

# A Beginner's Guide to Twitter Chat Participation



## What is a Twitter Chat?

A Twitter chat is a live, real-time discussion that takes place via Twitter messages, also known as tweets. Connected by use of a specific [hashtag](#), those contributing to the discussion can add their comments in 140-character increments. While it may seem an odd way to participate in a conversation, you may be surprised at the benefits the platform provides, and at the growth of this format among educators at all levels.

If you've thought about joining a Twitter chat or are completely new to the concept, the intent of this guide is to provide you with the basic information necessary to successfully participate in your first live Twitter chat.

## What to Expect

As in any group discussion, Twitter chats feature a general exchange of ideas, opinions, recommendations, and resources. Most are open to the public, and anyone interested in the topic is encouraged to attend. There are four common components of these live conversations you should look for:

- **Moderator:** An individual or group that organizes the event and facilitates the conversation.
- **Central topic:** Most chats are organized around a central theme of interest, as well as a more detailed topic for each "meeting."
- **Hashtag:** The # symbol used with a series of letters and numbers is known as a "hashtag" (for this event you will be using the hashtag **#WDCoffeeTLK**) and adding the chat-specific hashtag to each of your tweets allows you to participate. The hashtag is searchable and creates a way to filter the tweets that are part of the chat. Hashtags are also increasingly part of other social platforms, including Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram and Flickr.
- **Time and date:** Many Twitter chats are recurring events scheduled monthly, weekly, or another pre-determined interval. To see our Twitter chat schedule for our Coffee Talk series click [here](#). You can also review past Twitter chat discussions by clicking [here](#) (click on the PDF file WDC Coffee Talk Series Twitter Chat - Mar 26 2015). All Twitter chats differ, some provide discussion questions in advance, while others include them during the live event, and some chats will be more open-ended, taking direction cues from gathered participants. As a participant, you should assume that your contributions will be collected in some sort of transcript, ranging from a blog post summary to a compilation via a hashtag aggregation tool like [Storify](#).

Challenges typically associated with technology use can also be expected. For example, there can be issues with Twitter being "over capacity" and service breaks in Internet connectivity. Expect a little chaos, too, as you get familiar with the flow of a live conversation in Twitter and the timing of tweets. In

addition to delays experienced by some participants, new members may join at any time and side discussions often emerge along the way. Chats with large numbers of active participants scroll by quickly and you may not notice every comment. That's okay; it's the nature of the chat.

## Prepare for Your First Chat

Chats are simple in that you don't need a lot of equipment or prior training to join, but taking some time to get ready for your first chat may improve your overall experience. Here are a few steps to help you prepare for a live Twitter chat:

- **Find a Twitter tool.** There are multiple applications available to filter the hashtag used for the chat from the rest of the tweets in your Twitter stream. Explore [Twubs.com](http://Twubs.com) and [TweetChat.com](http://TweetChat.com), as well as search features of desktop management tools like [Hootsuite](http://Hootsuite). Practice using the tool before the chat starts so that you know how to reply, re-tweet, and know whether or not the tool automatically includes the [chat hashtag](#) (some tools offer this helpful option.) You can also conduct a [hashtag search](#) from your Twitter account.
- **Review available materials.** Please watch the Coffee Talk videos [here](#) prior to the chat. Be sure to read all resources provided carefully (especially if you are new to the process). Also you may even want to scan [transcripts](#) of recent chat sessions, if they are available, to get a better idea of the size of attendance and learn about other participants.
- **Make initial contact.** Ease into the community surrounding the chat: follow the chat's Twitter account (i.e., @DC\_AMCHP), use the chat hashtag (i.e., #WDCoffeeTLK) in a tweet to share related resources with the larger group, and announce your intent to join. You can also contact - @DC\_AMCHP, the designated moderator via Twitter to ask any questions you may have before the chat event.

Once you've identified a chat to join, get familiar with the topic and think about what you might contribute in the way of personal experience, resources, and additional questions you may have for other participants.

## Active Participation

In any chat you will likely find a diverse group of participants that includes chat veterans as well as other first-timers. It's a good idea to "listen in" or just monitor the hashtag (i.e., #WDCoffeeTLK) of a live event before joining, but don't wait too long to get involved.

Many moderators will ask participants to introduce themselves before the discussion starts. This is a great way to gauge the audience and the only way to really "see" who's there. Add your introduction to the stream and let others know if it is your first chat or the first time attending that particular chat. These groups are supportive and will provide helpful tips, such as:

- **Share what you're experiencing.** Re-tweet the chat questions so that your followers will see them, understand that you are participating in a live event (and tweeting more frequently than usual), and perhaps join the conversation.
- **Reply to other participants.** Interact with the other attendees, not just the moderator and the chat questions. Additional questions, following up on responses where you would like more

information or resource suggestions, are expected. Recognize others' responses that you find particularly relevant.

- **Remember to use the hashtag.** Perhaps the most common mistake of new participants is not including the hashtag in every tweet during the chat. Tweets that don't include the hashtag are often missed by other attendees who monitor the stream with a hashtag search or filter. You can continue to use the chat's hashtag even after the live session ends to share related information.

Twitter chats are informal, so it's also okay to end your participation or drop out of the chat if you have to do so. Thank your hosts and excuse yourself from the chat. This happens when attendees have to take important phone calls, go to meetings, or just find the conversation going in a direction that isn't relevant to them.

### **Things to Remember!**

Live chats provide a venue to meet others outside of your existing personal learning network, all drawn together by a common interest in a topic of conversation and a unique hashtag.

Consider the professional development potential of these kinds of meetings to extend your knowledge, your network, and your awareness of resources. You can even extend the reach of the chat by summarizing your takeaways via other social media outlets and other sharing opportunities with your existing network outside of Twitter.