

Getting the Most from Social Media

Social media is a good way to stay connected and to share your life with friends and family. Despite this, recent research has shown that social media has the potential to also increase anxiety and depression and lower self-esteem. Below is some information to help ensure that your experience of social media remains as rewarding as possible.

Clarify Mixed Messages

When we communicate online, a number of the nuances of in-person interaction can be lost. It's important to minimise potential confusion and conflict by making sure your words are not misinterpreted. Often humour can be misread as earnestness or criticism and this can change both the tone and nature of what you are communicating. Be aware that using expletives in written expression can sometimes make the post sound abusive or aggressive. Also be aware that not everyone reading your posts may have the same attitude to profanity as you and may be uncomfortable with such words. Consider using emoticons such as J L to help let those reading your messages or posts know the intention behind your words. If you are offended by something that a friend has written, consider asking someone outside the conversation who you trust and respect to also read it to see if their take on it is the same as yours. Once confident in your perception of the post, you can then let the person know directly that you have been offended by what they have written, and ask them to clarify their intent.

Temper your Opinions

Social media allows us the opportunity to express our views regarding ideas and politics and this can be enjoyable and intellectually stimulating. Sometimes views that are stridently expressed however may sound dismissive of others and may anger or offend those who think differently. Remember that there are potentially a lot of people from a variety of backgrounds reading your posts and you may like to phrase your opinions in a manner that takes this into account.

Limit Sleep Disturbances

Some research suggests that using social media immediately before bedtime can interfere with sleep. One theory as to why this occurs is because social media is akin to real-life social interaction and cues the brain to be alert. If you find that you are having difficulty in getting to sleep, consider logging out several hours before you wish to fall asleep. Also consider turning off your smart phone or tablet at night and not having it next to your bed. For more information on sleep, see our tip sheet on good sleep habits available [here](#).

Manage Distraction

Social media can be fun and is in many ways an excellent way to unwind and connect with people who like and value you. It may be so appealing, however, that it can distract you from tasks you need to do, such as your studies. If this is the case, consider limiting the amount of time you spend on social media, so that you can still complete the tasks you need to. If you're studying or writing an assignment, think about only looking at social media in your study breaks. This can help motivate you to study harder when not in the breaks. If you can stick to this plan it can help ensure that you are actively learning as well as increasing your sense of self-efficacy. If you find this strategy doesn't work and you have difficulty resuming study once you open social media, then you may wish to consider refraining from using social media altogether until your daily tasks are complete. Work out whether the amount of time you spend on social media is appropriate. Consider asking family and friends for their opinions and if you're concerned, check out our information on Managing Internet Distractions on the UNE Student Support Counselling Service's homepage for some tips on how to cut back to a level that you're happy with.

Assess your Needs

Sometimes our contact with social media can leave us feeling dissatisfied or anxious and the reasons for this may not be immediately clear. As with how we function in any of our relationships, it is always a good idea to be as self-aware as possible. Ask yourself what you need from social media. For example, if logging on elicits strong feelings of anxiety, envy, sadness, loneliness or dissatisfaction then this may be a sign that your use of social media should be re-assessed. If this is the case, then consider talking to a counsellor at UNE or a counsellor or psychologist in your local area to help you work out how best to get what you need from your online social interactions.

Be Safe with Sexting

Sexting involves the sending and receiving of sexually explicit photographs and texts. Like most consensual sexual expression, sexting can be a healthy and enjoyable way to sexually connect with your partner. Sometimes, however, sexting can lead to complications. Sexting must at all times be consensual and done by those of legal age. Sexting should also be private and should not be shared without you and your partner's consent. If you do wish to sext then it should be to someone you trust, and preferably with someone you have a more longstanding association with. Make sure you consider if the sexting is fair or if it is exploitative – are you sending *and* receiving sexts, or is it just one sided? Are you fully comfortable with doing this? Thinking about these things can limit the risk of your photos and messages being seen by others after your relationship ends. If your personal photos are being shared without your consent, then you need to act quickly by contacting the individual who has been sharing the photos and the websites to which the images have been uploaded. Having your sexts viewed by others without your permission can feel violating and if this has occurred then you may wish to contact the police and/or speak to a counsellor or psychologist to help you process your feelings.

Safeguard your Reputation

Be aware that while social media is primarily for family and friends, others, such as your current or prospective employers may also be curious about your online profile. There have been instances where employees have found their current and future positions compromised due to offensive and inappropriate material appearing on their pages. Remember this when making sensitive personal disclosures and maybe consider more private communication methods for disclosures of this type. As you transition from studying to beginning your career, you may wish to edit your profile so that it is more in line with a professional image or review your privacy settings. Also be aware that your lists of friends will likely start to include networks made up of not only close friends, but also acquaintances, other students and colleagues and that it can be easy to forget these people also see your posts or have tagged you in photos. If you wouldn't want to get blind drunk or semi-naked with every single person in your online network, then perhaps reconsider posting photos that depict you in these states.

Don't Accept Cyber Bullying

Cyber Bullying is the use of Information Technology to harm, harass or intimidate other people in a deliberate, repeated and aggressive manner. With the increase in new forms of electronic communication, cyber bullying is a dangerous and often insidious risk to our happiness and wellbeing. Posts that denigrate others, even if phrased in a jocular manner, may cause hurt and distress. Even if you don't initiate these comments yourself but simply like them or indicate you find them funny too, may mean that the person in question feels bullied by you too and may also lead others reading the thread to perceive you as a bully.

If you believe that you are being bullied then you need to assert yourself. If you feel safe, consider sending the bully a private email explaining how their behaviour makes you feel and asking them to stop. If the behaviour is occurring on a UNE Moodle page then speak to your unit coordinator immediately and be guided by UNE's official policy on the prevention of Harassment, Bullying and Discrimination available [here](#). For other websites, consider reporting the offensive behaviour to the site's administrator, and if it's serious enough, to the police. It's important to remember that just because this type of behaviour is happening online then this doesn't make it any less 'real' than if you were being taunted or intimidated in person.

**If you would like to speak to a UNE Counsellor about any of the issues covered in this tip sheet, please call
02 6773 2897
and arrange a face-to-face
or telephone appointment.**

The support you need to succeed.