

# How Do I Get Started with Twitter?





Are you ready to share with the world select bits and pieces of your life, 140 characters (or less) at a time? I suspected as much. This means that you're ready to get started with Twitter, the microblogging service that has taken the online world by storm. In this chapter, you begin, appropriately enough, at the beginning by learning how to set up and sign in to a Twitter account. Even if you've already got a Twitter account up and running, this chapter also takes you through a few other crucial Twitter techniques, including changing and resetting your Twitter password.

<b>Setting Up Your Very Own Twitter Account.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Signing In to Your Twitter Account .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Viewing Twitter's Current Status .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Changing Your Twitter Password .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Resetting Your Twitter Password .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Deleting Your Twitter Account .....</b>	<b>12</b>



# Setting Up Your Very Own Twitter Account

If all you want out of Twitter is to read a particular Twitterer's updates, then you don't need to bother creating your own account. Instead, point your favorite Web browser to <http://twitter.com/user>, where *user* is the person's user name on Twitter, and then peruse the updates that appear on the page.

This, of course, is no fun whatsoever. Twitter is all about sharing and participating in a community of fellow Twitterheads, and you can't do either of those things if you're sitting on the sidelines. Even better, joining Twitter literally takes only seconds of your time. So, without further ado (not that there's been much ado so far), here's how to join Twitter:

1. **Display Twitter's Create an Account page by navigating your Web browser to <http://twitter.com/signup>.** If you're already on <http://twitter.com>, click Join today; if you're already viewing a Twitterer's updates, click the Join today button.
2. **Use the Full name text box to type the name that you want other people to see when they look at your Twitter profile.** Two things to consider here
  - If you want people to find you on Twitter, be sure to type both your first and last names.
  - You can't include the text *twitter* anywhere in the name.
  - The maximum number of characters you can type is 20.
3. **In the Username text box, type the username you want to use on Twitter.** Here are some notes to bear in mind:
  - The username defines your Twitter address (it's <http://twitter.com/username>), it appears before each of your updates, and it appears in various other places in the Twitter landscape, so pick something you like and that has meaning.
  - The maximum number of characters is 15.
  - You can include any combination of letters, numbers, and underscores (\_). All other characters are illegal (you can't even type them in the text box).
  - You can't include the text *twitter* anywhere in the username.
  - As you type, Twitter checks to see if your username is available. If you see username has already been taken, then you're out of luck and need to try again. If you see "ok" then you're good to go.



Don't sweat the username choice too much because you can always change it later.

**4. Use the Password text box to type a password for your Twitter account.** More informational notes

- The password must be at least six characters long.
- As you type the password, Twitter rates the password strength: Too obvious (if it's the same as your username, which is *not* a good idea!), Weak, Good, Strong, or Very Strong. To get your password up to the Very Strong rating, make the password at least eight characters long, and include at least one number and one nonalphanumeric symbol.

**5. In the Email text box, type the e-mail address you want to use to receive Twitter notifications and other messages.** You learn in Chapter 2 how to customize these notifications. If you want to receive the Twitter newsletter, be sure to select the I want the inside scoop check box. Figure 1.1 shows a Create an Account page ready for action.

**1.1** Twitter's Create an Account page with all fields neatly filled in





6. **Click Create my account.** Twitter does just that, and it then offers to look for your friends on services such as AOL and Hotmail.
7. **You learn how to do this in Chapter 4, so click Skip this step.** Twitter displays a list of famous, semifamous, or just plain infamous people who are on Twitter and asks if you want to follow them.
8. **Again, you learn how to follow the famous in Chapter 4, so click Skip this step.** Do *not* click Finish here, or else you'll end up following all 20 people! Twitter finalizes your account and drops you off on your Twitter home page.

## Signing In to Your Twitter Account

With your shiny, new Twitter account fully formed and primed for action, you're ready to venture into the Twitterverse. Twitter is kind enough to deliver you to your home page right after it creates your account, so if that's where you are now you can skip ahead.

However, after you end your browser session and start a new one, you'll need to sign in to your Twitter account once again. Follow these steps to not only sign in, but also to tell Twitter to remember your credentials so you don't have to bother with this again (at least when using the same browser on the same computer):

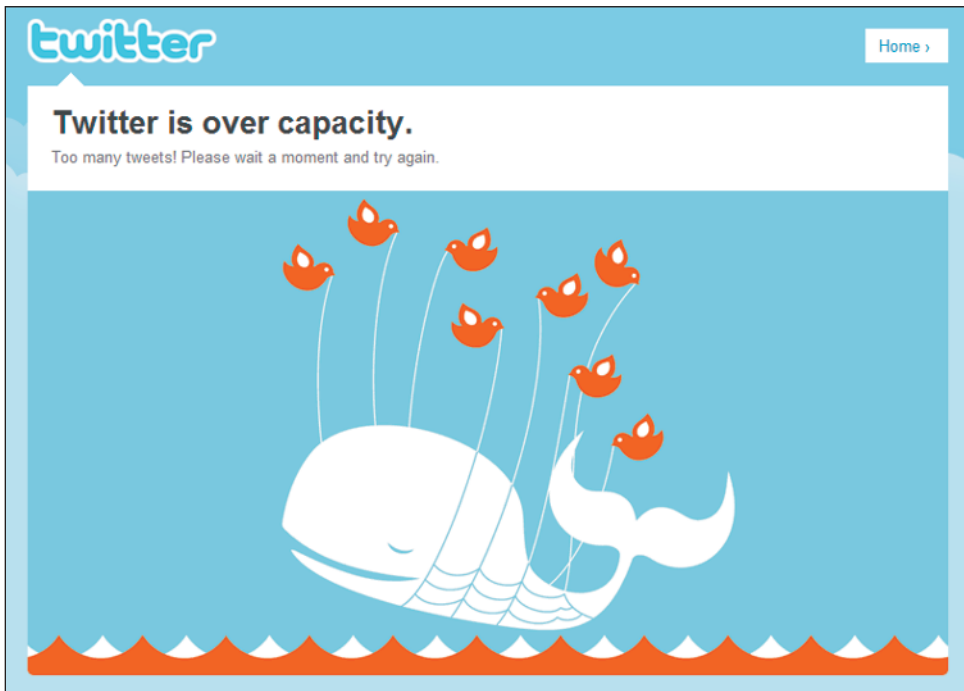
1. **Send your trusty Web browser to <https://twitter.com/login>.** You can also click the Login link that appears on just about every Twitter page.
2. **Type your Twitter username in the Username text box.**
3. **Type your Twitter password in the Password text box.**
4. **Select the Remember me check box.** This tells Twitter to add a cookie to your computer that saves your username and password, which enables you to log in automatically in the future.
5. **Click Sign in.**
6. **If you started off in some other Twitter page, Twitter redisplay that page, so click Home to get to your account's home page.**



## Viewing Twitter's Current Status

Twitter puts the fun in funky and the hip in friendship, but it can also sometimes put the ugh in ugly. I'm talking here about Twitter's occasional reliability problems. Twitter's original infrastructure wasn't built to handle the massive amount of traffic it now bears, so every so often there will be a hiccup, a glitch, or even an outright failure.

These failures arise when Twitter's server simply gets overloaded, so it can't process any new data until some processing power is freed up. You know this is the case when you try to do something on Twitter and you see, instead, the infamous *fail whale*, as shown in Figure 1.2.



**1.2** If Twitter gets overwhelmed by updates, the impossible-not-to-love fail whale shows up to let you know.

The good news is that the fail whale's moment on the stage is almost always mercifully brief, so you should be able to continue what you were doing in a few seconds or, at most, a few minutes.



You'll also be happy to know that our friend the fail whale shows up far less often than he (she?) used to. Over the past year or so, Twitter has made impressive strides in not only plugging the leaks but also shoring up the foundations, so the service is now more reliable than ever.

Unfortunately, that doesn't mean it's 100% reliable (online, nothing is). The fail whale still drops by unannounced on occasion, but Twitter also suffers from other gremlins from time to time. For example, you might see the whimsically mysterious Something is technically wrong page, as shown in Figure 1.3, if Twitter blows the online equivalent of a gasket.

So it pays to keep on top of Twitter's current status. There are a couple of ways you can do this.



**1.3** If a wrench gets thrown into the Twitter works, you might see this page.



First, send your Web browser to <http://status.twitter.com/> to open the Twitter Status page, which displays updates on Twitter's woes and worries, as shown in Figure 1.4.

Alternatively, visit the @twitter account by checking out <http://twitter.com/twitter>, shown in Figure 1.5.

The screenshot shows the Twitter Status page. At the top is the Twitter logo and the word "STATUS". Below this, there are two main sections of updates. The first section is dated "MON NOV 30TH" and titled "Responding to high error rate, Lists feature temporarily disabled. 3 days ago". It contains two updates: one from 1:30p stating they are recovering from a downtime, and another from 3:30p stating they have turned the Lists feature back on. The second section is dated "SUN NOV 29TH" and titled "SMS delivery issues on AT&T 4 days ago". It contains one update from 9:18p stating they believe the issue is fixed. To the right of these updates, there is a section titled "Updates on the status of the Twitter service." followed by "Related Links" which includes links for "Pingdom Uptime Report", "Official Company Blog", "Official Help Documents", "User Discussion Forum", and "Developer Community".

**1.4** Drop by the Twitter Status page to keep an eye on Twitter's health.



Ideally, you should follow @twitter so you see the service updates automatically. See Chapter 4 to learn how to follow folks on Twitter.



If you're wondering about the @ symbol that appears periodically throughout the book, know it's a kind of Twitter shorthand that means "the Twitterer with the username." So @twitter means "the Twitterer with the username twitter."



The screenshot shows the Twitter profile of the official Twitter account. The header includes navigation links: Home, Profile, Find People, Settings, Help, and Sign out. The profile information on the right lists: Name: Twitter, Location: San Francisco, CA, Web: <http://twitter.com>, and Bio: Always wondering what's happening. It also shows 123 following, 2,719,148 followers, and 12,988 listed. The main content area displays a tweet from @twittermobile with a link to a blog post about a Twitter background app. Below it are two more tweets: one about a World Aids Day tweet and another about a high error rate for the Lists feature.

**1.5** Check out the @twitter account for the latest updates on the Twitter service.

## Changing Your Twitter Password

When you forged your new Twitter account, you had to specify an account password, and Twitter is security-minded enough to rate your password on the fly: Too obvious, Weak, Good, Strong, or Very Strong. If you settled for a Weak or even just a Good rating, you might be having second thoughts and feel you'd sleep better at night with a Strong or even a Very Strong password.

Conversely, you might be wondering what's the big whoop about a Twitter password? After all, it's just your Twitter account. It's not like you're exposing your finances or national security secrets to the world (I'm assuming here you're not the Secretary of State). True enough, but it's also true that Twitter accounts have been hacked in the past, with the accounts of Britney Spears and a Twitter staffer (who was using the password "happiness," which is about as weak as they come) being the most notorious. If you're using your real name with your Twitter account, then you definitely don't want some malicious hacker having his way with this part of your online identity.



Fortunately, changing the password for your Twitter account isn't much harder than what you had to go through in the first place:

1. **Sign in to your Twitter account.**
2. **Click Settings.** The Settings page appears.
3. **Click the Password tab.**
4. **Use the Current Password text box to type your existing Twitter password.**
5. **Type your new password in the New Password and Verify New Password text boxes.**
6. **Click Change.** Twitter updates your account with the new password.

## Resetting Your Twitter Password

Okay, so you've been on vacation for a couple of weeks, or your nose has been grindstone-bound while you finish off a few projects, and you've been away from the Twitterverse for a bit. It happens even to the most dedicated Twitterers. You return to the login screen and, doh!, you've forgotten your password. You try all your old favorites, but no joy. You're locked out of your Twitter account!

Fortunately, all is not lost. You can ask the kind folks at Twitter to reset your password, which will get you back up and tweeting in just a few minutes. Here's what you do:

1. **Send your Web browser to [https://twitter.com/account/resend\\_password](https://twitter.com/account/resend_password).** The Forgot your password? page appears.
2. **Type your Twitter username in the text box.** You can also type the e-mail address that you associated with your Twitter account.
3. **Click Send instructions.** Twitter ships you an e-mail message (Subject line: "Reset your Twitter password") that includes a link to a password reset page.
4. **When you get the message, click the link.** Your default Web browser pops up and takes you to the password reset page.
5. **Type your new password in the New Password and Verify New Password text boxes.**
6. **Click Change.** Twitter resets your account with the new password.



# Deleting Your Twitter Account

I have the feeling that you're going to love Twitter, but it's also true that microblogging isn't for everyone. The constant pressure to answer the canonical Twitter question "What's happening?" may simply become too much after a while. If taking a short break doesn't help (I'm talking about a few days or even a few weeks, not a few minutes), then you can walk away and move on with your life. You could opt to let your account lie dormant (it is, after all, free), but if there are updates you want to get rid of, or if you don't want new people to follow you, then you should delete your Twitter account.

Of course, it could be that you love the whole Twitter thing, perhaps even to the extent that you've created multiple Twitter accounts. Lots of people juggle multiple Twitter identities (I have two, myself), but it requires lots of logging in and out, and lots of extra work updating and maintaining each account. If it all just gets to be too much, you might want to delete one or more of your accounts so you can finally get some sleep at night.



If you need to go the multiple-account route, then I strongly suggest using a third-party tool that supports multiple Twitter accounts, such as TweetDeck. See Chapter 8 for a look at some of these powerful tweeting tools.

Fortunately, unlike a lot of online services that bury their account-removal features in some obscure nook or cranny of their site (or, worse, require you to call the company to have your account terminated), Twitter makes it nearly painless to delete an account. Here's what you do:

- 1. Sign in to your Twitter account.**
- 2. Click Settings.** The Settings page appears.
- 3. Click the Account tab.**
- 4. Near the bottom of the page, click the Deactivate my account link.** The Is this goodbye? page appears, which asks if you really want to go through with this.
- 5. Click Okay, fine, deactivate my account.** Twitter deletes your account.

Did you click the Okay, fine, deactivate my account button and then immediately regret your rash decision? Not to worry, because Twitter actually keeps your account in limbo for six months. If you change your mind within that time, you can get your deleted account restored with almost no fuss.



1. **Direct your nearest Web browser to <http://twitter.com/account/deleted>.**
2. **Use the text box to type the username or e-mail address associated with the account.**
3. **Click Restore my account.** You'll receive an e-mail message that offers a link, and you click that link to restore your account.

Yes, it is really that easy, providing you restore it when your account is still in that limbo period.