

Twitter basics ... and beyond: tools to tweet effectively

This toolkit provides an introduction to the social media platform Twitter. It outlines Twitter's basic features, and explores some more advanced functions that you can use to improve your knowledge and understanding of Twitter.

Overview

Twitter has around **330 million active monthly users**. It's not the biggest social media platform (Facebook has around 2 billion active monthly users), but it's a very active channel. Twitter users post around **500 million tweets a day**.

Twitter's mission is to: "Give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers."

Twitter is a 'micro-blogging' platform, which allows users to share short text and image updates. These updates are called 'tweets'.

Recently, Twitter extended the total length of tweets, from 140 characters to 280 characters. And URLs and images no longer count towards a tweet's character count.

Searching for tweets and people

Searching Twitter can help you find users and content that is relevant to you.

You can do a [basic search](#) by keyword or username, and then filter by content type, location and language.

Basic searches can be saved, so you can quickly and easily search for content you're frequently interested in, such as hashtags or conversation topics.

You can also do an [advanced search](#) by phrase, hashtag, user, location and date.

Names and usernames

Your name appears above your username (see example below). It can be up to 50 characters long, including spaces, and should clearly represent you.

Avoid acronyms in your name, and always use plain language to describe yourself – being clear and obvious will help potential followers connect with you. People connect less with abstract things like acronyms and jargon.



This is the name of the University's Twitter account.

Your username can be up to 15 characters, and cannot include spaces. It must be unique (that is, not in use by another Twitter user). Aim to reflect your name as much as possible, and avoid acronyms if you can. Don't use underscores – they look untidy and cluttered.



This is the username of the University's Twitter account.

You use usernames at the start of a tweet to *reply* to someone. You put usernames in the body of a tweet to *mention* someone.

The example below is a *reply*. Nicola is talking *to* the University, not *about* it. The username is at the start of the tweet, so the tweet is delivered only to the @sheffhallamuni account

(and any accounts who follow @Nickinibbs AND @sheffhallamuni).



Nicola Nibbs

@Nickinibbs

Follow



@sheffhallamuni is the SHU wifi working?
Both personal and work phones cant detect it

9:51 AM - 7 Mar 2018



The tweet below is a *mention*. The @sheffhallamuni account is mentioned in the body of the tweet, because The RCM is talking *about* the University, not *to* the University.



The RCM

@MidwivesRCM

Following



Congratulations to Gemma Ford from
@sheffhallamuni who receives £1,000
towards her project and is the @vitabiotics
Pregnacare® Student Midwife of the Year!
Congratulations Gemma! #rcmwinner
#rcmawards

This tweet is a *mention* with the username at the start of the tweet. Lee has used a full-stop at the start of the tweet to turn it into a mention, instead of a reply. This is sometimes called the 'Mystery Dot'.



Lee Wilkinson

@lee_wilkinson2

Follow



.@sheffhallamuni has received a £500k
#funding boost to create a Centre of
Excellence for Degree #Apprenticeships
bdaily.co.uk/articles/2018/ #Sheffield
#Yorkshire

Remember, *replies* are not delivered to all of your followers. They're usually only seen by the account you reply to. If you want to talk *about* an account, rather than *to* it, make sure you're *mentioning* them, not *replying*.

Further reading: ['About replies and mentions'](#).

Sharing tweets

There are two ways of sharing tweets: by retweeting (RT), and by quote-tweeting (QT). A retweet shares the original tweet to your followers, without amending or adding anything extra to the tweet. Retweets show that you think something is worth sharing, without giving your followers any context to why you shared it.



SHU Student Support
@SHUhelp

Following

Don't get caught out by phishing scams!
Make sure you know what to look out for and
what do to keep you and your money safe.



Phishing Scams! Don't get caught out.

Phishing uses fraudulent emails and websites to fool recipients into divulging personal financial data such as credit card numbers, account usernames and pa...
blogs.shu.ac.uk

10:37 AM - 21 Mar 2018

1 Retweet 1 Like



Tweet your reply

This is a retweet. The tweet has been shared without amending it or adding any new content.

A quote-tweet shares the tweet with your followers, with an added comment from you about the content of the original tweet. There are many ways to make use of this feature. You could be critical and disagree with the poster, you might endorse the content, or you might add your own context to the situation.



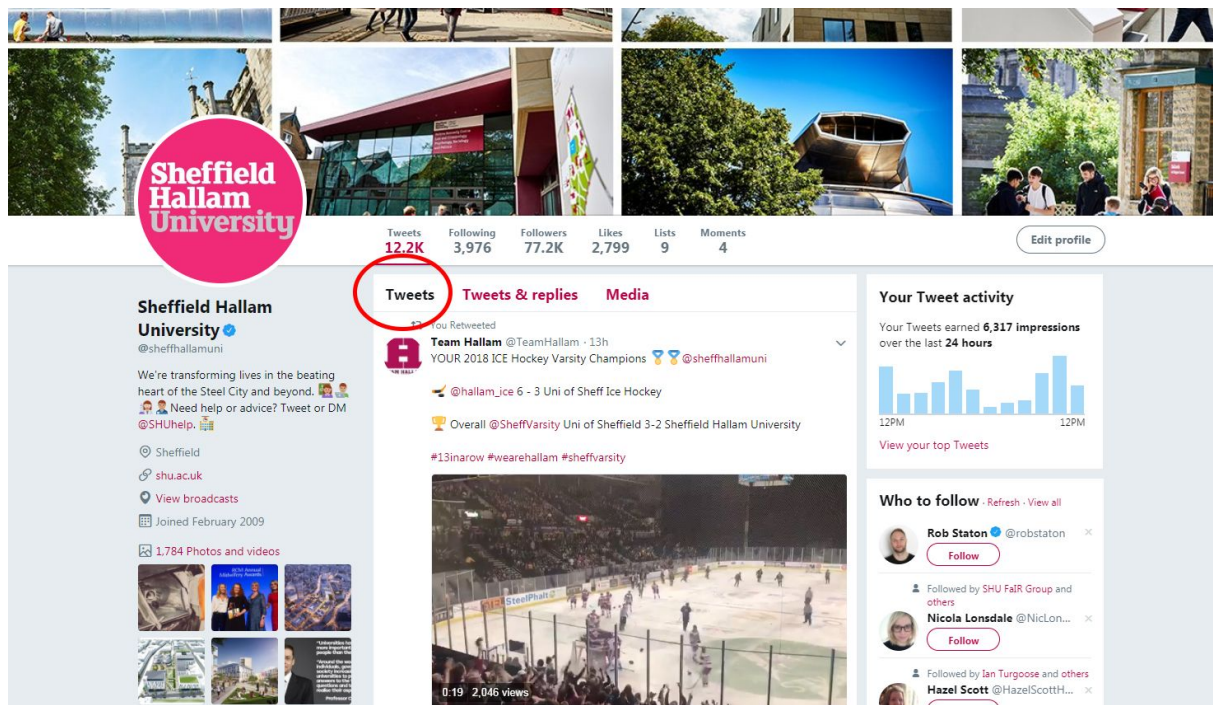
This is a quoted tweet. Note that Priscilla is not endorsing the original tweet. She's pointing out the error contained in the tweet.

You can retweet or quote-tweet your own tweets, or tweets by any other account (as long as it's not a private account). You don't need to follow an account to share its tweets.

‘Tweets’, ‘Tweets & replies’, and ‘Media’ tabs

On a Twitter account’s ‘page’, you’ll notice there are three tabs that segment the content posted by that account. This allows you to see either:

- Tweets by that account, with no replies to other accounts.
- All of the account’s tweets AND replies to other accounts.
- Tweets by the account that include either an image, video or GIF.



The tabs above allow you to filter an accounts tweets when you're viewing its 'page'.

The default view is 'Tweets', which doesn't display all of the account's replies to other users. If you want to see their replies as well, click on the 'Tweets and replies' tab.

Likes

Likes are a way of showing appreciation for content on Twitter. They used to be called 'Favourites'.

By liking a tweet, you're suggesting that you approve of the content. But you can use likes in other ways. You can use the likes function to save tweets to your 'Likes' tab, perhaps to share or read later.



Direct messages

Twitter allows users to message each other privately. There's no character limit in direct messages (DMs), and you can add multiple users for a group chat.

You can change your account settings so that anyone – even people who don't follow you – can message you.

Hashtags

Hashtags are useful when you want to join in or start a conversation. They allow you to network with others at conferences, or through shared interests. And they can bring people together around socio-political movements, for example #StudentsStandUp, #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter.

They're sometimes used as throwaway slogans, like you'd see on a t-shirt. This is fine, if you're being flippant or humorous. But note that, in general, hashtag engagement is declining on Twitter.

If you were wondering, anyone can create a hashtag. But, if you create one, always check to see if it's already in use. And make sure the words look okay all squished together.

Also, don't overuse hashtags. Too many can make a tweet look messy. Two maximum is fine, but they should be there for a good reason.

In summary, hashtags are good for:

- Conversation topics, such as #UKedchat
- Live news and events, such as #NUSconference
- Socio-political movements, such as #StudentsStandUp
- Slogans, such as #SoDoneWithThisToolkit

Lists

Lists on Twitter are ways of grouping accounts together. You can create up to 1,000 lists, and each list can include a maximum of 5,000 accounts.

Sometimes you can feel like there are too many accounts to follow, and so many tweets that you can't make any sense of it all. Lists can help.

You might want to make lists around specific interests (such as news lists), or useful resources (such tutorials and blog updates).

Lists can be public (accessible by anyone) or private (accessible only by you). You can

follow other people's lists, you can create lists, and you can share lists.

Users are notified when they're added to a list, so think about the purpose and description of a list before you start adding people. You might even want to ask permission to add people to a public list (such as 'Students on X course' or 'People who work in X department'), as you're revealing a small amount of personal information about them.

Use lists to:

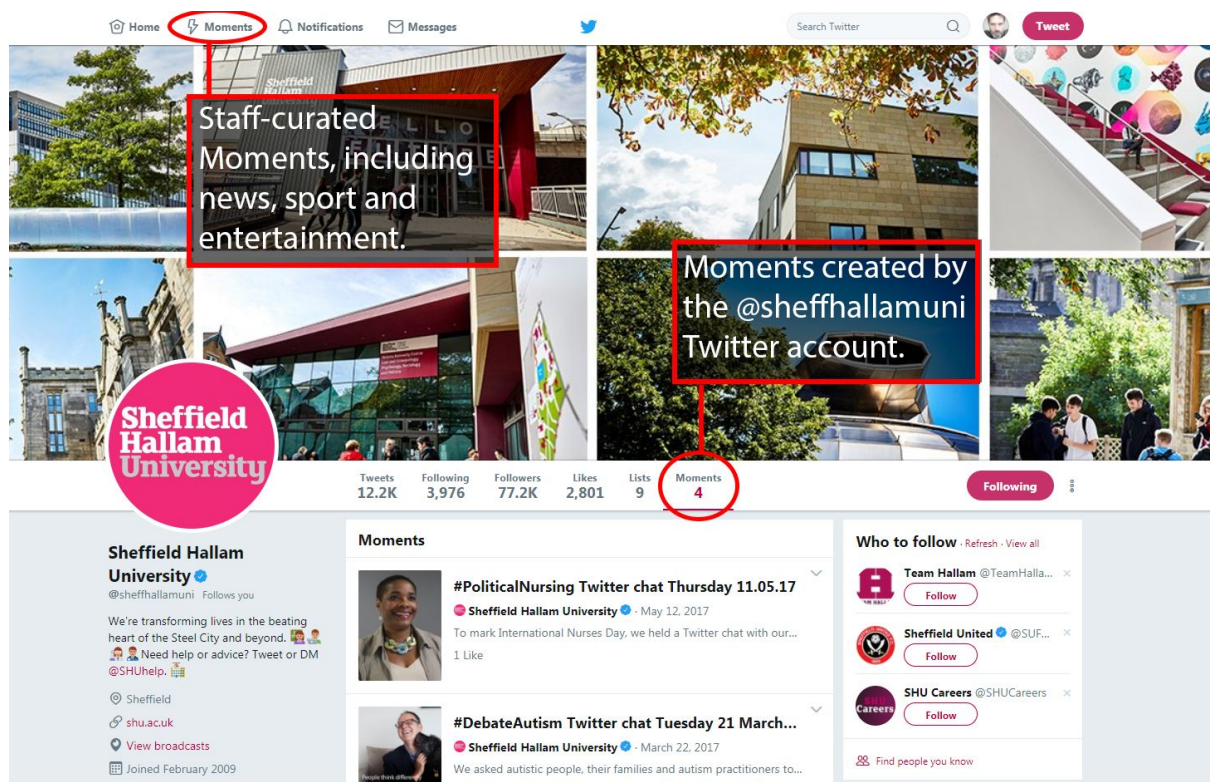
- [Curate users](#).
- Streamline your experience.
- [Organise and share resources](#)

Twitter Moments

Moments can be a useful way to demonstrate outcomes, tell stories and highlight conversations. They're often used to [show a range of views on a news event](#).

Although Twitter has a button for its staff-curated Moments, anyone can create Moments. Moments you create stay on your Twitter profile, under the 'Moments' tab.

When you create a moment, you can add a description, a cover image, and then you can add users' tweets. Moments that you create stay on your profile, under your 'Moments' tab.



You can [find out more about Twitter Moments in this article](#), or by following [@TwitterMoments](#) and [@UKmoments](#).

Twitter threads

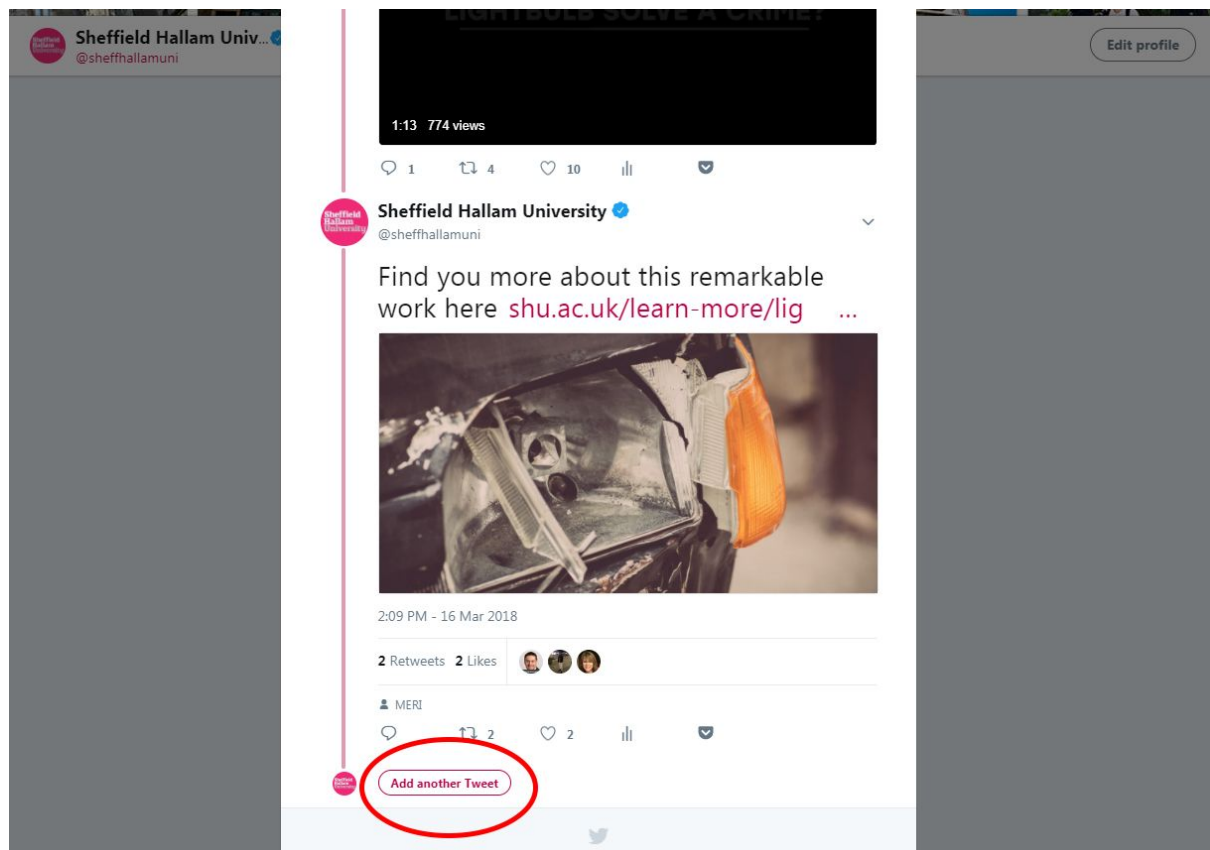
Threads are a sequence of tweets, connected to each other in the order they were published.

They give users a way of writing in detail on a subject. They can be effective ways to raise your profile, demonstrate thought leadership.

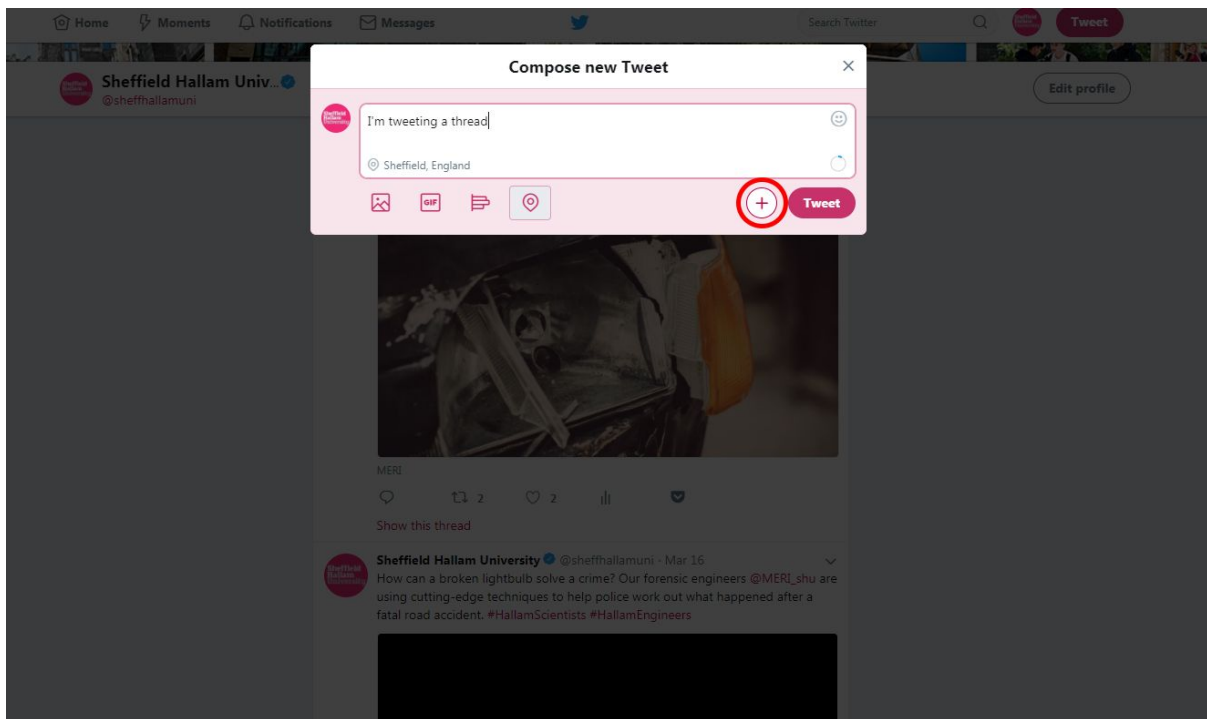
People use threads to [comment on news and events](#), analyse and explore a subject, offer a unique perspective and insight, and to [tell a story](#).

Writing a long thread allows you to explore a subject in detail, but it can be time-consuming. If you're planning to write a thread, you might want to write it in advance, in a word-processing app, and repurpose the content for a blog posts or news article.

There are different ways of posting threads: you can add tweets to a tweet on your profile, or you can pre-compose the whole thread.



This button adds a tweet below the existing tweet. The line on the left shows that the tweets are connected in a thread.



The button above allows you to compose a sequence of tweets as a thread before you publish them by pressing the 'Tweet' button.

Read more about [threads and how to use them in this article](#).

Visual content

Visual content in tweets can help you connect with your audience. Evidence shows that users are more likely to engage with tweets containing visual content, but it pays to spend a bit of time and care on [making sure your photos and videos are visually appealing](#).

You can include up to four images in a tweet. Your photos should show people's faces, or give us a sense of place. They also be well-lit and framed, and visually connect your audience to the subject.

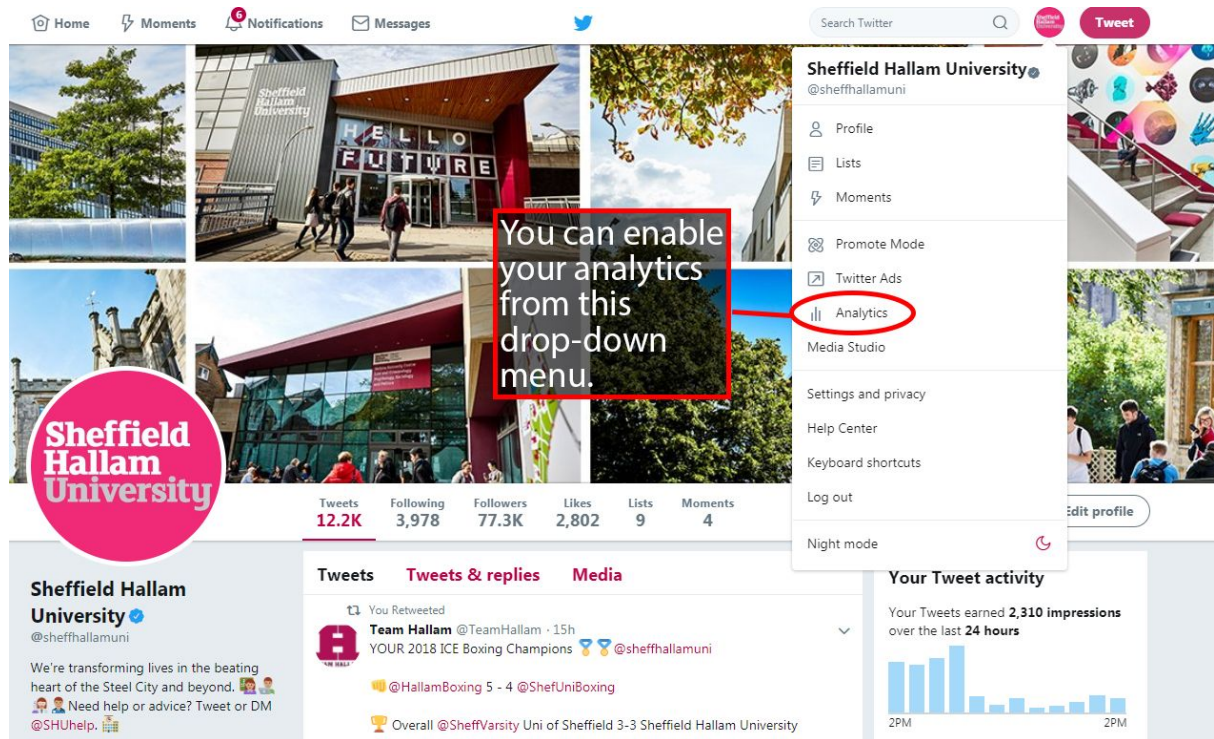
You can include up to 280 seconds of video content in a tweet, but your videos should usually be much shorter than that. 20-30 seconds is fine. Twitter has a very basic video editor built-in to its interface, which allows you to trim the beginning and end of the video.

Twitter has a GIF library. You can search and browse for relevant GIFs to include in your tweets. Be mindful that they are suitable for the tone and content of your tweet.

Live-streaming video is also possible, through the mobile app. You might want to get a tripod and mobile phone adapter if you want to live-stream, otherwise your streams will be shaky and difficult to watch.

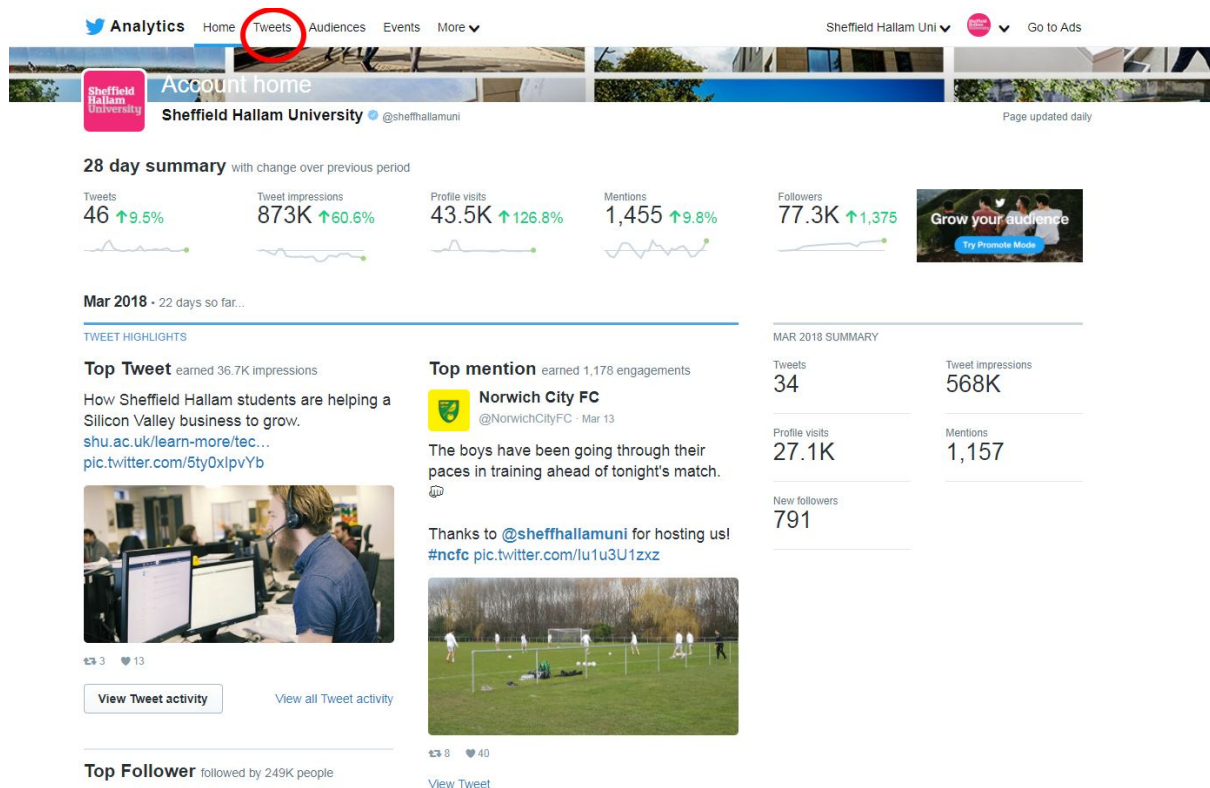
Analytics

Once enabled, the analytics feature in Twitter can tell you lots about how your tweets are performing, how many new followers you've gained and how many times you've been mentioned.



Once enabled, you can access your analytics from the same drop-down.

You're taken to your analytics overview page, which gives you a snapshot of your last month on Twitter. From here, you can explore your analytics in more detail.



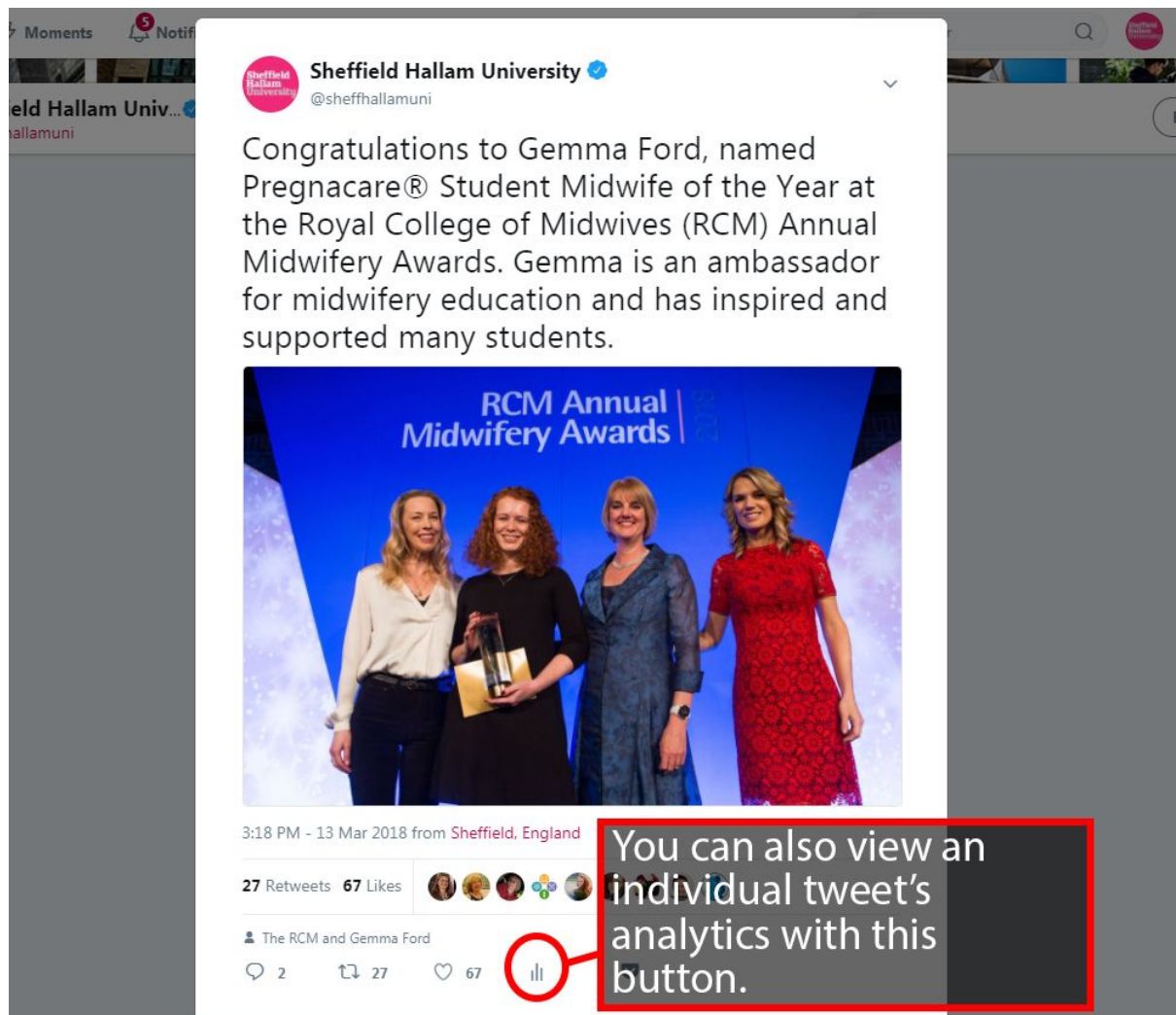
This is the analytics homepage. It gives you an overview of your last month on Twitter. Click the 'Tweets' tab (highlighted above) to see data about your recent tweets.

In the 'Tweet activity' section you can see much more detail about your tweets over the last 28 days, including:

- Number of impressions, or how many times your tweets were delivered to users' timelines.
- Engagement rate, which illustrates how frequently your followers like, reply to or share your tweets. You can scroll down to see more detail on engagement, including number of retweets, likes and replies.
- Number of clicks – useful to know if you're trying to drive traffic to your website or blog.

You can also view your tweets' analytics directly from Twitter. The 'Tweet activity' button on the bottom right of your tweets tells you the number of impressions and total engagements.

Note that Twitter measures any interaction with a tweet as engagement – this includes clicking on a tweet to expand it, or clicking an image to enlarge it.



You need to have enabled analytics to see this feature.

Twitter's policies

Twitter's rules and policies change regularly. You can [read up-to-date rules and policies on their Help Centre](#).

Remember that you agree to Twitter's rules and policies when you sign up to use the platform. It's the responsibility of the user to abide by the rules and policies, and to ensure you're happy with your privacy settings.

Profile checklist

This section outlines the things you need to do to make sure your profile is optimised. It assumes you've read the rest of the toolkit, and that you're familiar with the terminology.

1. Your name. This can be up to 50 characters long. It should be your real name. Try not to be abstract. Avoid acronyms, if possible.
2. Your username. This can be up to 15 characters long. It must be unique on Twitter.

3. Header photo (sometimes called cover image). This should be 1500 x 500 pixels. Twitter will resize and crop it if it isn't. It should say something about you and what you do, without distracting too much from the other content of your profile. You must have usage rights.
4. Profile photo. This should be 500 x 500 pixels, with the main subject (hopefully a head-and-shoulders photo of you) in the centre of the image. You must have usage rights.
5. Your biography. This can be up to 160 characters long, and should explain who you are, what you do, and what users will get by following you. Use plain language. Avoid phrases like 'the official Twitter account for...' – they say very little about you, and they take up space. There's no need to put disclaimers about your opinions in your bio, unless you're concerned about the content of your tweets.
6. Website URL. You can include a URL below your bio. This should be a page that helps connect Twitter users to you, such as your blog, or the 'About us' section of the University's website.

Still need help? Want to offer feedback on this toolkit? Give the communications team a ring on 0114 225 2875, or email socialmedia@shu.ac.uk.