

Social Media in Online Higher Education
Implementing Live Twitter
Chat Discussion Sessions

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Since June 2011, OnlineCollege.org has facilitated a weekly live chat (#IOLchat) via Twitter focused on topics related to online learning. During this time, many approaches, resources, and techniques have been tried – some have worked well and others weren't so successful. While much of the existing online advice about Twitter chats is directed at social media professionals and marketers, this tool offers a way for educators to engage in and reshape traditional online discussions with their students. Twitter can be used for both synchronous and asynchronous communication and is gaining popularity with educators in both higher education and K-12 communities.

Improving Online Discussion

Online discussions are a mainstay of online courses, usually taking place asynchronously through threaded discussion boards as part of a course site or learning management system (LMS), a type of software that consolidates course materials online and provides a point of access for students and instructors. These discussions are typically timed (e.g., over one week) and center on predetermined question prompts provided by the instructor. The challenge of creating meaningful discussion in this format is multi-faceted:

- Students log in to the course LMS and reply to the instructor and their classmates at different times, resulting in disjointed thoughts and challenges to staying current on what is being shared by others.
- Writing question prompts that encourage thoughtful participation by students instead of items that elicit simple responses of rote information or reporting requiring little exchange among students can be difficult to achieve.
- Online discussion forums often result in limited exchange of responses when everyone posts their assigned contributions to the discussion at the end of the required time frame, i.e., when they are due to be posted.
- Threaded discussion as a class assignment often includes unnatural requirements to ensure and assess participation. Directions to students may include information such as “post an original response by Monday, reply to at least two of your classmates' original posts by Wednesday, and reply to those who replied, etc. by Friday.”

Synchronous technologies are also available in many online courses, alleviating many of the problems that relate to the timing of discussion participation. Virtual classroom options, such as [Blackboard's Collaborate](#), and other videoconferencing applications, such as [WebEx](#), allow for all discussion participants to be in the same “virtual” space at the same time to prompt more spontaneous discussions. But even technologies, when available, present challenges in terms of administrative set-up, distribution of links and information, subscription costs, and access that may require downloads.

A Twitter Solution

Twitter is a “real-time information network,” often described as a microblogging platform because of the limitation of 140 characters per message, which are also known as tweets. This network offers an alternative to both asynchronous discussion forums and synchronous conferencing systems. Individual accounts are free for users, no additional software or downloading is required, and access is possible on a range of devices, including smartphones and tablets.

Why Twitter? Beyond providing an alternative platform for class communication, there are many ways in which Twitter differs from traditional online options. These features and functionalities can be leveraged to connect not only with your students, but also a diverse population of educators, authors, and leaders in your field.

- **QUICK ACCESS:** You don't have to log in to a course site, or even log in to Twitter's site, to take advantage of this system. Mobile apps and desktop applications provide quick access to Twitter accounts and their incoming news feeds on a multiple devices, such as smartphones, tablets, and personal computers. As a Web-based system, Twitter also works on various computer platforms and operating systems.
- **ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT OPTIONS:** Some of the management tools available can be used to monitor multiple social networking profiles (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook) simultaneously. If you or your students don't already have a Twitter account, but do participate in other networks, it is possible to access them all from a single sign-in point, making the management of an additional account a little less daunting.
- **“LET'S HAVE CLASS OUTSIDE:”** Twitter is open to all and messaging takes place in a public Internet space, for the most part. Communicating in this space takes your class “outside” of its online course site boundaries, which can make it easier to bring in a guest, or open the class discussion to others who may see the topic announcement. Participants can simply add the tweets into their stream when they want to join in.
- **COMMUNITY BUILDING:** You get to know a little more about your students, and they get to know a little more about you through social networking profiles and conversations. While there is usually a place for students and instructor to post an introductory message within a course, other profiles, such as Twitter, usually include additional information about family and interests. The Twitter account profile can include an image, brief bio (160 characters), and a URL of the user's choice.
- **PERSONAL LEARNING NETWORKS (PLN):** As Twitter becomes more popular among educators, the potential exists to build your network and engage in a stream of new collaborators, ideas, and job leads. Through this social media tool, you will find resources to enhance your own learning and professional development, and you can contribute to the learning of others as well. Search for your favorite authors and leaders in your field of study and you may be surprised to find that they are on Twitter.

- MODELING ONLINE COMMUNICATION:** As you model professional communication within your course — on discussion boards, in announcements, and through emails to your students — your use of social media can provide further instruction on appropriate language, tone, and interaction online. Management of an online reputation and social presence is increasingly important for all, and Twitter is one way to demonstrate not only how to build a positive reputation, but also explore and experiment with new avenues of communication.

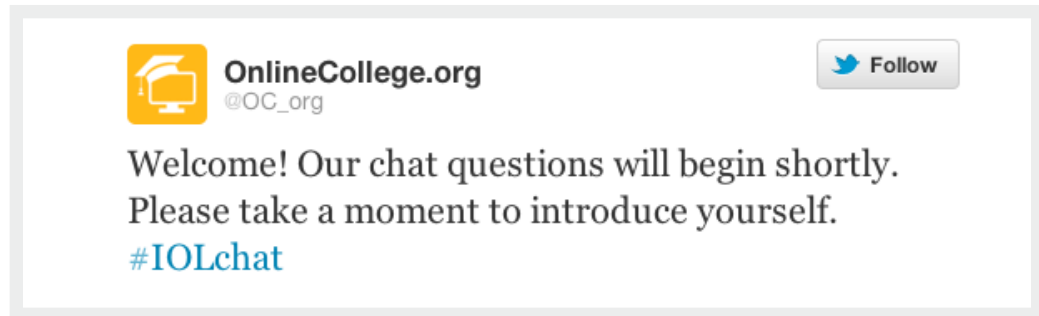
The “Live Chat” Format


While Twitter allows for both synchronous and asynchronous online communication, it is the real-time connection, through a live Twitter chat event, that presents new possibilities for transforming online course discussions. A live chat can take place when all participants are online at an agreed upon date and time, using a common hashtag (#) to indicate that their tweets are part of a unified discussion. Use of the hashtag allows the Twitter stream to be filtered so that just the participants’ messages are included. You can follow or join the live conversation using the Twitter platform or a management tool, adding the designated hashtag to each of your tweets. Searching for and following the hashtag allows you to see all participants in the discussion, not just those you already follow with your account. The screenshot below provides a look at just one tool, TweetChat, and the stream from a recent #IOLchat event.

Chat Stream Example via TweetChat

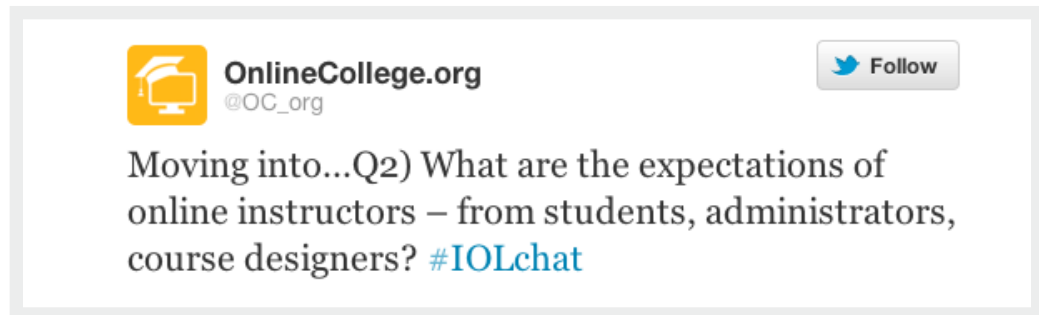
Live chats often center on a predetermined topic and may include questions that have been chosen and provided in advance of the event. A moderator, or co-moderators, will facilitate the chat session, announcing the start of the event and tweeting the questions around which the discussion takes place. Examples of moderator facilitation tweets are provided below.


Moderator Message Examples



 **OnlineCollege.org**
@OC_org Follow

Welcome! Our chat questions will begin shortly.
Please take a moment to introduce yourself.
[#IOLchat](#)



 **OnlineCollege.org**
@OC_org Follow

Moving into...Q2) What are the expectations of
online instructors – from students, administrators,
course designers? [#IOLchat](#)

The role of the chat moderator during a live session includes opening the session and welcoming participants, facilitating conversation and discussion, and monitoring the time.

Ideas for Class Use

With the instructor in the role of chat moderator, the integration of the live chat format can take on different forms within an online course. Twitter chats are helpful for holding class discussions as well as facilitating other types of student-instructor communication, which may be required or optional for enrolled students. Several options are outlined below, but these are just a few of the possibilities you might try.

Required Participation

- Engage in a conversation structured around a predetermined topic or discussion question in lieu of, or as an option to, asynchronous threaded forums within the course LMS.
- Review reading assignments to better understand students' comprehension of concepts and progress with the materials.
- Propose solutions to a given problem scenario related to the course topic, requiring each participant to include resource links with their suggestions.
- Conduct a meet-and-greet session in which class members introduce themselves and relate previous experience with course subject, motivation for taking the course, etc.
- Invite a featured guest who is active on Twitter to answer student questions and provide his or her perspective on a course-related issue.

Optional Participation

- Hold virtual office hours at scheduled dates and times when your students know you are logged in and monitoring Twitter for their questions.
- Conduct an exam review session that may include reminders about important concepts as well as provide time for students to ask questions about exam preparation.
- Set up general question and answer sessions to invite feedback from students periodically during the academic term.
- Consider the meeting possibilities with small groups or class teams to discuss progress on assigned projects.
- Create an opportunity for students to earn extra credit for participating in Twitter communication with classmates that helps to share resources and address class-related concerns.

In addition to a real-time, synchronous event, you may also consider some of the asynchronous possibilities afforded by the Twitter platform.

- Pass along course-related resources that you discover from your Twitter network.
- Check in with students between class meetings, lectures, or live sessions.
- Send out announcements that may include changes or updates to class schedules.
- Use Twitter as a back-up channel of communication should the school's LMS or your course site go offline.
- Introduce your students to members of your PLN who are also active Twitter users.

Twitter In Higher Education

According to a 2011 [study](#) at the University of North Carolina, “one in every 40 scholars is on Twitter, on average tweeting about five times per week.” But most of these scholars are not yet using Twitter for academic purposes (Titlow, 2011). However, the use of social media in general, and Twitter specifically, is increasing among higher education professionals to facilitate communication and interaction with and among students, as well as to further develop professional networks with academic peers.

You can look for other educators already active on Twitter in a number of ways, and The London School of Economics and Political Science has already built multiple [Twitter lists](#), organizing educators by academic discipline ([The London School, 2011](#)). Follow one or more of these lists to add the tweets from these academics, researchers, and experts to your Twitter news feed. The London School also recently published *Using Twitter in University Research, Teaching, and Impact Activities: A Guide for Academics and Researchers* that outlines specific tips for using Twitter with colleagues and students, and techniques for developing a personal “tweeting style” ([The London School, 2011](#)).

Twitter in the Online (and Blended) Class

Educators are already actively exploring ways in which the Twitter platform can be applied in their courses. The live chat possibilities are of particular interest for this report. Here are a few examples from the field illustrating several different ways in which Twitter is being used to enhance communication in both academic courses and workplace training sessions:

- **CONDUCT A BOOK CLUB.** Jane Bozarth in her 2010 book, *Social Media for Trainers*, recommends dividing reading into small sections or chapter assignments and encouraging participants to tweet their thoughts about the reading and reflections on what they learned. This type of exchange could take place synchronously or asynchronously.
- **INCLUDE AN IN-CLASS BACKCHANNEL.** The Centre for Learning and Performance Technologies ([C4LPT](#)) recommends this technique for on-ground class meetings in which participants “live tweet” during the session. Instructors can encourage students to tweet in-class and even show the stream via computer monitor. Encouraging students to live tweet a class session or guest speaker presentation can also help to “capture the content of lecture,” whether it is taking place in a physical or virtual classroom ([Perez, 2009](#)).
- **REVIEW PRE-SESSION TWEETS.** Another suggestion from [C4LPT](#) is to begin your live session with a look back at tweets that have been shared in the course or training event. Encourage students to use a hashtag that you determine for your course to share and comment on resources and current events between live events and class meetings.

- **POST CLASS ANNOUNCEMENTS.** Marc Tasman, a lecturer at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, finds Twitter preferable to his school's LMS to get information out to students quickly. With fewer steps and clicks involved in accessing a Twitter account and sending out a message with links to student followers, this can be a more immediate solution to posting an announcement in the course site ([Perez, 2009](#)).
- **ALTERNATIVE CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.** Emory University professor and librarian Brian Croxall (2010) documented his [Twitter assignment](#) for an English course that explores how students make connections via social media and "if it changes the culture or society of the class in any appreciable way." Karen Franker (2010) of the University of Wisconsin-Stout developed a [rubric](#) for assessing student use of Twitter that includes criteria related to content, frequency, hyperlinks, mechanics, as well as comments and contributions.
- **OPTIONAL INTERACTION.** The use of Twitter in a course does not have to be required. Students enrolled in a film course at the University of Toledo can opt to use Twitter "for course updates/reminders, in-and out-of-class discussions" and the instructor encourages students to follow actors and directors who are active on Twitter and discussed in the course ([Marshall, 2010](#)).

Live Chats for Professional Development

Twitter presents a number of ways to interact and communicate not only with your students, but also your peers. Organized chats already exist, connecting educators at all levels around mutually beneficial topics of conversation. Professors, teachers, and trainers are meeting via Twitter hashtags to:

- **TALK WITH OTHER EDUCATORS TO EXCHANGE IDEAS AND RESOURCES,** engage in professional networking activities, collaboratively address common problems, and commiserate about current concerns in your field. These chats often focus on predetermined, weekly topics. A recent article from [The Guardian](#) provides insight about #UKEdChat, "a weekly congregation of teachers on Twitter" (Tobin, 2011).
- **FOLLOW CONFERENCE EVENTS EITHER AS AN ATTENDEE OR NON-ATTENDEE** following the tweets of attendees. This kind of social media [backchannel](#) is taking place more often as attendees share their notes and reactions to large keynote meetings and smaller presentation sessions (Kelly, 2011). Conferences are promoting their designated conference hashtag prior to and during the conference time frame, and individual presenters are even creating their own hashtags for participant tweets during their sessions. E-learning professional Dave Kelly presents just one example of the resources that are shared during a conference event in his recent post, Learning Technologies 2012 Conference Backchannel: Collected Resources from #LT12UK ([Kelly, 2012](#)).

Conference Hashtag Examples



Discovery Education
@DiscoveryEd



We've got @shareski presenting a 3PM in Room 220F He said he'll cry if no one shows up. Don't let him cry. #fetc



Training Magazine
@TrainingMagUS



Coming to the #Training2012 conference? Make sure to join our LinkedIn group for conversation and promotions! linkd.in/yAf5gH



T.H.E. Journal
@THE_Journal



What year are we preparing students for, 1990 or 2020+? asked Heidi Hayes Jacobs at her great #FETC keynote this a.m.

Chat Management & Participation Tools


Hashtags are hyperlinked. This means that you can click on one and see all the latest tweets that include that specific hashtag. This is one way to follow a Twitter discussion online. The Twitter interface is helpful in this way, and it's improving all the time, but you may want to experiment with some of the other tools that are available to help you follow hashtags and manage your participation. New applications seem to be continuously appearing, so the list below is just a small sample of the management options available.


- **GroupTweet:** Create a group Twitter account that “retweets each contributors’ message from the GroupTweet account.”
- **SavorChat:** Combine the use of both Twitter and Facebook accounts, hosting your own chat room with scheduling options.
- **CoveritLive:** Create an embeddable scrolling window for your chat that tracks your hashtag and/or specific users that you select. This tool captures all messages contributed to the conversation and can be replayed at a later date. OnlineCollege.org currently uses CoveritLive to display live chats and allow for replay of past events. An example of the scrolling window is provided below.


CoveritLive Window:


This week's chat feed:


#IOLchat 2/1/12 (02/01/2012)


12:18  **NoodleEducation:** [@odu_dl](#) As online instructors, how do you facilitate collaborative learning? [#IOLchat](#) [#online](#) [#faculty](#) [via Twitter]




12:18  **perpetualgogy:** Perhaps a "Pre-Class" or link to a vid/screencast would help us new and old Newbies or is it Noobs ;) [#UNLV](#) [#Online](#) [#faculty](#) [#IOLchat](#) [via Twitter]

12:19  **OC_org:** [@perpetualgogy](#) Course platform changes? Instructors can anticipate and help alleviate confusion. [#IOLchat](#) [via Twitter]

12:20  **ODU_DL:** [@NoodleEducation](#) Our live video stream courses have a special interface that supports live chat and communicating with the prof [#IOLchat](#) [via Twitter]
[Share](#)

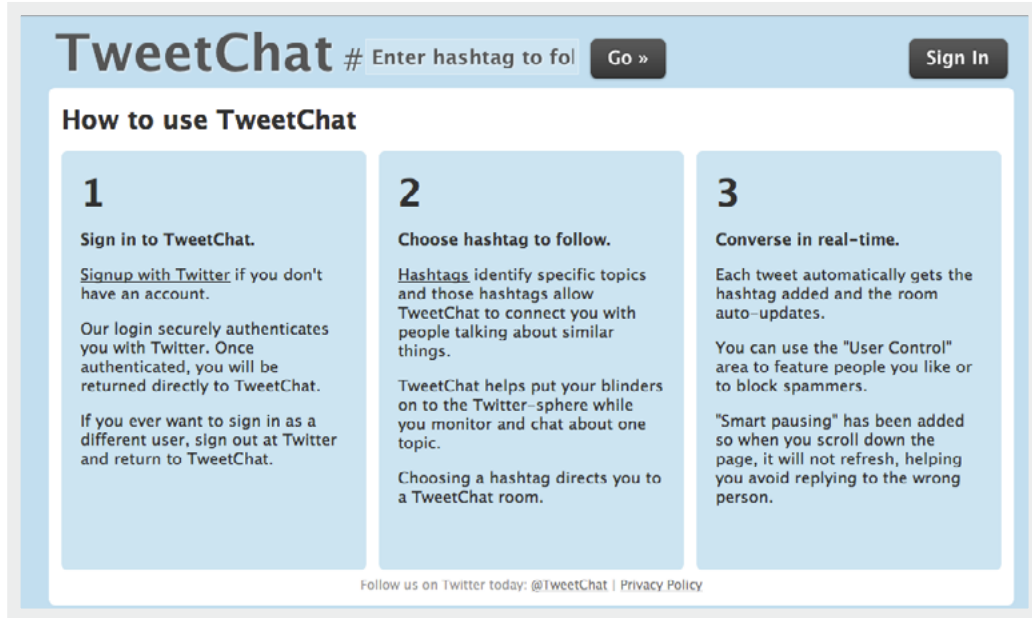
12:20  **OC_org:** [@NoodleEducation](#) Welcome! Thanks for joining us today :) [#IOLchat](#) [via Twitter]

12:21  **ODU_DL:** [@NoodleEducation](#) Asynchronous courses are kept in the LMS where chat and discussion boards are available. [#IOLchat](#) [via Twitter]

Driven by Demand Media **COVERIT LIVE**   

- **TweetChat:** In three simple steps, you can create a screen for both following the tweets that include your hashtag and sending your discussion tweets that automatically include your hashtag. Sign in with your Twitter account, enter your hashtag, and join the conversation.

TweetChat Login Screen:



- **Hootsuite:** This is just one of many dashboard applications that allow you to manage multiple social media accounts and follow multiple streams simultaneously. Conduct a search for your hashtag from within Hootsuite and save the stream to your dashboard.

Hootsuite Interface:



- **Twylah:** Create a webpage for your class tweets with this tool, which is currently available by requesting an invitation. The visual layout and organization may be helpful to both instructors and students, especially in between live sessions.
- **Nurph:** Nurph channels “are real-time discussion sites that bring your Twitter community together for group chat.”
- **TweetGrid:** A Twitter search dashboard that tracks multiple hashtags simultaneously and updates in real time.

Conducting A Live Chat

Our recommendations for getting started with your own chat event are listed below, organized into three task lists: Before, During, and After the discussion. These lists also represent our lessons learned in the process of hosting and moderating weekly Twitter chat events over the past eight months.

Before Your First Discussion

Once the live session begins, it can go in a number of directions based on the make-up of the participant group and the facilitation of the moderator. Taking care of a few basic administrative and logistical details in advance of the event can enhance the experience for all involved. Here are a few steps to consider:

PARTICIPATE IN OTHER CHATS. Before embarking on your own chat adventure, test the waters with some of the already established chats. It's okay to just sit in or listen in at first so you get a feel for the flow of information and get to know the other participants. Individual Twitter chats can be as different as any other format for discussion, so try a few and make notes about the approaches you like and don't like.

CREATE A HASHTAG. You will need a way to tie all of your participants' discussion tweets together, and the hashtag (#) serves this purpose. It allows you and your students to identify your tweets and contributions to the discussion and makes all of the tweets searchable. There are no real rules for hashtags, but here are a few guidelines:

- Keep it short. The hashtag counts toward each message's 140-character limit.
- Make it memorable. Find a work or series of characters that will be easy for you and your students to remember. Some instructors use the course prefix and number, such as "#EDU999."
- You may have to try several options. Creation and use of individual #hashtags are not regulated in any way, so your first, and maybe even second and third, choices may already be in use by other groups. Perform a quick search in Twitter for the hashtag you want to use to see if it is available.
- Use letters and numbers only. Hashtags can't include punctuation or special characters.

DECIDE ON A DISCUSSION TOPIC. Setting goals for the chat in advance not only helps you to prepare, but also helps your students to get ready to participate.

- Choose a broad topic area that has the potential to invite debate, opinion, response, and suggestions.
- Consider ways to approach to frame the event, such as:
 - responding to a recent current event,
 - debating sides of an issue,
 - reviewing a report or study, and
 - brainstorming solutions to a given problem or scenario.

DEVELOP SPECIFIC QUESTIONS. This takes some practice and can be just as challenging as writing asynchronous questions for your online discussion boards.

- Develop specific questions that relate to your chosen topic to guide participants. Make sure those questions require feedback that amounts to more than yes/no or agree/disagree responses.
- Select several “read aheads,” such as articles and websites that are relevant to your discussion questions and inform your students about the topic and issues before the live event. This is also a good way to introduce students to different types of sources and authors you have approved.
- Create a separate document for the chat that includes all of the materials you might need. This will allow you to cut and paste text into your messages, so you can focus on the stream of participant activity and not on typing while the chat is taking place.

ANNOUNCE THE TIME AND DATE: Let your students and any other participants you want to invite know when to log in. This is a synchronous session, so your students will need to add it to their calendars and prepare ahead of time by reviewing topic and questions, reading advance materials, and setting up necessary accounts. Plan for both start and end times so participants will know what to expect. One hour is a typical length, but you can schedule the time as appropriate for your group. Don’t forget to factor time zones into your decision if your participants are in different geographic locations. Consider publicizing your event both on and off Twitter (i.e., email reminders, course announcements) to make sure you reach everyone you want to reach.

RECRUIT AN ASSISTANT. This is not always possible, but it may be a helpful addition to your first chat event. Reach out to your network and locate someone with Twitter and perhaps Twitter chat experience to support you during the event. This person could primarily listen in and provide you with tips and suggestions in the background (i.e., with instant messaging or other communication tool outside of Twitter) or be a full participant, helping you to facilitate the discussion.

START SLOWLY AND BUILD. If Twitter is relatively new for you and/or your students, consider hosting an “orientation” chat event for a brief period of time so everyone can test out their accounts and send a “test” Tweet with your hashtag. This may increase everyone’s comfort level so they will be ready to move forward when the time comes to participate in a class discussion.

During Your First Discussion

Running a live event takes practice. Give yourself room to grow and learn from each chat you manage as a moderator or join as a participant. You’ll develop your own list of techniques that work for you and your students, but until then, borrow from the more experienced moderators and incorporate the strategies that seem helpful to you. Use the list below as a starting point to understand what to expect from your first live chat.

Get the Session Started

- Log in to your account and your management tool, if you choose to use one.
- Send a reminder tweet in advance that includes the chat hashtag and the start time. This can also serve as a warning to your followers who aren't part of your chat that you will be sending out more tweets than usual during that time frame.
- Welcome new participants as they send out their first tweets of the session. It's helpful to acknowledge each account, but this can be difficult with a large group.
- Remind participants to include your chat hashtag in each tweet they send out.
- Invite participants to say hello, introduce themselves, answer a preliminary question, or otherwise make it known that they are joining in the chat. This is the only way you will be able to "see" that someone is following along.
- Send a "kick off" tweet to announce the start of the session.

Facilitate Conversation

- Tweet out your discussion questions and invite responses from your participants. If you have more than one question planned, send them out one at a time.
- Help participants to both engage and have their input amplified. You can retweet their messages, reply to them with your feedback and suggestions for expanding on what they've said, and ask follow-up questions to spur more in-depth responses.
- Watch for participants engaging with each other and not just with you as the moderator. These conversations are part of the larger chat and can help build the discussion.
- Be flexible. Your pre-set questions will help you stay on track and keep the group focused, but don't be afraid to go "off-script" just as you would in an in-class discussion if a crucial point needs to be emphasized or if the group takes the discussion into an unexpected, but useful, direction.
- Be patient. It can be tempting to quickly reply to participants and move from question to question, but allow time for them to respond. They will not only need to form their thoughts, but also type them into Twitter. There may be moments when it appears that no one is speaking.

Manage the Logistics

- Find the best combination of open windows and tabs that works for you. It may be helpful to start with multiple items on your screen:
 - your Twitter account,
 - a Twitter management or chat tool,
 - a document with your discussion questions, and
 - your email (in case you receive messages from students having trouble with the chat.)
- Have a plan A, B, and C for accessing the Twitter stream and tracking your hashtag. At some point in time, the technology will likely fail. You may, for example, lose your Internet connection, or your Twitter management tool may lock up, or errors may occur when Twitter is “over capacity.” Be prepared to switch gears and alert your participants that there may be a change in plans or a pause in the chat.
- Monitor your time. If you have an assistant, this person can be helpful in reminding you about the time and/or providing a warning at agreed upon points during the scheduled session (i.e., midway through, 10 minutes left).

Conclude the Session

- Send a tweet that announces that the session is wrapping up. This may be in the form of a time limit or a natural close to the discussion. Invite participants to share a last item or thought before ending the chat.
- Thank your students for participating and provide a next step for them to follow-up with after the chat, such as related reading, preparation for an upcoming assignment, or any other planned activity.

After Your First Discussion

Once you have completed a live session, there are steps you can take to extend the discussion and document the experience both for your review and that of your student participants.

GENERATE A TRANSCRIPT. There are several tools and services available to help you create a link to a collection of all of the tweets that included your hashtag during a specific time frame. These transcripts also present the tweets in chronological order. This can be a helpful way to record the discussions for review by participants as well as by students who were not able to attend the live event. Try [Tweet Reports](#) and [Storify](#).

WRITE A SUMMARY. This could be as brief or detailed as you want it to be, but will allow you to present your analysis of the most important parts of the chat. This is also a way to recognize individual participants. Provide as an attachment in your course, via email, or on a class blog.

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION. Encourage participants to continue talking about and exchanging resources relevant to your discussion topic, even after the session ends. By including your hashtag in subsequent tweets, the stream can continue for those who want to keep tracking the discussion.

PREPARE FOR YOUR NEXT EVENT. Take some time to reflect on your first session. Make notes about what went well, what didn't go well, and what you would do differently next time. Include this information when you plan your next live chat.

Advanced Chat Strategies

The guidelines presented above cover the basics required for preparing for and conducting your first live event. Once you gain more experience with the platform, you may be interested in expanding your use of Twitter chats with additional features and techniques. The possibilities are seemingly endless, but we've collected several ideas from our experience with #IOLchat and the other chats we attend that might be interesting to you. Select one or two to help take your live chat experience to the next level.

FEATURE A SPECIAL GUEST. Just as you might invite a guest speaker to your face-to-face classroom, you can also invite a guest to join your live Twitter chat session. The chat could be framed in multiple ways, including pre-determined questions that you and your guest plan or a question and answer session in which your students pose questions for your guest to answer. Students could also be asked to submit questions in advance.

OPEN A SEPARATE CHAT ACCOUNT. If you would like to keep some separation between your individual Twitter account and the live chat you conduct with your students, consider creating a separate account for use during your chat sessions. You could moderate the chat by tweeting questions and facilitating conversation from this account instead of your own. That opens up options for you to participate in different ways. One example of a chat-specific account is [@lrnchat](#).

CROWDSOURCE. Ask your potential participants, students, or peer group members for ideas. Send out a call for suggestions that gives instructions for replying through tagged tweets, direct messages, email, online survey, or polling tool. Participants may have specific ideas for chat topics or answer other questions related to current trends that may help you determine the most relevant topics to schedule.

COLLECT YOUR CHAT RESOURCES. One of the most popular motives for using Twitter is for the resources that are commonly shared, usually in the form of links. While a transcript can be used to capture these, it doesn't allow you to search through them by keyword or topic. Social bookmarking and curation tools can be helpful to you and your group. Look at applications like Delicious, Diigo, Pinterest, and Scoop.it as ways to not only collect links into one area for easy access, but also make them searchable by adding tags and keywords. You could serve as the manager for this account or provide access to your students or other chat group members.

SET-UP A CHAT WEBPAGE. For recurring events, provide a central hub of information about the chat that includes the hashtag and scheduled day and time. Add an introduction that states the purpose and goal of the event and details about what's planned. This is also a good place to provide any supporting resources and post ground rules you may have regarding procedures. Focus on the audience you are expecting to attend, whether that is limited to your students or open to anyone interested in the general topic you plan to discuss. The [#UKEdChat](#) page is an example of this strategy that includes additional resources and networking opportunities for participants.

ADD YOUR EVENT TO A CHAT DIRECTORY. If you want to openly invite others to attend your live chat event, and if you plan on a recurring schedule, consider adding your chat to one of the many Twitter chat directories. These sites offer you the opportunity to add your chat to a list and include the basic information regarding when you meet and the general topics covered, as well as providing your identifying hashtag. [The Twitter Chat Schedule](#) is just one of these directories and currently lists over 500 chats.

Conclusion

There are challenges in conducting online discussions from the perspectives of both students and instructors as online course participants. The typical asynchronous forum can limit discourse and exchange, while synchronous technologies may be cumbersome to deploy and access. The microblogging tool Twitter provides one solution to the problems associated with facilitating real-time conversations. Twitter's free account access and proven approach using hashtags to filter participant contributions make it a new option for facilitating not only class discussions, but also professional development and networking sessions.

This type of online discussion may not be right for every educator, or even for every class, but it does provide a viable alternative to the existing options usually available within an online course. Different schools will have different policies and guidelines in place for using social media and technologies that are not supported by the institution. Check with your program's administrators to find out more about the possibilities available to you before embarking on Twitter use with your courses. In the meantime, there are many ongoing chats that an interested educator could join as a trial of this live chat experience.

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Venable, M. (November 14, 2011)	Twitter for professional use: Part 2 Channeling the streams. <i>Educational Technology and Change Journal</i>.

Resources

Blackboard Collaborate	http://www.blackboard.com/Platforms/Collaborate/Overview.aspx
CoverItLive	http://www.coveritlive.com/
GroupTweet	http://www.grouptweet.com/
Hootsuite	http://hootsuite.com
Nurph	http://nurph.com/
SavorChat	http://www.savorchat.com/
Storify	http://storify.com/
TweetChat	http://tweetchat.com/
Tweet Reports	http://search.tweetreports.com/advanced_search.php
Twitter	https://twitter.com/
Twitter Chat Schedule	http://bit.ly/ChatSched
Twitter Support - Lists	https://support.twitter.com/articles/76460-how-to-use-twitter-lists
Twylah	http://www.twylah.com/
WebEx	http://www.webex.com/

Appendix A: Twitter Chat Checklist

Before

- Participate in another chat
- Create a hashtag
- Decide on a discussion topic
- Develop specific discussion questions
- Announce the time and date
- Recruit an assistant
- Start slowly - run a “test” chat

During

GET THE SESSION STARTED

- Log in
- Send a reminder tweet
- Welcome new participants
- Remind participants to include session hashtag
- Invite introductions
- Send “kick off” tweet to start the discussion

FACILITATE CONVERSATION

- Tweet discussion questions (one at a time with pause for replies)
- Engage with participants, encourage replies, retweet, ask follow-up questions
- Be flexible
- Be patient

MANAGE THE LOGISTICS

- Open documents, browser tabs, and account windows
- Be ready with Plan B and C regarding technology
- Monitor your time

CONCLUDE THE SESSION

- Send a “wrap-up” tweet
- Thank participants for attending

After

- Generate a transcript
- Write a summary
- Continue the conversation, asynchronously
- Prepare for next chat

Appendix B:

21 Live Chats For Educators

The Twitter chats listed below were active at the time of publication. Keep in mind that schedules change and events come and go, and there are many more active groups than those listed here. Check the links for additional information regarding topics, times, and dates.

CHAT TOPIC	HASHTAG	WEBSITE/URL
Educators debating and evaluating solutions	#edchat	http://edchat.pbworks.com/w/page/219908/FrontPage
How and what people are learning	#lrnchat	http://lrnchat.com/
Education books	#edbkchat	https://twitter.com/#!/edbkchat
Range of education topics	#spnchat	https://twitter.com/#!/search?q=%23SPNchat
Social media and education	#smEDU	http://socialmediacub.org/blogs/social-media-education/
Learning professionals -impact of digital experience on learning	#chat2lrn	http://chat2lrn.wordpress.com/
Social media and higher education	#smcedu	http://smcedu.ning.com/
College unions and activities discussion	#CUAD	http://jenniferkeegin.com/tag/cuad/
Web 2.0 tools	#web20chat	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Web20Chat/139855972704696?v=info
Educators in the United Kingdom	#UKEdChat	http://ukedchat.com/
Preparing for, applying to, paying for college	#collegechat	https://www.facebook.com/pages/CollegeChat/120414001331543?sk=info
Use of iPads in education	#iPadChat	http://twebevent.com/iPadChat
Elementary education	#elemchat	http://elemchat.wikispaces.com/
Career and technical education and workforce development	#actechat	http://www.acteonline.org/e-media.aspx
Academic research and the doctoral journey	#phdchat	http://phdchat.pbworks.com/w/page/33280234/PhD%20Chat
Academic advising	#AcAdv	https://twitter.com/#!/acadvchat
Freshmen writing programs	#FYCchat	http://fycchat.blogspot.com/

CHAT TOPIC	HASHTAG	WEBSITE/URL
Kindergarten and early childhood education	#kinderchat	http://kinderchat-kinderchat.blogspot.com/p/chat.html
Career and job search	#careerchat	https://twitter.com/#!/search/%23careerchat
Student affairs professionals	#SAChat	http://thesabloggers.org/sachat/#
Online higher education, trends and technology	#IOLchat	http://www.onlinecollege.org/twitter-chat-with-inside-online-learning/