

ACCOUNTS

All AP journalists are encouraged to have accounts on social networking sites. These sites are now an integral part of everyday life for millions of people around the world. They have become an essential tool for AP reporters to gather news and share links to our published work. We recommend having one account per site that you use both personally and professionally. Many AP journalists have had great success with this strategy, since social media is inherently a personal space. And on Facebook, for example, it's a violation of the Terms of Service to maintain two personal profiles.

Employees must identify themselves as being from AP if they are using the accounts for work in any way. You don't have to include AP in your username, but you should use a personal image for the profile photo (not an AP logo) and identify yourself in your profile as an AP staffer. Posting AP proprietary or confidential material is prohibited. Employees may not include political affiliations in their profiles and should not make any postings that express political views.

It's important to monitor your profile page to make sure material posted by others doesn't violate AP standards; any such material should be deleted.

PRIVACY

Employees should be mindful that any personal information they disclose about themselves or colleagues may be linked to the AP's name. That's true even if staffers restrict their pages to viewing only by friends. It's not just like uttering a comment over a beer with your friends: It's all too easy for someone to copy material out of restricted pages and redirect it elsewhere for wider viewing. As multitudes of people have learned all too well, virtually nothing is truly private on the Internet. We recommend customizing your privacy settings on Facebook, which allows you to make choices about what you share and with whom. Detailed instructions on how to do this are available on *insideAP* and on Facebook®.

OPINION

Everyone who works for AP must be mindful that opinions he or she expresses may damage the AP's reputation as an unbiased source of news. AP employees must refrain from declaring their views on contentious public issues in any public forum and must not take part in demonstrations in support of causes or movements. This includes liking and following pages and groups that are associated with these causes or movements.

Sometimes AP staffers ask if they're free to comment in social media on matters like sports and entertainment. The answer is *yes*, with a couple of reasonable exceptions:

First, trash-talking about anyone (or team or company or celebrity) reflects badly on staffers and the AP. Assume your tweet will be seen by the target of your comment. The person or organization you're deriding may be one that an AP colleague is trying to develop as a source.

Second, if you or your department covers a subject -- or you supervise people who do -- you have a special obligation to be even-handed in your tweets. Whenever possible, link to AP copy, where we have the space to represent all points of view.

RETWEETING

Retweets, like tweets, should not be written in a way that looks like you're expressing a personal opinion on the issues of the day. A retweet with no comment of your own can easily be seen as a sign of approval of what you're relaying.

Example:

RT@jonescampaign smith's policies would destroy our schools

RT@dailyeuropean at last, a euro plan that works [bit.ly/xxxxx](#).

These kinds of unadorned retweets must be avoided.

However, we can judiciously retweet opinionated material if we make clear we're simply reporting it, much as we would quote it in a story. Colons and quote marks help make the distinction:

Example:

RT Jones campaign now denouncing smith on education: @jonescampaign smith's policies would destroy our schools

RT big European paper praises euro plan: @dailyeuropean "at last, a euro plan that works" bit.ly/xxxxx.

These cautions apply even if you say on your Twitter profile that retweets do not constitute endorsements.

FRIENDING/FOLLOWING

It is acceptable to extend and accept Facebook friend requests from sources, but we should try to avoid situations that may jeopardize AP's reputation by giving the appearance of bias. In particular, since friending and "liking" political candidates or causes may create a perception that AP staffers are truly their advocates, staffers should avoid this practice unless they have a true reporting reason for it. If we must friend or "like," we should avoid interacting with newsmakers on their public pages – for instance, commenting on their posts.

If reporters need to friend a newsmaker who is using a personal profile on Facebook, they should limit the newsmaker's access to their own personal information using Facebook's Friend Lists and privacy settings. Instructions on how to do this can be found on *insideAP Social Media Toolkit*. To keep track of tweets by newsmakers, we recommend using a Twitter list that allows you to receive postings without joining the person's official list of followers. This is a good practice for all staffers. Managers should not issue friend requests to subordinates. It's fine if employees want to initiate the friend process with their bosses.

PUBLISHING

AP staff are encouraged to link to AP content in all formats, as well as content from other media organizations, except if the material spreads rumors or unconfirmed information not fit for AP's news services. Please be mindful of competitive and corporate issues as you post links. Staffers should not directly upload or copy/paste content that has been published on an AP platform. It's fine to link to that content in use on a member, customer or AP platform.

Don't break news that we haven't published, no matter the format.

If you have a piece of information, a photo or a video that is compelling, exclusive and/or urgent enough to be considered breaking news, you should file it to the wire, and photo and video points before you consider putting it out on social media. And in those cases in which you capture exclusive content, you should consult with a supervisor about how to share it on your personal social media account. If material you have gathered meets our standards for quality and accuracy, but for a variety of reasons isn't published on the wire, it is acceptable to share it on social networks. This includes material we commonly refer to as "cutting room floor," or content that doesn't make it into our services because of space limits. Sharing this type of content can help you build your personal brand, which AP encourages. You should consult with a manager before sharing photo or video outtakes.

All of AP's social media guidelines rely on you to use your news judgment to determine if a piece of content is urgent enough that it should be filed to the wire. If you have any hesitation about a tweet or post, you should consult with your manager, regional desk or the Nerve Center before sending it.

SOURCING

When you vet a source found using social media, you must apply the same principles used in vetting a source found any other way. But there can be additional challenges with social media sources, since it can be difficult to verify the identity of sources found online. For those reasons, you must never simply lift quotes, photos or video from social networking sites and attribute them to the name on the profile or feed where you found the material. Most social media sites offer a way to send a message to a user - use this to establish direct contact, over email or by phone, so you can explain what you're working on and get more detailed information about the source.

If a source claims to be an official from a company, organization or government agency, call the place of business to confirm identity, just as you would if a source called on the phone.

If you come across photos, videos or other multimedia content that you would like to use in your news report, you must verify its authenticity. You must also determine who controls the copyright of the material and get permission from that person/organization to use it. Use particular caution if you find a social networking page or feed that appears to belong to a person who is central to a story, especially if you can't get confirmation from that person.

Phony accounts are rampant in the social media world and can appear online within minutes of a new name appearing in the news. Examine the details to determine whether the page could have just as easily been created by somebody else. Many athletes, celebrities and politicians have verified Twitter accounts, meaning that Twitter has given their individual accounts a "stamp of approval" to indicate that it really does belong to that person. Before you quote from a verified user's tweets for the first time, however, you need to confirm who is managing the account. Is it the famous person? His or her handlers? A combination? Knowing the source of the information will help you determine just how newsworthy the tweet is and how to characterize it.

INTERACTING WITH USERS

AP is strongly in favor of engaging with those who benefit from our content. Most of the feedback that comes in is highly constructive. It often leads us to terrific information and imagery. But there's another side. People may accuse us of bias in our writing or photography. They may make denigrating comments about our writers and photographers.

Any substantive criticism of our content should be taken seriously, however it may be phrased. AP's **News Values and Principles** say, "Staffers must notify supervisory editors as soon as possible of errors or potential errors, whether in their work or that of a colleague." Beyond that, responses to our audience can largely be guided by the nature of the comments that come in. A thoughtful note from a reader or viewer that leads to a correction by us deserves an email or tweet of thanks (try to avoid repeating the original error). If someone offers a businesslike criticism of a story or image but has their facts wrong, it's good to reply, time permitting, to set the writer straight.

Abusive, bigoted, obscene and/or racist comments posted to an AP-managed platform should be flagged to the Nerve Center immediately. As for people who send flaming, generic denunciations of our integrity or judgment, there are a couple of approaches. Many such writers will not be satisfied by any response from us, however well-reasoned. Time that could be devoted to responding can usually be better spent elsewhere. There's no need to engage such people at all. However, some staffers have made a stab at turning away wrath with a reasonable reply, occasionally with success.

Other things to keep in mind:

- I. Any response we make to a reader or viewer could go public. Email and direct Facebook and Twitter messages may feel like private communications, but may easily find their way to blogs and political pressure groups (not to mention attorneys). In the case of a story or image that stirs significant controversy, the editor is likely the best person to reply, rather than the person who created the content. The Standards Center can also reply, saying it looked into the complaint and here's what we found. This is particularly true if the response requires an explanation of AP policies or otherwise goes beyond the immediate content in question
- II. Any incoming message that raises the possibility of legal action should be reviewed by an AP attorney before a response is made
- III. We should not get into protracted back-and-forth exchanges with angry people that become less constructive with each new round particularly insulting or abusive comments directed to any staffer should be reported immediately to a manager. If such comments are posted online, contact the Nerve Center and we will work to get it removed, even from non-AP platforms. Of course, any comments that are truly threatening to individuals should be brought to the immediate attention of AP Global Security (Contact: Danny Spriggs, Dir. Global Security at dspriggs@ap.org)

INTERACTING WITH AP ACCOUNTS

Staff are welcome to retweet and share material posted by official AP-branded accounts on social networking sites (e.g. @AP, @AP Stylebook, etc.). We ask that AP staff refrain from liking or commenting on official AP-branded Facebook posts. These accounts are official, public-facing channels of communication, and we want to reserve the comments and the interactions for the public, not for journalists to talk among themselves in a public-facing spot. It can be off-putting and alienating for an average Facebook user to click on a post and see conversations between colleagues or virtual insider pats on the back.