

## Social Media Best Practices

1. **Pick your platform.** Each site has its own audience and its own character, so base your selection on who you want to connect with and what you want to do. With more than 64% of U.S. adults using the platform, Facebook is the most popular, but Twitter and Google+ are both growing fast. LinkedIn is a good way to grow your professional network while Instagram is a great option if you want to connect through image-sharing. And don't forget the many smaller, niche social networks, such as ResearchGate and Goodreads. Find the network or networks that work best for your goals.
2. **Know your purpose.** Are you posting on social media for work or for personal use? If it is for work, be sure to review any relevant social media policies (even if it's for a personal account, part of those policies may still apply). What kind of identity do you want to cultivate, and what followers do you want to attract? For example, if you are an astronomer, you might want to share the latest space discoveries through your social media profile; or, you could focus on your love of baseball and cooking (or all three!). It's best to establish up front what you'll be talking about so you can connect with people who share your interests.
3. **The first step is to listen.** Just as you wouldn't walk into a dinner party and immediately start talking about what you want to talk about, regardless of the conversations already going on around you, your first step into social media shouldn't be to post/publish, but to listen. Familiarize yourself with the landscape first: explore the tool you're intending to use, search for conversations/communities on the issues you're interested in, etc. Then, when you're comfortable, start to contribute to the conversations that already exist to make the connections you need to start your own conversations.
4. **Add value.** There are billions of words being posted every day. To make sure yours are read, make sure you're writing something that is unique and people will value. Write what you know and provide worthwhile information and perspective.
5. **Make it a conversation.** The key word in social media is social...you're talking to people and with people, not talking at people. And while you should keep a polite tone with your readers, it should be conversational and not overly "composed." Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality and voice. People want to know you, not the company line.
6. **Create a system that allows you to manage your time.** You can set up filters, lists, and RSS feeds so you can read the information you want when you have time. Integrate this into your daily schedule, like checking your email. You can also schedule updates to go out automatically with tools such as Hootsuite, and use tools like RescueTime to help you keep track of how much time you're spending on certain tasks. Pay attention to when your issues are especially hot on social media so you can put in the time to engage when it is most relevant.
7. **Know when to engage and when to ignore.** There is a big but subtle difference between scientific debates and values-based debates—be sure you know which type you're getting into. Sometimes, people will try to goad you into a conversation that's not worth having. For more about how to engage critics, check out [Science in an Age of Scrutiny](#).
8. **Acknowledge and correct your mistakes.** Mistakes can and will happen. The important thing to do is not try to hide them, but rather acknowledge the error and correct it. In addition, if you

heavily relied on the work of other technical experts and they identify that something you released in social media outlets is incorrect, you should correct your mistake. Remember that correcting your mistake often means acknowledging but *not* deleting the original text.

9. **Always remember: There is no delete.** Anything you post online can be found by anyone for years to come. No matter how stringently you limit access to material or how quickly you delete it, once something is shared, it's possible it can be shared widely. Always keep this in mind before hitting send. As UCS's Social Media Manager Katy Love says, "If it give you pause, pause!"
10. **Follow us on social media!** You can follow us on Twitter with the Science Network: [@SciNetUCS](#), and the Union of Concerned Scientists: [@UCSUSA](#), or find us on [Facebook](#), [Google+](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

Sneak peek from "[The Science of Science in Social Media](#)" [Google+ Hangout](#):

*4 biggest misperceptions that hinder scientists as they consider social media for science communication:*

Myth #1: The most important thing you can do is get correct facts out there.

Correction: This is an underlying problem in how we approach communications called the information deficit model. This model says if we just push enough facts out there, we can solve any problem. Instead, we need to participate in a conversation and build networks where experts can answer questions for people who need information.

Myth #2: I should be playing the numbers game.

Correction: Don't worry about number of followers or number of tweets per day. Instead, focus on relationships, networks, and helping individuals who have questions you can answer.

Myth #3: Social media is overwhelming because of "information overload."

Correction: It's not information overload, it's filter failure. Be strategic when building lists, filters, and networks to easily sort information.

Myth #4: Social media connections aren't real or substantive.

Correction: You can build real relationships online. Social media can add tangible value to interactions and research. Social media can also help you identify and seek out like-minded individuals at large events, conferences, or universities, so you can connect in person. And it provides a point of entry for others who won't ever be reading scientific journals.