How to Get Started in Twitter
(for Psychoanalysts)

This 'How to' gives you some basic ideas about how using Twitter can add value to your public outreach as a psychoanalyst.

Introduction

Twitter is one of a number of different social media platforms widely used to share ideas, announce news, and make connections with people who share your interests. Positive outcomes of becoming involved with social media include:
- Practice building
- Intellectual stimulation
- Promoting the value of psychoanalysis by exposing the broader public to psychoanalytic thinking
- Importation of new ideas
- Making connections with people all over the world who share your interests.

Twitter is particularly well suited for psychoanalysts who wish to communicate in the public arena yet maintain a professional image. It is easy to learn and use. You can easily set up a professional account that doesn't include personal information. You will be in good company if you join Twitter—the Pope tweets, as do public intellectuals like Steven Pinker and Neil DeGrasse Tyson and all serious (and idiotic) politicians.

Twitter Principles
- Twitter is about **idea-casting not self-casting**. Tweet about ideas, not yourself.
  For example, "Seeing old friends at #IPALoondon2019" is not interesting. This is self-casting.

"Neuroscience meets psychoanalysis at #IPALondon2019. See update on #Freud project" is about an idea and is interesting.

- The positive culture of social media like Twitter is to **share/give away specialized knowledge**
- Think of yourself as a **public intellectual**. A person who has studied and practiced for years to understand the human mind and is willing to share your insights with the public in non clinical "conversations." I don't care if you're still a candidate, you have expertise in human motivation and behavior far beyond almost anyone else. You are an expert.

Twitter Advantages

- Training in brevity, clarity, sharpness of language and thought
- Connections to new ideas
- Connections to other thinkers
- Fits in to small spaces in your schedule
- Easy and fun
- It enables you to connect in real time with a potentially wide and diverse audience (there are some 300 million Twitter users worldwide)
- It is an easy, free way to promote events, blogs and other content you want to share
- It is a quick, easy way to show your endorsement of another tweet (and your support of other writers, thinkers, causes)
- You can respond easily with an opinion to breaking news and events

Tweeting is a valuable exercise in writing discipline as you must make your point clearly and concisely and write about complex ideas without using jargon.

Tweeting using psychoanalytic ideas

Most of your tweets will be on general subjects, for example:
- Events in the news
- Mental health news
- Your reaction to someone else's tweet
- New books, films, exhibitions etc
- An experience you had, a response to a lecture/conference etc
- Your response to topical events – Awareness Days, anniversaries.
- Your advice on coping with recurrent events (e.g. back to school, holidays)

But as a psychoanalytic commentator you want to provide a uniquely psychoanalytic slant:

- Provide in-depth understanding - we stand for 'what lies beneath'
- apply a core psychoanalytic concept to the event or issue.
- Talk about mental health conditions, treatment or consequences from a psychoanalytic point of view.

Here's one technique for thinking about how to write a Tweet with a psychoanalytic viewpoint:

Think about the event or issue you want to comment on—something that grabs your attention-- and then consider which one core psychoanalytic concept might be applicable and interesting. The list below might help you think of the core concepts that might apply in the situation you're interested in:

- Transference
- Countertransference
- Resistance
- Defense
- Conflict
- The Unconscious
- The relationship as an element of cure
- Narrative as an element of cure

Setting up your account

Account name/handle
This is how you are identified on Twitter. It always begins with the @ symbol.
For example: Dr. William Massicotte is @wjmanalyst, Dr. Jorge Bruce is @jotabruce
You set up your own account name.

Bio
When you open a Twitter account, you have the opportunity to write a brief biographical statement that identifies you and your purpose.

For example:
Dr. Jorge Bruce's account name is @jotobruce. He describes himself like this:
Psychoanalyst lost in the newspaper, the web and, last not least, the office

Prudy Gourguechon's account name is @ pgourguechon and she describes herself in her bio as: Consultant, advisor, author, speaker on the psychology of business: leadership, iinvesting, critical career changes, the new retirement. Psychoanalyst, physician. (note: bio is tailored to your intentions).

Dr. Marie Rudden: @MGRudden psychoanalyst, psychiatrist, writer, researcher. Book inhaler, horse/dog/cat lover. Dismayed by Trump.

Images—Personal photo

When you set up your account you will have the opportunity to upload a photo of yourself. This is a very good idea. People like to see who is "talking" to them. However, only do this if you have a good professional headshot, properly lit. Any photo not taken by a professional makes you look like an amateur too. (There are many reasons you should have a professional headshot if you are going to have any kind of public presence including a practice website. It's a very worthwhile investment.). If you don't have a professional headshot you can use an interesting image that reflects who you are. See @MGRudden.

Images—Background photo

You should also take the time to upload a background image to make your account look polished and individualized. Take a look at Rick Summers feed for a simple background @summersrpa.

Take a look at the background image for @Esther_Sperber's feed. She's an architect who is interested in psychoanalysis.

Or Neil deGrasse Tyson's: @neiltyson. Tyson is one of the most successful public intellectuals on Twiiter with 13.6 million followers. "Public intellectual" is what you are aiming to be.

Look at Peter Fonagy's feed. @PeterFonagy. He does not have a background image and it looks kind of dull. Though he's doing fine with over 7000 followers and has an excellent head shot.

One source for beautiful (free) background images is unsplash.com. In general, always use horizontal images.

Using Twitter – some basic terms

Twitter
Twitter is an online social networking service that enables users to send and read short messages called tweets. These can include images and links to websites.

Tweet
The message you send is a tweet. It cannot be longer than 280 characters. Twitter increased the character count from 140 to 280 in 2017. However, you should try to be closer to 140 than 280. People don't want to read a lot of copy in a tweet.

Twitter timeline

This is a list of all the tweets you receive from other people on Twitter. These are posts by the people you follow (see below). The most recent tweets are first. Depending on how frequently the people you follow post, your timeline can update very rapidly.

Hashtag (#)

A hashtag is a word or phrase used to distinguish the topic, event, concept or person referred to in the tweet.

For example #Freud #IPA #psychoanalysis. APsaA is launching a campaign to use the hashtag #TalkingHelps. For more about the campaign click here. Participating in this campaign will be very helpful in your getting the hang of Twitter.

Use hashtags so you can connect with others who are interested in the same topic.

For example, if you tweet: Think #Freud is dead? Think again and read this article on #psychoanalysis

- anyone who types in #psychoanalysis in the search box might see your tweet in their search results
- If you search for #psychoanalysis you will see:
  - tweets by everyone else in the world using the same #psychoanalysis hashtag
  - a list of accounts of individuals and organizations interested in psychoanalysis
  - photographs related to psychoanalysis.

Try it. It is amazing.

Another use of hashtags is to tie together tweets around an **event**. At a congress, you'll often see a hashtag promoted on posters or projected slides, for example #IPABoston2015. This means that everyone who is tweeting about anything they think is interesting at the IPA Congress uses this hashtag and it links together all their posts. At most professional meetings these days the organizers will post the hashtag either on a slide or in the program booklet.

Following

You chose who to follow on Twitter. When you follow someone, his or her tweets show up in your timeline. You get to see what they are thinking and what they are up to. Other people can also see who you follow.

To make the most of following:

- Aim for a range of feeds depending on your interests
- Don't just stick to psychoanalysis. See what thinkers in other fields are doing
- see who your colleagues and people you are following are following - you'll learn about interesting people and groups to follow that you would have never heard of

- Avoid extremely frequent tweeters unless you are delighted with what they have to say. You will recognize extremely frequent because that person's tweets will overwhelm your feed and bury other peoples' tweets that you want to see.
- Don't be afraid to 'unfollow'
- Follow your colleagues!
- Follow major psychoanalytic and mental health feeds @ipaonline. APsaA is @psychoanalysis_.
- Check out who decides to follow you and follow them back, but only if you are interested in them.

One way to find people to follow is to go to the profile page of a trusted or admired feed (e.g. American Psychoanalytic Association @psychoanalysis_) and click on "following". You will see all the people that person or organization is following and you can follow them too.

Followers

Your followers are people who decide they want to see your tweets.

You build a following slowly. Don't worry if you have few followers - they will come. And even if you don't, following others gives you windows into the thinking of people all over the world.

Some tips on following:
- When you get a follower, look at their feed and see if you want to follow them
- Reciprocate if appropriate (there might be people who chose to follow you who you don't want to follow because you don't want to see their tweets).
- Avoid those who are following thousands of people.
- to thank or not to thank? Some people thank every new follower, e.g. they might tweet "@sfreud, thanks for following@. This can be annoying and is not recommended on a routine basis.
- Follow first - don't worry about followers. Look for interesting people to follow.

Links

By including a link to a website in your tweet you can direct readers to more online information such as a page on your Society website, your blog, your Facebook page or a LinkedIn article.

In order to keep within the 280-character limit, use an app such as bit.ly, ow.ly or goo.gl to shorten the url.

Images

Add photos to your tweets to make them more impactful and so more likely to be noticed and read.

Images are also a way to get more information into the tweet—you can add an image of some text, for example, dodging the 280-character limit.

See our guidance about images in the 'How to blog' factsheet.

Retweeting

This is the simplest type of tweet. When you see a tweet by someone you are following that you think contains an interesting idea or information you can just click on the retweet icon and it goes out to all your followers.

Trending/ going viral

Topics which are being discussed more than others at any given time, based on the number of people clicking onto a hashtag, are said to be trending.

This is the essence of Twitter as a worldwide social medium for ideas to go 'viral' and spread organically from one person to another.

The effect is largely ephemeral but can create a campaign or body of consensus for a period of time, e.g. #saveourdaughters   #icebucketchallenge, which is picked up by other media.

A few words of caution on tweeting

- **Whose views are you giving?** If you work for an institution such as a university, hospital or government agency, anything you say can reflect on it. Check with your organization's press office for their social media policy. Make sure it is clear that your views are your own.

- Your tweets carry your professional (and possibly private) **reputation**.

- Ensure you do not include any content, which could be seen as **defamatory**.

- If you are writing in a way that might appear to be giving advice about psychological illness, you might want to include a **disclaimer** that this is general information and specific questions should be directed to a licensed practitioner.

- Always honor patient and clinical **confidentiality**.

- Consider carefully whether you want to reveal any **personal beliefs** - political, religious etc

- Remember, your tweets last forever and can be quoted. **Never write anything you wouldn't want your patients, your children or your mother to read**.

- Tweeting is **conversational and interactive**. Your followers may tweet back - you can decide whether or not to respond.

- **Trolls** are people who write negative, attacking or otherwise toxic comments. Unfortunately, the anonymity of social media can allow and even encourage irrationality, even viciousness. All experts recommend ignoring comments from trolls. **Do not answer them**.

Important Article

[Getting started with Twitter](#)

Questions for consideration and discussion:

1. What about patients seeing what I tweet about?
2. What about politics?
3. The implications of the purpose of your feed: promoting psychoanalysis, promoting your business, promoting your cause.
4. Blank screen/analytic neutrality vs. grist for the mill
5. Twitter anxiety