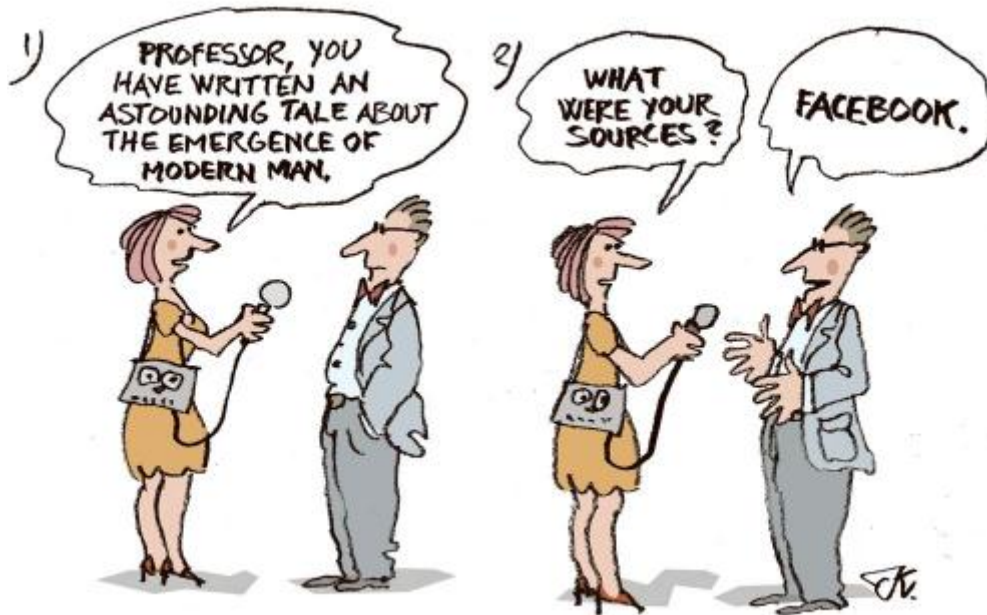


# Online Course in Science Journalism

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## Lesson 10 - Social Media

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## 10.1 Introduction

We've all heard about social media, but what is it and how important is social media for us as science journalists? Is it all about keeping up to date with your friends and family, or can social media offer us anything more?

This chapter will explain what social media is and how to use it to enhance your reporting skills.

### Traditional versus social media

There has been some debate about whether social media is journalism, and we will discuss some of those arguments later in this chapter. The important thing to remember is that social media is not journalism, in the same way that paper is not journalism. Just like paper, or the airwaves, social media is a tool which is increasingly being used by journalists to practice their craft.

Social media is changing journalism, and we need to make sure that we are on the crest of the wave, rather than floundering behind it as it passes.

All media is about communication. Traditional media - such as newspapers, magazines, television, radio and even basic online media - enables us to tell our readers about **something that is happening or something that they need to know**.

Social media does that too, but there is a very important difference. **Social media is a conversation**. Social media changes you from being a reporter to being a community organiser and analyst.

Traditional media is a two-step process:

1. Journalists question their sources
2. Journalists relate the story to their audience (readers, listeners, viewers)

Social media adds new levels to the process. It happens something like this:

1. Journalists get information using sources that range from experts to other observers, bloggers, bystanders, interested parties, anyone with an opinion
2. Journalists interpret the information they have gathered, separating opinion from fact, and tailor it for their audience
3. Journalists and their work become part of a conversation that continues long after the broadcast has aired or the newspaper has become a wrapper for fish and chips

## 10.2 Joining the conversation

Take a look at this letter [ <http://www.independent.co.uk/i/editor/letter-from-the-editor-join-the-conversation-2207387.html> ] from the editor of the Independent in the UK. What do you think about his attempt to get into a conversation with his readers?

Here's another opinion in an interview with George Kelly [ [http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/navigating-journalism-online-an-interview-with-george-kelly\\_b3609](http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/navigating-journalism-online-an-interview-with-george-kelly_b3609) ], online coordinator at the Contra Costa Times in California. In it he says:

"The current digital landscape gives journalism and reporting unprecedented reach and impact. We've got cheap, powerful databases that let us sift and sort and display information in amazing ways. We've got tools and services to curate real-time information from anywhere on the planet. Now, we need to figure out when, and where, and how to use those tools to give people the information they need to make decisions about their lives and communities".

The following article [ <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2009/05/how-journalists-are-using-twitter-in-australia147.html> ] looks at some of the issues and opinions surrounding the use of social media by journalists. Here is an extract:

### How are journalists using Twitter?

Professional journalists are using Twitter to enhance and augment traditional reporting practices. It's another tool in their kit and many journalists, like ABC radio producer Andrew Davies, are now logged onto Twitter throughout their working day.

"I try and start my day by looking at what people are saying (and) talking about on Twitter," he said, "I love being able to read all the fantastic links to interesting websites, ideas (and) news that people have sent out."

Reporters I interviewed are using the platform to "broadcast" links to content they or their news outlet have produced in an effort to build a new audience. Some also contribute to or manage organizational Twitter accounts on behalf of their employers. A few use it as a live reporting platform and some employ applications to share images, audio and links to other online content they find interesting. Many are using it to crowdsource contacts, story angles, background and case studies. In fact, when I began researching this story, my first move was to tweet a request for journalists to respond to questions about why they were on Twitter and how they used the platform. I received useful feedback and uncovered a number of new contacts via this method before conducting more extensive online interviews.

The ABC's Michael Turtle uses Twitter regularly to monitor public debate which he acknowledges influences his storytelling.

"It sometimes helps to use Twitter to gauge opinion on an issue," Turtle said. "You would certainly never claim the views online are representative, or seek to pass off a collection of tweets as an accurate poll. But it can point you in the direction of certain views, which can help guide some of the questions you might ask or angles you might follow-up."

Most journalists I interviewed monitor the feeds of sources on their beats as an adjunct to website and email accounts. They check their competition and try to keep up to date with hot industry issues. For some, it's replaced their RSS news feeds and for others it's a way of networking with peers and developing mentors. It's the end-of-day bar debriefing and a reporting tool rolled into one.

As more and more people become 'citizen journalists', telling their own stories in the ways that resonate best with them, we need to learn new ways of working. We need to learn how to use the community as both a source of news and the audience for that news.

In order to do that, we need to step out of the safety of what we know. The determination of what is news and how it is covered is no longer the decision of the journalist. **Social media means that people will be having a conversation about what they regard as being newsworthy, whether or not the journalists choose to join in.**

As science journalists, we have an extra layer of responsibility. We need to report the scientific developments of the day as well as to cut through the hype and misinformation that is all too prevalent. With a service such as twitter, information can spread in seconds: it is our responsibility to ensure that we are up to date with the conversations our audience is having, and to debunk potentially dangerous misinformation by providing information from credible, reputable, scientific sources.

### **10.3 What is social media**

Brian Solis, a digital analyst, sociologist and futurist who is widely recognised as one of the most prominent thought leaders in the new media environment, decided to crowdsource the ultimate definition for social media.

Crowdsourcing is the process of asking an unknown group of people how to solve a problem. It is used to tap into a wide range of talent to find an answer to a question, but it is also a way to find out what people are thinking, what people want and what is important to your audience. The concept is explained more fully in section 10.9.

This is the result of Brian Solis' experiment:

#### **Short Version**

Any tool or service that uses the internet to facilitate conversations.

#### **Long Version**

Social Media is the democratisation of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers.

## 10.4 Is social media relevant

Social media has certainly come into its own during the protests in the Arab world in 2011. As Philip N Howard reported on the online journalism site Miller-McCune [ <http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/> ] During the heady days of protests in Cairo, one activist succinctly tweeted about why digital media was so important to the organisation of political unrest. “We use Facebook to schedule the protests, Twitter to coordinate, and YouTube to tell the world,” she said.

An excellent example of how social and digital media were used during the Cairo revolution can be found at [ <http://blog.ted.com/2011/03/04/inside-the-egyptian-revolution-wael-ghonim-on-ted-com/> ]. In the video, internet activist and Google executive Wael Ghonim tells of his experiences during the revolution. His Facebook page “We are all Khaled Saeed” is widely seen as one of the main sparks for the revolution. He was imprisoned by the Egyptian secret police for 11 days as a result of his work.

**Clearly Facebook has a wider use than just exchanging photos of holidays and babies.**

After the earthquake and tsunami which hit Japan on 11 March 2011, we saw the first use of Twitter to keep the world updated on a potential nuclear disaster. The Tokyo Electric Power company (TEPCO) created a Twitter account to keep Japanese residents and the rest of the world informed about what was happening at the Fukushima nuclear power plant. The account quickly grew to close to 300 000 followers.

## 10.5 What about connectivity

Africa may be lagging behind the rest of the world in terms of high speed, affordable internet connectivity, but this is changing rapidly. As science journalists, it makes sense to not just report on the challenges and changes, but to be ahead of the rest when it comes to making use of the latest technology in our work.

According to McKinsey Global Institute, there have been 340 million mobile phone subscribers registered in Africa since 2000. By 2009, there were already more mobile phone users in Africa than in the United States. **As smart phones become cheaper and more accessible, more and more people will be using their phones as their primary access to the internet.** Applications like Twitter and Facebook are becoming indispensable communication tools and sources of news.

Karel Pienaar, MTN South Africa's managing director, has said he believes the price of smartphones will soon drop to around \$20 or \$30. In South Africa, around 60% of mobile phones currently being sold by MTN are smartphones.

## **10.6 Cherry picking social media**

There are hundreds of different social media platforms available. They range from member-only forums set up by particular interest groups to communities of hundreds of thousands of members. For the purposes of this course, we are going to concentrate on just a few of the most popular: Twitter, Facebook, blogging and LinkedIn.



## 10.7 Twitter

Twitter [ <http://www.twitter.com> ] is a social networking and microblogging service that allows its users to send short messages – tweets - of up to 140 characters. It was created in 2006, and since then has grown to be one of the world's biggest and most popular social networking sites. By June 2010, the company claimed that about 750 tweets were being sent every second. That's 65 million each day.

On March 14, 2011, Twitter's 5th birthday, the figures had increased to an average of 2000 tweets every second. The first billion tweets took over 38 months to achieve. Now Twitter is growing by a billion tweets every week, and four million new accounts are set up each week.

You can see the stats at [ <http://blog.tweetsmarter.com/twitter-stats/total-tweets-2010-2011/> ]

In other words, **it is huge**, and you can't afford not to be part of it.

It is a good idea to link different social media platforms so that you can post to more than one simultaneously. It is particularly easy to link Facebook and Twitter [ <http://apps.facebook.com/twitter/> ]. That way you'll be sure of reaching a more complete audience.

**It is best not to make assumptions about what your audience is reading.** In the Netherlands, for example, young people use Facebook more often than Twitter. In South Africa the biggest growth in Facebook is among people aged 44 and above.

It is difficult to find accurate and up to date figures for Twitter usage in Africa, but it seems clear that most Twitter users are in South Africa, followed closely by Egypt. South Africa ranks tenth worldwide for Twitter usage. Twitter is, however, being used across the continent and its adoption is growing daily.

Measured by number of unique visits, Twitter ranks higher in South Africa than anywhere else in the world (like everywhere else, more people go to Twitter to gawk than to actually tweet). At the beginning of July 2010, Twitter was the sixth on the list of web sites most often accessed from South Africa (source: Alexa [ <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/ZA> ]).

In 2008, the link between twitter and sms (text messaging) was shut down in Africa because of difficulties the company had in reaching agreements with mobile phone operators. This has since been reversed, and it is possible to tweet using your (non-smart) phone from many countries. You can find a list at [ <http://support.twitter.com/entries/14226-how-to-find-your-twitter-short-long-code> ]

### 10.7.1 Why should journalists be part of Twitter

Alan Rusbridger, the Guardian Editor-in-Chief, says that “saying that Twitter has got nothing to do with the news business is about as misguided as you could be”. His roundup of the 15 reasons why Twitter is vital can be found at [ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2010/nov/19/alan-rusbridger-twitter?cat=media&type=article> ]

He concludes by saying: “... we can be sure that the motivating idea behind these forms of open media isn't going away and that, if we are blind to their capabilities, we will be making a very serious mistake, both in terms of our journalism and the economics of our business.”

Many journalists also use **Twitter as a news service**, using the search function to monitor what is happening and to find out what the community in which they work is talking about. Increasingly, organisations and individuals are using social media to break news.

### **10.7.2 Why should science journalists be part of Twitter**

For one thing, many of your sources are already there. There are some good lists of scientists on Twitter available on the web. This is a good one: [ <http://www.accreditedonlinecolleges.com/blog/2010/100-amazing-scientists-you-should-follow-on-twitter/> ] and here is another: [ <http://sciencepond.com/> ]

It is often easier to get a quick response from scientists by sending them a Twitter message rather than an email. It is a good place to introduce yourself, and let them know that you are interested in the work they are doing. Twitter also helps you to keep up to date with research that is being done in your areas of interest.

### 10.7.3 Join and learn the language

Go to [ <http://www.twitter.com> ] and register your account. If possible, use your own name so that your traditional media audience can find and follow you more easily.

When you send or retweet a message, remember that the Twitter names of people you quote are part of the **140 character limit**. So if you want to be retweeted, don't call yourself @theworldsgreatestsciencejournalist or you would have used up 35 of the available characters.

The Twitter help files are comprehensive and can be accessed here [ <http://support.twitter.com/groups/31-twitter-basics> ]

There are some simple shortcuts and rules when tweeting:

- The Twitter community always acknowledges sources. If you see something that you want to share, you should **retweet** it. That indicates the source that it came from. If you get some information from another Twitter user and change it, you can also use “/via @nameof tweeter” at the end of the tweet.
- Use the @ to **mention** another user, for example @Wheatlands. Twitter links the letters after the “@” symbol to that person's account [ <http://twitter.com/wheatlands> ]
- Putting “#” in front of a word creates a link to all tweets with that word. **Hashtags** group tweets that have something in common. For example #oncology lists all tweets about that topic, as it filters tweets that have been categorised by its users.

#### Tips

Try to make your tweets no more than 120 characters. That leaves space for others to retweet your insights. Also, use URL shorteners like <http://bit.ly> or <http://goo.gl/> to condense long web addresses.

Use free sites like [www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com) or [www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com) to manage your tweets and your followers.

### 10.7.4 What's next

Once you have signed up, you need to start entering the conversation. Many people who are on Twitter are just observers, but as a journalist you should be leading and taking part in the conversations.

You can raise awareness of your stories and the issues you are covering by **tweeting from press conferences, media briefings and after interviews**. You can use twitter to generate interest in your work and to direct your audience to your story once it appears or is broadcast.

It is a good idea to tell the speaker or organiser that you are going to be tweeting the conference. This avoids any misunderstanding by a speaker who may think you are sending text messages to your friends, or not paying attention to the presentation.

Also, **don't tweet every single thing that is said**, unless it is an earth shattering, government-toppling announcement. For one thing, you'll have nothing left to write in your story, and for another, you may actually lose followers by annoying them with a barrage of tweets.

The first step is to **start following** the people who are relevant to your work. You can search [ <http://search.twitter.com/> ] for fellow journalists, scientists and community leaders and follow them. When you follow someone it is often useful to take a look at who they are following and to follow them too.

It is regarded as good manners to follow people back when they follow you, but it is a good idea to be fairly choosy. The tweets of people you follow will show up in your Twitter Timeline, and if you are **following too many people** it may be difficult to keep track.

After you join Twitter, it is a good idea to **tell some scientists you are there**. A suggestion would be to tweet some of the lists of scientists and introduce yourself. For example, Hello @scienceprof I am a science journalist, fascinated by your research.

You can also tap into conversations by using the hashtags. For example, one of your first tweets could be: Hello, I'm a science journalist working in Cameroon, keen to hear about your research #scio11

Take a look at #scio11 [ <http://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23scio11> ]. It is a community of scientists from around the world. There are many more, it is up to you to explore the Twitterverse and find (and share), or even start the communities that suit you best.

Create **Twitter lists** [ <http://support.twitter.com/entries/76460-how-to-use-twitter-lists> ] to categorise the people you are following. Lists allow you to organise people into groups. You can also choose to follow other people's lists, which may include people that you are not following.

## 10.8 Facebook

If Facebook were a country, it would be the world's third biggest in terms of population, after China and India. It has over 637 million members, and it is growing by the day.

In 2009, it had over 300 000 users in Kenya, it was the most popular site in South Africa (beating Google) and was growing by 20 000 users per month in Nigeria and Ghana – three times the US growth rate. And as it grows, it fuels the demand for better internet connectivity and cheaper smart phones.

**Data released in February 2011 by statistical analysis portal Socialbakers.com showed that Facebook in Africa has grown by over 50% in the past six months.** The continent now has 25 million Facebook subscribers. The 8.3 million new users are concentrated in Egypt, Nigeria and South Africa. The number of users in Nigeria has grown by 83%, followed by Egypt with 43% growth and South Africa with 25% growth.

Is it a tool that we can use as science journalists, or is it just a place to show off pictures of your latest purchases and love interests?

**Facebook is a useful tool for scientists, science journalists and science communication.** There are plenty of good examples of science organisations and scientists who are using Facebook to showcase their work. Take a look at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Naked-Scientists/38242550838>. The South African Science Journalists' Association [ [http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group\\_141046635943574](http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_141046635943574) ] is one of the many organisations that uses Facebook as one of the ways it keeps its members updated.

### Example:

Goodluck Jonathan first announced his intention to run for the presidency of Nigeria on his Facebook page [ <http://www.facebook.com/jonathangoodluck> ]. He updates his Facebook page almost daily, and when this chapter was written already had over 500 000 fans on his page.

### 10.8.1 Making Facebook work for you

While there are many scientists and scientific organisations on Facebook, it is still more of a social platform and less of a news source than Twitter.

**Journalists at Research Africa are using Facebook to verify the scientists they are trying to contact through Twitter.** Facebook provides a much more comprehensive snapshot of someone's life, so it is easy to see which of the numerous people with similar names is the one you are actually looking for.

You may choose to use your personal Facebook profile to link with your news sources and connections, or you may choose to keep your professional and personal life separate.

If you decide to separate the two, there are three options for the way you manage your presence.

The first is just to open a **separate account**, under a professional name. The second is to **create a fan page** [ <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php> ], and the third is to **create a group** [ <http://www.facebook.com/help/?page=414> ]. You need to decide what you want before you start, because a group cannot be converted into a page.

Facebook explains the difference here [ <http://www.facebook.com/help/?faq=13622> ].

Groups are generally meant for smaller groups of people you know personally, and have limiting functions in place when the group members exceed a certain number. If you want to share ideas with people who are interested in for instance alternative energy sources in sub-Saharan Africa, you can create a group for that purpose. **Pages** are intended to be a place for organisations, businesses, celebrities, or bands to connect with users who like them. If you want your news organisation to be represented on Facebook so you can interact with your readers, you could create a page on behalf of your organisation.

Another useful option for journalists on Facebook is the **Facebook poll or question** [ <http://www.facebook.com/questions/> ]. You can ask your connections any question you like and easily find out their answers. For example, if you were looking for examples for a story, you may try asking a question such as "Do you think bed nets are effective in combating malaria".

A poll may be more specific, and you can create a list of possible answers for your connections to choose from. An additional advantage is that as your connections share your poll or question with their friends, you can quite quickly get a good sample of opinion on whatever you are researching.

For **tips on the best way to use Facebook as a journalist**, read this article on Mashable [ <http://mashable.com/2011/05/09/facebook-media-companies/> ], or have a look at this [ <http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/facebook-journalists/> ] tutorial.

## 10.9 Blogging

A blog is a type of website, usually maintained by just one person who posts regular entries. These entries may include articles, opinions, photographs and video. **Blogs are part of the social media conversation because they allow interactive comments from readers.**

According to Wikipedia, blogs have seen a rise in popularity since 2002 as sites for breaking, shaping and spinning news stories. By 2004, blogs were becoming increasingly mainstream and are now common additions to the offerings of traditional media outlets.

For a science journalist, a blog can serve a number of purposes.

It can be a way for you to publish some of the interesting information you have gathered for your story in a different way. It may be more casual or in a different tone to that of your publication. **In a blog you can write in the first person and express your own opinions.** It is not necessary to be as objective as you would in a normal story.

If you are a broadcast journalist, your personal blog may be a way to find your voice in another medium, and to practice your writing skills. Because you are your own editor, you can write what you like, and take sole responsibility for what you say.

A blog can be a way for you to **build a community** around your work or the issues that you feel passionate about. It can also enhance your reputation as a science journalist and drive traffic to your 'day job' work. By telling your audience about the stories you are working on, and providing some extra information you can enhance the work you are doing in traditional media. Your blog can also help to increase sales of your publication or the audience for your broadcasts, especially if you let people know that you are providing some extra information online.



## 10.9 Blogging (continued)

A blog can be a way that you can **share the voices of the people you interview**. You can ask them to write a guest post for you, or add a longer video segment of what they have to say than you would otherwise have been able to use. It is all about adding value and broadening the story.

Other people's blogs are a great source of information, and may provide you with vital sources for stories that you are working on.

With their rise in popularity and the platform they provide for anyone to become a citizen journalist, it has become increasingly important to remember that **a blog does not have the rigours of fact checking and contextualisation** that a traditional news story does.

### EXAMPLES

Here is a great example [ <http://www.plainenglishnuclear.net/2011/03/yet-another-japan-reactor-post/> ] of a blog post that would be really useful for anyone writing about the nuclear dangers after the Japan earthquake of March 2011.

A good example of a health writer who is using blogs is Nancy Schute. You can read her parenting blogs at <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/blogs/on-parenting>.

There are some great science blogs at <http://scienceblogs.com/>, <http://blogs.discovermagazine.com>, <http://blogs.plos.org/> and they are well organised into categories. The blogs at <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/> are also great examples of how science can be written in an accessible and interesting way. They also have particularly good illustrations.

Some of best female science bloggers can be found here: <http://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2010/04/50-best-female-science-bloggers/>

Another useful list is here: <http://www.wikio.com/blogs/top/sciences>

One very effective blog that carries many science stories is the one run by Kenyan Rose Odengo. You can see it here: <http://ladyenews.wordpress.com/>

### 10.9.1 Who are you

One of the big decisions that you will have to make when you start blogging is whether to **blog in your personal capacity, or as part of the organisation for which you work.**

Your decision will be affected by a number of factors. The first step would be to check with your superior – does your organisation make provision for staff blogs? What are the consequences of not being part of the company blog? Are there any company rules against publishing in your personal capacity?

Another consideration would be whether you want to use your blog to channel your audience to your regular publications or audience.

The blog can be useful as a gauge of what your audience is thinking. You can use it to 'stir the pot' and to **enter into a conversation** with your readers. Many journalists who blog find that the blog sparks new ideas and can often be the starting point for a news story, rather than the other way around.

### 10.9.2 Where to post

If your organisation has a corporate blog, and you decide to stick with that then the decision is easy. But what if you want to start up your own independent blog? **What platform should you choose?**

The first decision to make is if you want to go with a free, hosted platform or if you want to have your own domain. Having your own domain does give you extra functionality, but there could be costs involved and you will need some technical expertise.

The most popular hosted platforms are Blogger [ <http://www.blogger.com> ], Posterous [ <https://posterous.com/> ] and Wordpress [ <http://wordpress.com/> ]. All have their strong points, and the decision will come down to what works best for you.

Wordpress is the most elaborate but slightly more technical, and probably not ideal if you are not tech-savvy. A comprehensive tutorial for setting up and using Wordpress can be found here [ <http://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/cat/wordpress> ]. Blogger is pretty simple to use. Posterous is ideal if you are planning to post to your blog via email.

### 10.9.3 The ‘rules’ of blogging

1. The first rule of blogging is that it should be **fun**. If you are not enjoying doing it, then don't bother.
2. **Keep it up!** You need to post at least once a week to keep your blog active and your audience happy. Why not create a posting schedule, where you set aside a specific time for blog writing.
3. Know what you want to **say**. Have a brainstorm session and write down at least 25 blog ideas before you start.
4. Keep it **short and sweet**. Try to keep the posts at around 300 words long, and almost never more than 1000.
5. Make it accessible and **easy to read**. Use pictures and lists and bullet points to break up the text.
6. **Links** are important. Use links to explain complex terms or to point to other research or to broaden the story by pointing to other conversations on the same subject.
7. Keep it **conversational** and lighter in tone than you may use in your normal publication.
8. Keep it topical and **relevant**. If your blog is furthering your work as a science journalist, don't include details about your church camp or your latest squeeze.
9. **Write posts in advance**: This helps for when you are stuck for a topic or going on holiday or too busy. Most blog sites allow you to pre-schedule your posts.
10. Don't be shy. **Tell everyone** about your blog. Put the address on your email signature, on your business cards and if possible mention it in your stories.
11. **Comment** on other people's blogs: people will see your comments and click the link to find out more about you.
12. Link to **other blogs**: When other bloggers see you've linked to them, they'll check you out — and may link back.
13. Write a **guest post**, and invite others to write for you.
14. **Write great content**: nobody will want to read it if it is badly written or boring.

## 10.10 Crowdsourcing

The term crowdsourcing was first used by business author and journalist Jeff Howe to describe the process of asking an unknown group of people how to solve a problem. **It is used to tap into a wide range of talent to find an answer to a question, but it is also a way to find out what people are thinking, what people want and what is important to your audience.**

Crowdsourcing is about using your audience (readers, viewers, listeners) to report on a news story. How do you reach these people? One of the most effective tools in use around the world today was developed by a Kenyan company. Ushahidi (which means 'testimony'; <http://www.ushahidi.com>) develops free and open source software for information collection, visualisation and interactive mapping. It was originally formed to map reports of post-election violence in 2008 in Kenya.

Can you think of a way that you could use crowdsourcing in your science journalism? Take a look at Ushahidi's crowdmap <http://www.ushahidi.com/products/> crowdmap: in just a few minutes you could set up a site to **monitor responses to any issue that you are highlighting**, such as drought conditions or epidemics. Crowdsourcing is tapping into the rich source of eyewitnesses that already exists.

A good example can be found at <http://www.rdtm.org> where people are entering their own levels of radioactivity around Japan. Also see this story on Al Jazeera [ <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/asia/2011/04/201142317359479927.html> ].

The challenge for you as a science journalist is to take these eyewitness reports and combine them with good, analytical reporting that includes comments and analysis from scientists.

For example, a story that includes an eyewitness account of a flood, would be much more powerful if it also included the reasons for the flood and how increased flooding in certain areas could be linked to climate change.

### EXAMPLE

Scientists are already using crowdsourcing to collect data. Some good examples can be found at <http://ataleoftenslugs.com/2010/10/16/crowdsourcing-science/>. Here is another interesting use of crowdsourcing: <http://www.the-scientist.com/blog/display/54344/>

## 10.11 LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a **business oriented social networking site**, which has more than 100 million users. Users build up a network of contacts, made up of their direct connections as well as connections of their connections. It is most often used to find jobs as well as to research companies, so it can be useful to a science journalist.

You can use LinkedIn to connect and **keep track of your most important sources** or industry contacts. These people may pass story ideas or information on to you through LinkedIn if they are unable to meet you face to face. It is also useful to be able to see if your contact is travelling or in meetings, which may explain why they are not answering your phone calls!

Because many companies are on LinkedIn, and people who use the service list their employers or previous employers, many journalists use the service to find a source within a company who may be able to provide some inside information for a story they are working on.

Within LinkedIn you can link your blog

[ [http://www.linkedin.com/opensocialInstallation/preview?\\_ch\\_panel\\_id=1&\\_applicationId=1500](http://www.linkedin.com/opensocialInstallation/preview?_ch_panel_id=1&_applicationId=1500) ] or Twitter account

[ <http://learn.linkedin.com/twitter/> ] to your own profile, so the contacts in your network can keep up to date with what you are tweeting or blogging about.

## 10.12 Tying it all together

**Social media is all about entering conversations and being part of what is happening in the world of science**, but the thought of keeping up with everything and managing your accounts can be daunting.

It is a good idea to create an integrated strategy for yourself. You can link Twitter and Facebook so that a single status update goes to both platforms [ <http://www.ajvaynerchuk.com/how-to-link-twitter-to-facebook-a-twitter-tutorial-3/> ]. You should also use Twitter and Facebook to publicise your blog and YouTube posts.

Remember to **include your social media addresses in your email signatures**: you want people to know that you are there, and to be able to reach you and your work in a number of ways.

### 10.13 Self-teaching questions (1-6)

1. CBC News posted an interesting roundup of tweets which shows how the general public and reporters reacted to the nuclear scare. You can see it here: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourcommunity/2011/03/social-media-nuclear-worries-in-japan.html>

Now take a look at this blog post: <http://www.plainenglishnuclear.net/2011/03/yet-another-japan-reactor-post/>.

Was the media right to tweet about the events as they unfolded? How do you separate fact from opinion using social media?

2. Is blogging journalism? This is a debate which has raised tempers and generated many column inches. There is a good roundup of some of the issues and opinions here <http://thenextweb.com/us/2010/08/18/blogging-vs-journalism-the-ongoing-debate/>. What is your opinion?
3. Read this Nieman Report: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100696>. How do you think a blog would affect your relationship with your audience? If you already blog, have you seen a change?
4. Write a list of the features you'd like to see on your blog. Then visit [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com), [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [www.posterous.com](http://www.posterous.com). Which site do you think would work best for you?
5. Take a look at these two examples: <http://wheatlands.blogspot.com/2009/03/i-have-one-of-those-widgets-on-my.html> and <http://wheatlands.blogspot.com/2009/05/biofuels-and-food-chain.html>. What do you think of the style of writing, as compared to a normal newspaper report?
6. Take a look at some of your recent science stories. Is there a way that you could have crowdsourced information that would have made the science more accessible or relevant in your community?



## 10.14 Self-teaching questions (1-6) answers

1. CBC News posted an interesting roundup of tweets which shows how the general public and reporters reacted to the nuclear scare. You can see it here: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/yourcommunity/2011/03/social-media-nuclear-worries-in-japan.html>

Now take a look at this blog post: <http://www.plainenglishnuclear.net/2011/03/yet-another-japan-reactor-post/>.

Was the media right to tweet about the events as they unfolded? How do you separate fact from opinion using social media?

**ANSWER:** The immediacy of tweeting means that some inaccuracies will creep in. The most important thing is to ensure that you correct these as soon as possible.

This is also a good argument for an integrated approach, where live tweeting of an event is backed up by a more in-depth story in print or broadcast media.

2. Is blogging journalism? This is a debate which has raised tempers and generated many column inches. There is a good roundup of some of the issues and opinions here <http://thenextweb.com/us/2010/08/18/blogging-vs-journalism-the-ongoing-debate/>. What is your opinion?

**ANSWER:** This question is really looking for your opinion, so there is no wrong answer. When you are formulating your response, however, you should look at the role of amateur bloggers as opposed to blogs that are written by journalists, often as an extension of their regular work. Also the tone and content of a blog (amateur or professional) will be a good indication of whether it is journalism or not.

And of course, your definition of what constitutes journalism is a clue here. Take a look at <http://bit.ly/lBr6U5> for some suggestions.

3. Read this Nieman Report: <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reportsitem.aspx?id=100696> How do you think a blog would affect your relationship with your audience? If you already blog, have you seen a change?

**ANSWER:** Again, this question is looking for your opinion and experience, but your answer should include some practical examples of how a blog can deepen and strengthen your engagement with your readers as well as allowing you to explore your subject in a way which is not constrained by space or the editorial stance of your publication.

4. Write a list of the features you'd like to see on your blog. Then visit [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com), [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) and [www.posterous.com](http://www.posterous.com). Which site do you think would work best for you?

**ANSWER:** The features should include some means of tracking your audience; an easy way for people to follow your blog such as an rss feed; an efficient picture or video uploader. Items such as the ease of customisation of your space and the colours and sizes of fonts are very much according to the personal preference of the writer.

5. Take a look at these two examples: <http://wheatlands.blogspot.com/2009/03/i-have-one-of-those-widgets-on-my.html> and <http://wheatlands.blogspot.com/2009/05/biofuels-and-food-chain.html>. What do you think of the style of writing, as compared to a normal newspaper report?

**ANSWER:** Both of these blogs are an example of how a hard science story can be reworked in a personal, easy style. In both instances the stories were also written for newspaper publication, in a much more traditional style.

6. Take a look at some of your recent science stories. Is there a way that you could have crowdsourced information that would have made the science more accessible or relevant in your community?

**ANSWER:** This question is not looking for a simple 'yes' or 'no'. It is looking for concrete examples. If you could have crowdsourced more information, how would you have gone about it? What would you need to put in place in your normal working day in order to do this?

## 10.15 Assignments

### Assignment 1

Take a look at this blog: <http://nachiket.wordpress.com/2009/02/15/why-scientists-wont-use-twitter/>

What do you think about the author's opinions? Do you agree that scientists are asocial by inclination and that social media won't work for scientists? You may find some of the comments at the end of the article interesting, but for the purposes of this exercise, it would be better to only read them after you have formulated your own answer.

### Assignment 2

You want to create your own blog. Give reasons for your choice of platform. What will your first blog posts be about and how often will you post?

### Assignment 3

Try the search term 'scientist' on Facebook. You'll find a wide selection of organisations, some of which have over 100 000 members. Find organisations that are useful to you and 'follow/like' them.