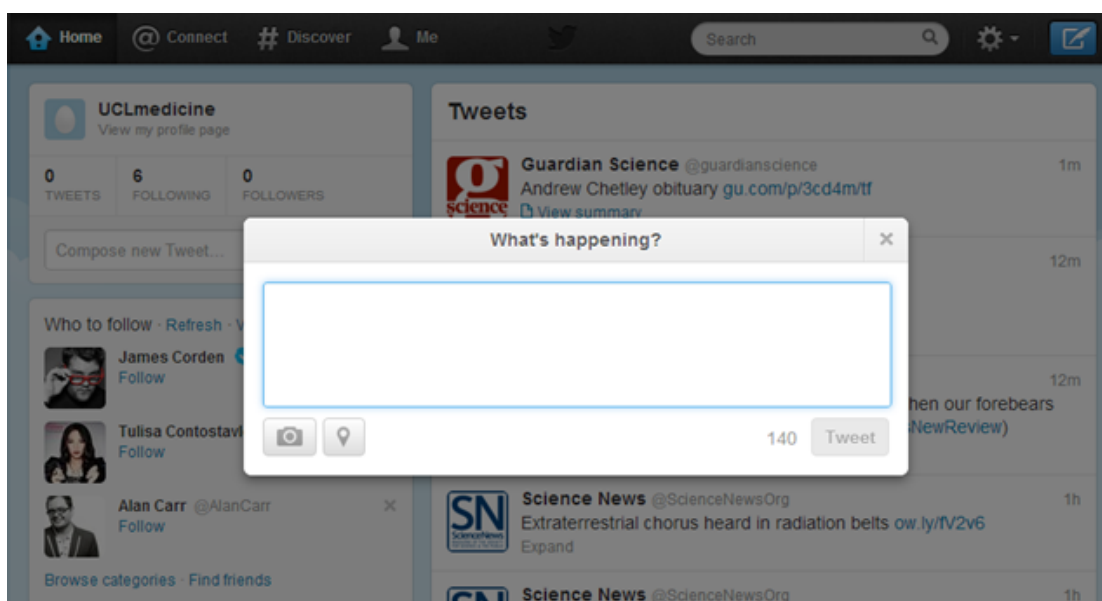
You're almost ready to go. You just need to **confirm your email address**. Twitter will have sent an email to your address, you just need to click the link in the email and sign in to Twitter. Then, hey presto:



You can now write your first tweet! Just click in the white box on your home page, and click tweet when you're done. You can click the camera button to upload a photo with your tweet, or the pin button to tag your location:



Alternatively, you can click the blue box with a quill in the top right-hand corner of the screen, and this produces a new tweet box to write in. Again. Just fill in the box, share a picture or location if you choose, and click "Tweet":



You can also **post links when you tweet**. As you might have noticed, though, **web addresses** (or “URLs”, as they’re formally known) **can be quite long**, and may even be longer than 140 characters on their own. **So Twitter has the neat habit of shortening any links for you**. They may look a bit strange, but don’t worry, they still lead to the same place. Although there’s no harm in double-checking, just in case...

Another trick you can use is to **go to a URL-shortening website yourself**, to create a **custom shortened URL** for a link if you so fancy. For example, **http://is.gd/** is a fantastic URL shortener you can visit, and by clicking “custom URL”, you can copy-paste a link into the top box and choose what you want it to look like when shortened in the box underneath. For example:



Custom short URLs must be between 5 and 30 characters long.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WzDp4

<http://is.gd/>

☐ Log statistics for this link

Shorten!



[Home](#) [News](#) [FAQ](#) [Software](#) [Developers](#) [Contact](#)

Your shortened URL is:

<http://is.gd/aboutucl>

Your shortened URL goes to: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WzDp4XE-ik



A Friendly Word of Warning

*If you select the “**protect my updates**” box in your settings, only people you allow to follow you can read your tweets—otherwise, anyone in the world who knows your username can read your content.*

This sounds frightening, but actually it **allows you to engage with others** more easily and get the most out of Twitter. A good rule of thumb is—be sure **not to post anything** that you wouldn't be **happy for your mum to see**, be happy to **shout in King's Cross station**, or be happy for a **future employer to see**. This is especially true if you upload pictures to the service, or tag your home location publicly before you tweet you're going away for two weeks' holiday. I would advise not tagging your location as I'm not sure it really adds any value.

After all, if you have an **open profile**, you don't know if the people following you (or even reading your tweets without following you directly) are your **friends, medical students, your family, lecturers or patients**. If you post that you are out drinking at 2am, and then that you are in surgery at 6am, think about how professional that does (or doesn't) look. This could **potentially lead to a Fitness to Practise issue**.

It's **common for people to have multiple accounts on Twitter**—you can always have a **public professional one** and a **protected one for family and friends**. This also helps **neatly separate the differing professional and personal interests** that you may follow, too. If you want to protect your tweets, go to your **account settings** and **tick this box**:

Tweet privacy ☐ **Protect my Tweets**

If selected, only those you approve will receive your Tweets. Your future Tweets will not be available publicly. Tweets posted previously may still be publicly visible in some places. [Learn more.](#)

Jargon Buster

So, you have an account, and you know how to tweet—hooray! But Twitter's not just about tweeting. There's a plethora of other functions, and unspoken etiquette that users are expected to follow. Before we guide you through this, there are a few definitions you need to know.

Tweet	<i>A message, 140 characters or shorter in length, that you post to Twitter</i>
Handle	<i>Another word for the username you create when you sign up</i>
@	<i>Symbol to identify accounts, allowing you to "mention" people in tweets for them to see. Just like email addresses, you need to type it word-perfect for the message to reach your intended recipient, e.g. "Hi @StephenFry!"</i>
Timeline (TL)	<i>Your timeline is where all the tweets appear from the people you follow. You can also access a personal timeline of a specific user's tweets, too</i>
RT	<i>When you copy and repeat something someone just posted, so that your followers can see it. Find a tweet you like, and press the retweet button. Alternatively, copy and paste the tweet you want, and add "RT @username:" before it, if you also want to add to it with a little comment of your own too</i>
MT	<i>Modified tweets. These are RTs that are paraphrased for brevity or clarity</i>
DM	<i>A Direct Message is a way of sending private messages to someone on Twitter—but it can only be done if the person is following you</i>
#	<i>A "hashtag" is used to organise tweets about a topic, making them easier to find. It consists of a # sign followed by letters and numbers. For example, if you're tweeting about medical education, you could type "#meded" in your tweet. Someone looking for information on medical education could then search for "#meded" and see what the world is talking about on the subject. There are many hashtags that are commonly used but you can create your own too. Note that hashtags have no spaces or punctuation, not even apostrophes.</i>
TT	<i>Trending Topics. This is a list of the most-talked about things in a particular city, country, or across the world</i>

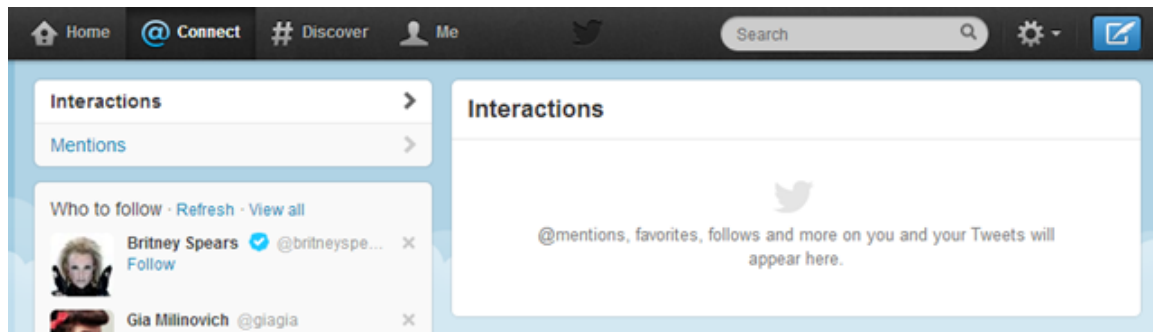
All of these functions—replying, retweeting, and even adding tweets to a favourites list—are easy to do. Just let your mouse hover over a tweet, and you can click buttons to reply, retweet, or favourite depending on what you would like to do:



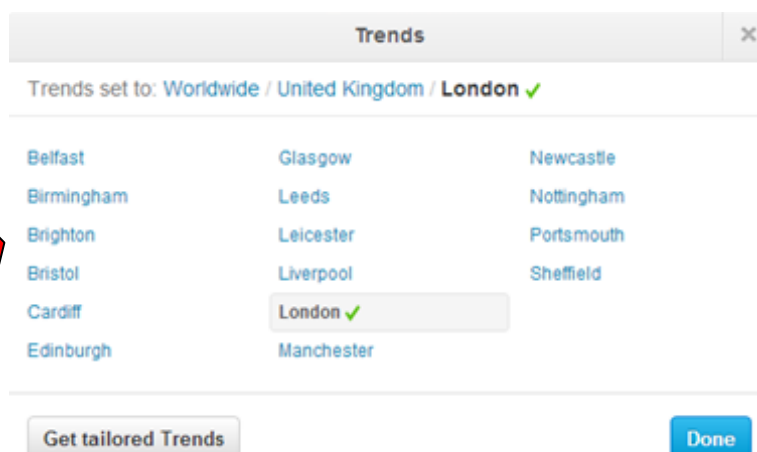
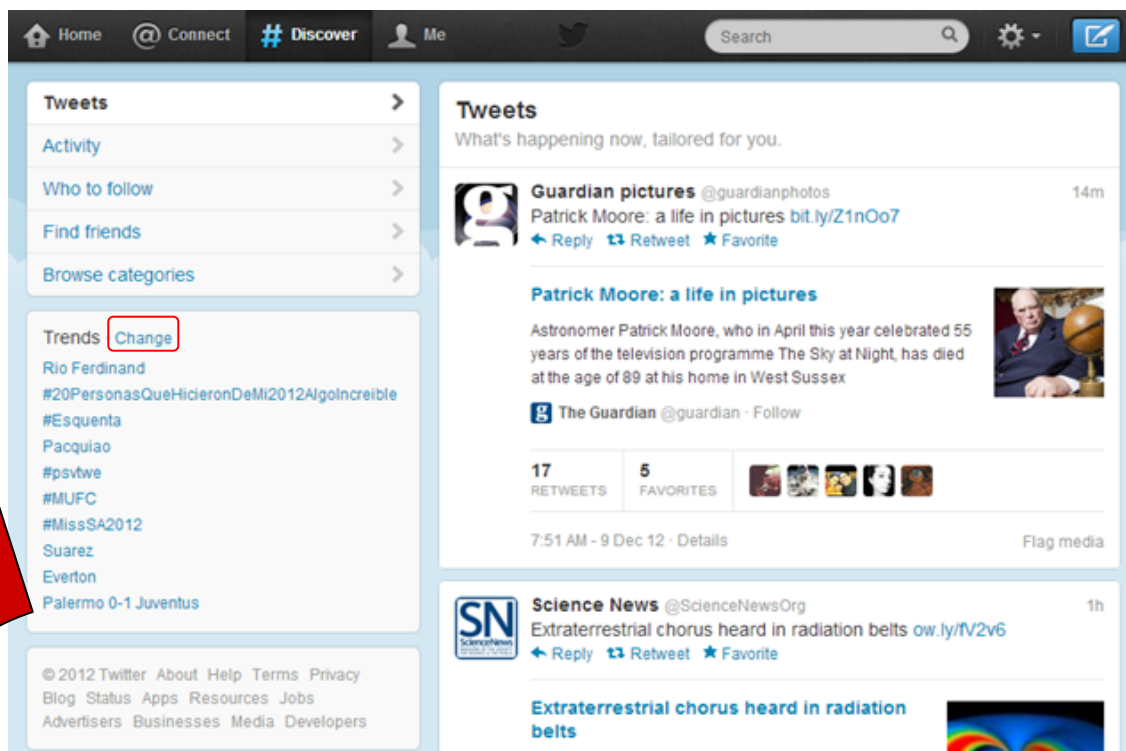
Alternatively, you can also click the box that appears when you access a user's personal page, and write in it to reply to them:



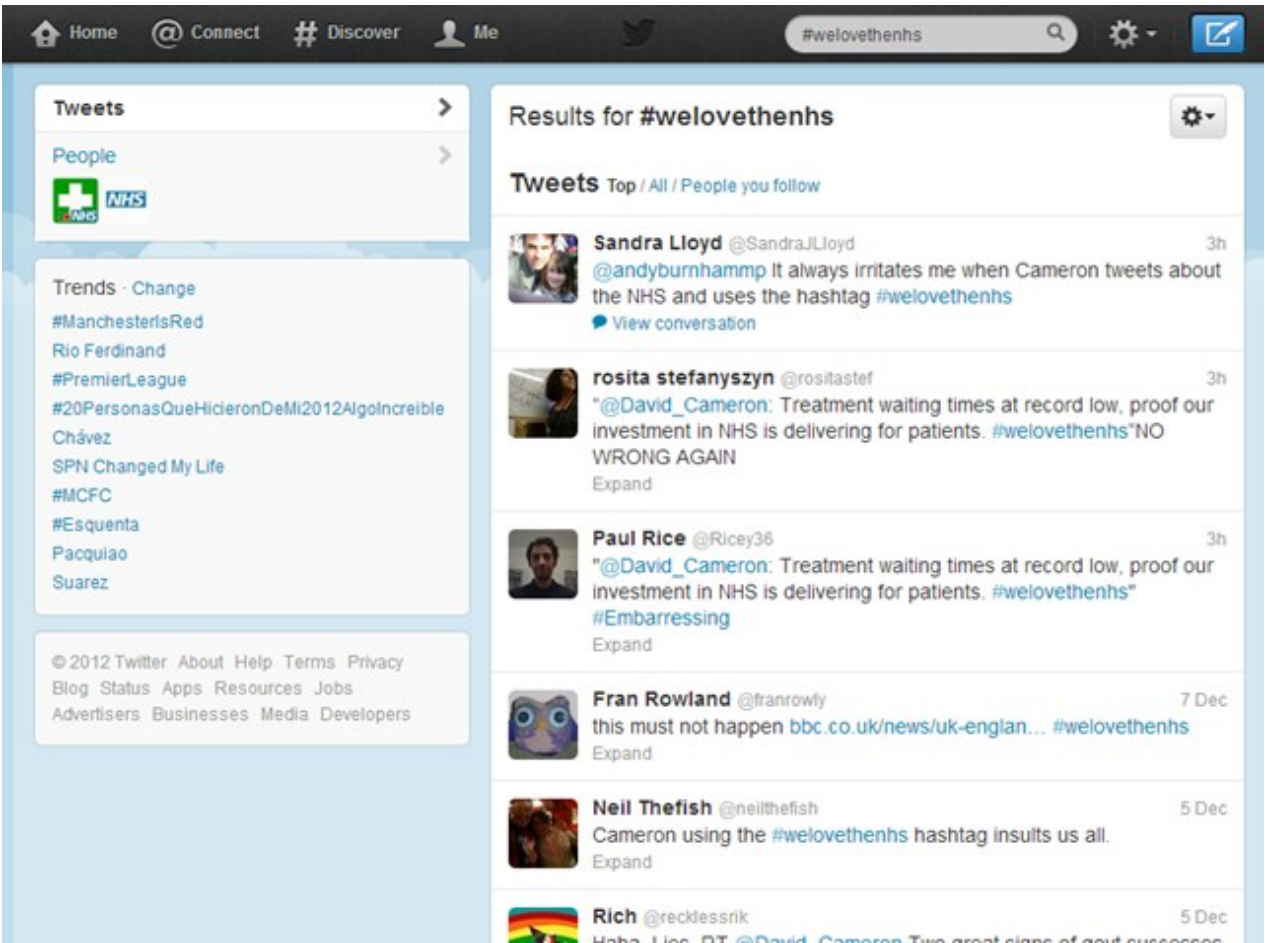
If you click the “@Connect” button in the top left, you can see all the mentions, follows and other interactions relating to you, which helps you keep up with conversations:



If you click the “#Discover” button in the top left, you can see all the main new stories happening at the moment relating to you (based on who you follow). On the left are the TT's, or Trending Topics. Again, these can be tailored to you but you can also click “Change” to see trending topics for a particular city or country.



You can also **type specific hashtags** to **search** for in the search bar at the top. I've shown the results for **#welovethenhs** below, the hashtag used both by those campaigning against the new Health and Social Care Act and, without a hint of irony, the Prime Minister:



Note that **hashtagged phrases** can be used anywhere in the **tweet**—beginning, middle or end—and still come up when searched for. So you don't **need to use it more than once**. Again, you have limited space in a tweet, so don't waste it.

Good hashtags to follow

#meded	Medical education
#ukmeded	Medical education, specific to the UK
#twitjc	Twitter Journal Club, a discussion on Sunday evenings about a specific clinical research paper
#revalidation	Widely used by UK health sector and library professionals)
#ready4reval	Revalidation readiness (GMC)
#stateofmed	State of medical education and practice report (GMC)

Twitter Tips To Keep In Mind

- Don't jump into the fray straight away. Follow your friends, any blogs you might be interested in, and any news sources. Then look at who they follow, and try and **compile a list to follow piece by piece**. Alternatively, search for hashtags which interest you, and look at those who make the most interesting comments and follow them. Then **join the conversation**.
- You don't have to read *every* tweet, respond to every mention, or reply to every direct message. Responding regularly is nice, but not compulsory. Relax.
- When you do interact, **act as you would in real life**. Be gracious. Be social. Say thanks. It's all too easy to forget that there are people on the receiving end of tweets.
- Don't use **text-speak**. There's limited space, but shortening words as you would in a text message, e.g. "C u l8r 2day?", is frowned upon (although acronyms are fine).
- Don't tweet in capital letters, IT COMES ACROSS AS THOUGH YOU'RE SHOUTING. LIKE THIS. Also, don't tweet in the third person. That's *so* Facebook...
- Promoting and chatting with others is a **great way to participate** in the community. Twitter's community feel and personal touches are what raises it above being just another news feed, and getting involved allows you to get the most out of using it.
- Mentions should ideally have lots of detail in them, so that others picking up snippets of the conversation can more easily understand the response and join in (e.g., expand "Terrible idea!" into "No, I think homeopathic treatment on the NHS is a terrible idea!").
- It's okay to **follow people you don't know** personally on Twitter—I'd even say it's recommended. They can choose whether or not to follow you back. It's also okay to unfollow people on Twitter. Following shouldn't carry the same weight as a friendship, it's merely a link showing a shared interest. Also, Twitter can "forget" follower relationships during server spring-cleans. It doesn't always mean that someone unfollowed you, so don't panic. But either way, don't fret about the numbers. It's a **case of who you know, not how many—quality over quantity**.
- Similarly, it's okay to block people who annoy or upset you. You're here to have fun!

Twitter Tips To Keep In Mind

- It's nice to credit tweeters if you're going to pass on their information, e.g. "It turns out event tonight isn't rained off after all (thanks @username for letting me know!)". Another way of saying this is "HT @username", where HT stands for "hat-tip". We're old-school on Twitter.
- Your replies, if starting with "@username", only come up on people's timelines if someone were to **follow you and one of the people you're replying to**. If you want the reply to be read by everyone who follows you, then it is generally accepted to put a full stop at the beginning (".@username") or to rearrange the sentence so that "@username" appears in the middle.
- It's **better to DM someone** if you're making personal plans or having a personal conversation.
- **Two or three hashtags per tweet max** is quite enough—**use them sparingly**. It can grate on your followers really fast if you don't...
- Lastly, and most importantly, **go mobile**. Download an app enabling you to use Twitter on the move. This can either be the official app for your smartphone platform of choice (Apple iOS, Android, or Windows Phone), or a third-party app (of which there are so, so many!). It **makes Twitter so much easier to use**, and also allows you to post thoughts as and when they come to you.

Being a relatively new phenomenon, **most medical schools in the UK don't have Twitter accounts**, although several US medical schools have employed them to great success—giving prospective students up-to-date information on the admissions process as well as clinical research, alumni news as well as upcoming events. **Let's join the conversation!**

Twitter's Role In #meded

You can use it to:

- Make announcements
- Help students to study
- Gather and share resources
- Promote activities
- Share employment opportunities
- Facilitate networking

Users you might like to follow:

- The British Medical Journal (@bmj_latest) and the Student BMJ (@StudentBMJ)
- The GMC (@gmcuk)
- Academic Centre of Medical Education at UCL (@ACMEatUCL), and staff, (@_elljay_ and @kathwoolf)
- Accounts for UCL news, alumni, and public events (@uclnews, @uclalumni, and @uclevents)
- The New England Journal of Medicine (@NEJM)
- The World Health Organisation (@WHO)
- The Health Protection Agency (@HPAuk)
- Royal College of Physicians (@RCPLondon)
- Anaesthetic Education (@gas_ed)
- Emergency Medicine (@EmergencyMedBMJ)
- The Royal Free, UCL and Whittington Hospitals (@RoyalFreeNHS, @UCLH, and @WhitHealth)
- Twitter Journal Club (@TwitJournalClub)
- Guardian Healthcare (@GdnHealthcare)



**HAPPY
TWEETING**