

BBC NEWS GROUP

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR STAFF



Social media is now critical to our work, allowing us to more easily connect with people, to find useful information and newsworthy content, and to get our journalism to new audiences. But social media easily blurs the line between the personal and professional, and the simplest misstep could lead you to undermine the credibility of yourself, your colleagues, and BBC News as a whole. This guidance will help you avoid that. It applies to everyone working for BBC News and across all services including but not limited to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Google+, Reddit, Pinterest and chat apps like WhatsApp, Line and Snapchat.

There are three main kinds of social media activity we are concerned with:

1. Your own personal social media use, not carried out in the name of BBC News, though it could well include work-related activity, like newsgathering or reaching out to contributors.
2. The social media activity of designated editors, presenters, correspondents or reporters carried out as part of official BBC News output.
3. Official social media activity in the name of our programmes, teams, or brands.

This guidance also has sections covering breaking news, and the use of content sourced from social media and non-media professionals (or 'User Generated Content'/UGC).

1. Personal social media use – see also [BBC Editorial Guidance](#)

a) A useful summary has always been and remains: 'Don't do anything stupid'. Considering you're on show to anyone who sees what you do on social media, another way of summarising it would be: 'You're a BBC journalist; act like it.'

b) The need for care applies all the time, on all services, regardless of 'privacy' settings, the intended audience, or if it's a 'direct' or 'private' message. Posts on sites like Facebook, or Direct Messages on Twitter, that you may think are restricted can be easily and quickly shared with much wider audiences. Assume anything you do or say can be seen by anyone.

c) If you're editorial staff, it doesn't make any difference whether or not you identify yourself as someone who works for the BBC. It's fine to say where you work in bios and 'About' sections. It's good to talk about what you do. But the handle, name or main title of your activity shouldn't include 'BBC', to avoid giving the impression what you're doing is somehow part of official BBC output (unless it is - see below). You should make clear that any views expressed are personal, and not those of the BBC.

d) You shouldn't state your political preferences or say anything that compromises your impartiality. Don't sound off about things in an openly partisan way. Don't be seduced by the informality of social media into bringing the BBC into disrepute. Don't anonymously sanitise Wikipedia pages and similar websites about the BBC. Don't criticise your colleagues. Don't reveal confidential BBC information, including sensitive stories or deployments you or others are working on. Beware revealing information that may risk the safety of you or your colleagues. If you're deployed to sensitive or dangerous places, switch off functionality on electronic devices and social media services that reveal your location.

e) Usually it's possible for anyone to see the individuals, issues or organisations that you choose to 'friend' or follow on social media. Consider the impression given by those choices, especially if they're contentious or partisan, and relevant to stories you cover. Broaden or balance the range if needed. The same applies to social media posts or content that you publicly 'favourite' or save.

f) Sharing or retweeting material from other people is part of what social media is all about - but consider that it can give the appearance of endorsement by you or the BBC, so context might well be needed. A "retweets aren't endorsements" or equivalent disclaimer in your bio won't be enough on its own.

g) Beware the impact of spreading unconfirmed rumours or unverified content, particularly in breaking news situations.

h) Talking to people is crucial to getting the most out of social media. Be polite. If you experience rudeness or criticism, beware reacting aggressively, including by 'blocking' and equivalent actions, which should be saved for cases of real offence, abuse, or spamming.

i) If you have a social media or other online presence - like a blog - where you feel conflicts of interest are possible, you should discuss it with your line manager; he or she won't unreasonably stop you, but will want to discuss potential risks.

2. 'Official' social media activity of editors, presenters and correspondents

a) The social media activity of many editors, presenters and correspondents is labelled 'official', meaning it has the same status as their mainstream TV, radio or digital output. The label is applied after discussion involving the individual, their line manager, and the Social Media Editor for News, or equivalent.

b) So its status is clear, the activity should carry BBC News branding. Bios should not say any views expressed are personal, or similar.

c) If you have official status, your activity must be consistent with that. That doesn't mean you can only talk about your work. In fact, we encourage the opposite: social media is all about personality and being human. Just bear in mind that many people, if not most, who follow and engage with you will be doing so because of your editorial role. Especially remember that content posted as part of official social media activity may appear automatically on BBC output, such as the news website (though there are ways of excluding specific posts if needed).

3. Social media activity in the name of our programmes, teams or brands – see also [BBC Editorial Guidance](#)

a) There is a carefully thought-out approach to social media activity by BBC News brands, programmes and teams, and a successful portfolio of established accounts and profiles. Any new activity must not start without very careful consideration and consultation with line management and the Social Media Editor for News, or equivalent.

b) The golden rule for all such official social media activity is that everything must have a second pair of eyes check before it's posted, aside from exceptional situations.

c) To the extent technically possible, we must exercise responsibility for contributions that appear on social media pages and sites carrying our name, such as comments.

d) If you're running an official social media account, you're responsible for its security against hacking and other unauthorised use, and you must be familiar with security advice. Critically, always use a secure password, change it often, and don't store or send it via email.

e) Mentions of social media activity on BBC TV, radio or digital output need to be approached with care, and are subject to separate [Editorial Policy guidance](#). Most importantly, they say that every mention must be editorially justified. You should be wary of allowing undue prominence for what are commercial brands.

4. Breaking news

a) As for our TV, radio and digital output, accuracy trumps speed every time when it comes to breaking news on social media, no matter the temptation to be first.

b) When you have news to break, you should normally alert the appropriate newsdesk first. If you use Twitter, it is possible to file into Quickfire and tweet at the same time by sending simultaneous SMS text messages. But the needs of our large audiences across our full range of outlets should be prioritised, and that will usually involve a newsdesk rapidly deploying appropriate resources to cover the story.

5. Use of content from social media and non-media professionals (or 'User Generated Content'/UGC).

a) Video and stills on the web aren't 'in the public domain' and free for us to use. Alongside or as part of checking for authenticity, permission to use must be sought. Bear in mind the copyright holder probably won't be the person shown in the content and may not be the person who took it, or distributed it.

b) Be aware that using video under the 'fair dealing' copyright exception has specific conditions attached, including the timeliness and newsworthiness of the content, the need to make efforts to gain permission, and to credit. Seek advice if you're unsure. Fair dealing can't apply to still images.

c) We rely on non-professionals sharing their content to help us do our jobs, and must treat them with respect. We should always give an on-screen credit to the individual who owns the content, unless they ask otherwise, or when to do so may put them at risk. Giving the name of a website - like YouTube or Facebook - isn't enough on its own.

d) It's fine to approach potential contributors on social media from either BBC branded or personal accounts, although in some situations the latter might be inappropriate if drawing attention to your social media presence exposes you to potential risk.

e) Always being polite to potential contributors is a given; but also bear in mind they may be feeling vulnerable or distressed. It's normally best to move such conversations to private channels (such as direct or instant messaging, or email) as quickly as possible. Consider that public approaches may give credence to rumour or hoaxes. We must never encourage people to take risks on our behalf, for example to take pictures or video of a news event. Multiple approaches by BBC News to the same person should be avoided.