



# **Social Media Toolkit for Authors & Illustrators**

# GETTING STARTED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media can be a powerful tool for spreading the word about your books and building a community of readers around your work. It is also ever-changing and can sometimes feel intimidating or like an unsustainably large time commitment. This document, while not exhaustive, contains many tips and tricks that will help you navigate the world of social media, and most of them apply generally across all social channels. Here are a few things you should know before you get started.

## Social media is optional.

The first thing to be aware of is that **you do not have to be on social media if you don't want to be**. It's not for everyone, and when people force themselves to be on social media, they tend to be less active, which defeats the purpose. We've found social media to be beneficial, especially in the long term, so we encourage all authors and illustrators to at least consider it. But if you know it isn't for you, that's okay.

## Less is more.

People sometimes feel as though they need to be on every platform in order to use social media effectively, but these days being everywhere means having five or more accounts that require new content regularly. Unless you genuinely love being on social media and you have lots of time to devote to it every day, it's better to have one or two accounts on platforms that you like and would use even if you weren't an author or illustrator. The more you like a platform, the more you'll use it. Streamline your efforts for maximum impact and it won't feel like a burden.

## Find your favorite channel(s).

Whether you're new to social media and not sure where to start or looking to explore social media platforms that you haven't tried before, we know it can sometimes be a daunting task to figure out where you should concentrate your efforts. Below are some questions to keep in mind when you're choosing to add a channel to your social media portfolio.

- **What platforms do you already use?** You may not use any social media platforms right now, and that's totally fine! But you may have a personal Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram account already. If you like or feel comfortable on platforms where you already have accounts, consider turning those personal accounts into your author or illustrator accounts, or create new accounts on those platforms just to talk about your books.
- **Which platforms do you find interesting?** Even if you don't have much experience using social media, you may like to take photos and therefore be drawn to Instagram, or you may love TikTok videos and want to try making some of your own. Do some exploration, try things out, and see which platforms you might want to stick with!

- **Which platforms are your author and/or illustrator friends active on?** Social media is great for building a community of readers around your work, and it can also be a powerful networking tool. Consider establishing your channels where your author and illustrator friends already are, so they can be some of your first followers and you can learn from their successes.
- **Where is your audience most active?** The best place to be is where your readers are. This might be the largest platforms where most consumers spend most of their time (Facebook and YouTube), but it might not be—it all depends on who you're trying to reach. If you're not entirely sure where your audience lives, read on!

Still not certain which channel is right for you? Below is some information on the most common social media channels, along with their pros and cons. All social media platforms are free to join.

### Goodreads

The reason Goodreads is first on the list is not because it's the biggest social media platform, but because it was built exclusively for readers to share, review, and talk to other book lovers about the books that they love. Therefore, it is *highly* relevant to all authors and illustrators.

We recommend that all authors and illustrators create a Goodreads account and sign up for the [Goodreads Author Program](#). Just don't read or respond to Goodreads reviews of your books!

- **Pros:**
  - Goodreads is a social media platform exclusively for readers.
  - The Goodreads Author Program allows authors and illustrators to claim and control their profile, access engagement tools like Author Q&A and Highlights, set up giveaways, and even make small changes and updates to their book pages.
  - You may enjoy Goodreads for its user functions—the ability to keep track of your own reading and sort your books into lists.
- **Cons:**
  - Reviewers try to be honest in their reviews, and not every book will work for every reader. Therefore, the likelihood you will come across an unflattering review of one of your books at some point is high. We know it's tempting, but at the risk of being repetitive, *we strongly recommend not reading any Goodreads reviews of your books*. If you can't resist reading, please refrain from commenting on any reviews, *especially* negative ones.
  - Engagement with readers is limited by the platform's features. While it's important to enroll in the Goodreads Author Program to gain access to what exists, it will be easier to engage with fans on a more mainstream social platform.

## Instagram

Instagram is a mobile app (also accessible via desktop browser) organized around the posting of images and video content. When Instagram launched in 2010, it was a very simple photo sharing tool; since Facebook acquired it in 2012, Instagram has added many new features to keep up with competitors like Snapchat and TikTok. It's one of the most popular social media platforms with over 1.2 billion global active users. The majority of Instagram users are between 18 and 34 years old, and 72 percent of US teens use the platform.

- **Pros:**
  - Instagram is still relatively simple and easy to use, but its newer bells and whistles (Stories, IGTV, Instagram Live, Instagram Reels, etc.) make it highly flexible. You can use Instagram in a completely different way than one of your author friends, and you can both be successful on the platform.
  - There is a thriving community of book influencers on Instagram (bookstagrammers) who dedicate their channels to talking about books and engaging with their own communities of like-minded readers. You can learn a lot from bookstagrammers, develop relationships with them, and amplify their content on your own channel (just make sure to credit them for their work!).
  - While Instagram has its downsides (like all platforms do), authors and illustrators generally find it a more positive, supportive, and effective place to build a community of readers than Facebook or Twitter.
  - Hashtags and tagging aid in discoverability—find out how best to use hashtags on Instagram later on in this document!
  - If you don't have the bandwidth to add Snapchat to your social media footprint, Instagram Stories is basically the same thing.
  - If you don't have the bandwidth to add TikTok to your social media footprint, Instagram Reels is basically the same thing. They're so similar that if you do want to be active on both, you can cross-post content between the two platforms.
  - Instagram has native analytics that help you see the demographic breakdown of your followers and when they're most active, which helps with planning content and getting to know your fan base.
- **Cons:**
  - If you've never used Instagram before, many of the new features might be overwhelming. Start by focusing on the central feature of the app—the main feed, where you can post standard images or videos—and explore other features as you become more comfortable.
  - Instagram is ruled by [a collection of algorithms](#) that decide what content users will be shown. The algorithms prioritize a user's past engagements and the accounts they follow to determine what posts to serve them. This means that it can take time to build a following on a brand-new account. For help with this, check out the tips for growing a fan base on social media later in this document!

- Since Instagram is so focused on images and video, the pressure to create something perfect and beautiful with every post can be intimidating. Attractive images are important—check out the section on creating good content later in this document for more!—but you don’t have to be a professional photographer or video editor to be successful on Instagram. Take advantage of the app’s filters to improve your photos, and experiment with Stories and Reels, which are much more in the moment and therefore more casual.
- You can’t hyperlink within Instagram Feed post captions, and you can’t use the swipe up link feature in Instagram Stories until you have more than 10,000 followers. Until your channel grows, the only place for a live link is in your account bio. A link in bio solution like [Linktr.ee](https://linktr.ee) (which is free) can help with that.

## Twitter

Launched in 2006, Twitter is one of the oldest social media platforms. Twitter is best known for its microblogging functionality, which allows users to post and engage around short messages that are limited to a length of 280 characters. Over the past few years, the service has added features that allow live video and audio streaming (Twitter Spaces), ephemeral content posts (Twitter Fleets, which are now defunct), tipping, and paid subscriptions. With 353 million global active users, Twitter is far from the largest social media platform. But it is popular among journalists and commentators, and a source of news for many.

- **Pros:**
  - Twitter is *the* gathering place for people from all parts of the publishing industry, including gatekeepers like booksellers, teachers, and librarians, so it’s a great place to connect with these folks, as well as with fellow writers.
  - As far as content types go, Twitter is very flexible. Images and video help boost tweet engagement, but some users also successfully post text-only tweets. Experiment with content to figure out what works for you and your followers.
  - Like other social platforms, Twitter has an algorithm that determines what content users see in their timelines, but it’s somewhat customizable and strikes more of a balance between chronological posts and trending posts than other platforms’ algorithms. Posting something on Twitter will probably resonate more in the moment than posting it elsewhere.
- **Cons:**
  - There is such a large volume of content on Twitter that posting a tweet can feel like throwing a pebble into a waterfall—it instantly disappears. You can increase the chances of your followers noticing important content by posting it multiple times.
  - Even with the extended character limit, successful Twitter content is brief, consumable, witty, and immediate. If you don’t have a lot of time to devote to social media, it can sometimes feel difficult to keep up.

- Because conversations on Twitter are so fast-moving, a high post frequency is important to establish and maintain relevance.
- Twitter users are opinionated, and debates can sometimes get heated. If you would rather stay out of the fray, you might be better suited to another platform.

## Facebook

Facebook wasn't the first social media platform, but it's certainly one of the oldest that's still popular today, and it's by far the biggest, with over 2.7 billion global active users. Facebook has undergone many renovations since its launch in 2004 and has generated controversy and criticism over user privacy and antitrust behavior, harmful content and misinformation, election interference, advertising fraud, censorship, and more. Of all the social media platforms, people spend the most time on Facebook.

- **Pros:**
  - Many gatekeepers in the children's book community (teachers, librarians, booksellers) use Facebook, so if you write for younger kids, or you just want a place to keep in touch with industry folks you meet throughout your career, Facebook is a good platform for that.
  - Facebook's advertising platform is best in class. While it's absolutely not required, if you ever feel like you want to do some social advertising, Facebook is the place to do it.
- **Cons:**
  - Facebook has been struggling to attract younger users for years now. Parents are more likely to be active on Facebook than any teenager you might know, which is especially important to keep in mind for YA authors.
  - Facebook launched Pages as a way for brands and public figures to interact with fans. But Facebook's algorithms (which determine what content users see on their Facebook feeds) heavily privilege content from users' personal connections. This has a negative impact on posts from Pages; even if you have tens of thousands—or even hundreds of thousands—of fans on your page, less than 1 percent of them will see the content you post on average. For this reason, we don't recommend using a Facebook Page; if you want to be active on Facebook, stick to using your profile—you're limited to 5,000 friends, but they're more likely to see your posts.
  - Facebook's user interface is pretty clunky. It has *a lot* of features, but even the more useful ones (like Facebook Live) can be glitchy.

## Snapchat

Snapchat is a mobile multimedia messaging app best known for the fact that its content is ephemeral—most of what is posted on Snapchat eventually expires and becomes unavailable to users. If that sounds a lot like Instagram Stories, that's because Stories was created to compete

with Snapchat, which disrupted the social media landscape when it launched in 2011 and attracted younger users. It remains one of the most popular social media platforms among teens, although TikTok is right on its heels. The average Snapchat user is between 13 and 34 years old.

- **Pros:**
  - 70 percent of teens in the United States say that they use Snapchat. While that's slightly fewer than Instagram, studies have shown that there's not as much user overlap as you might assume. So, while it's not necessary to be on both platforms, if you like and use both, you may be reaching different people on each platform.
  - Snapchat is all about in-the-moment experiences, so it's a great place to post behind-the-scenes or slice-of-life content without worrying too much about having the right lighting or perfect photo composition.
- **Cons:**
  - Because your followers can only see your Snapchat content for 24 hours, maintaining daily activity is important to stay relevant, which isn't manageable for everyone.
  - 78 percent of Snapchat users are between 18 and 24 years old. So, unless that age group is your target audience, we recommend focusing on a different platform to build your fan base.
  - Snapchat's discoverability features are more limited than some other platforms, so building your audience there can take time.
  - Instagram Stories is very similar to Snapchat, so if you're already on Instagram and have limited bandwidth available for social media, it might make more sense to focus your energies there rather than building a new channel.

## TikTok

As social media platforms go, TikTok is relatively new, becoming globally available only in 2018, though its precursor Musical.ly has been around since 2014. TikTok is a primarily mobile-only social media service centered around short-form videos. Its users value authenticity, diversity, cleverness, humor, and inclusiveness, and they are skeptical of highly promotional or branded content. Before you go all in on TikTok, evaluate honestly whether you can deliver on these expectations.

- **Pros:**
  - TikTok is the second most popular social media platform among teens, with 689 million global active users, and the majority of TikTok's users are in their teens and twenties. It's a good place to be if you are a YA author.

- There's a growing number of book influencers on TikTok who regularly promote books and engage with readers. This group is commonly referred to as BookTok. You may have heard that term before—rest assured, BookTok is not yet another social platform, just a community of book influencers on TikTok. But these are great accounts to follow and people to build relationships with.
- Because of the viral nature of TikTok, some book-related TikToks posted by influencers or readers have managed to drive notable sales for specific titles.
- **Cons:**
  - TikTok videos can take hours to produce depending on how complex they are (this is true of Instagram Reels as well).
  - TikTok engagement is driven by sound trends and memes, which means you have to watch a lot of TikToks regularly and hop on trends while they're still hot. This can be difficult to do if you have a looming book deadline.
  - At the moment, the platform is limited when it comes to content types. Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat are all more flexible.
  - There have been some privacy concerns around TikTok. The app has come under fire for the data it collects from its users and the permissions it requires to use its features.

## YouTube

YouTube is the most ubiquitous online video sharing platform on the planet, with nearly 2.3 billion global active users who watch over a billion hours of video per day. YouTube has been owned by Google since 2006 and is known for being a place where individuals (YouTubers or YouTube creators) and brands have been able to grow their audiences. With the launch of YouTube TV, the platform also became a subscription streaming service along the lines of Netflix, Prime Video, and Hulu.

- **Pros:**
  - 85 percent of US teens say they use YouTube, so it's a great place to reach YA readers.
  - Although the user interface has evolved over the years, YouTube is still fairly simple to use. They've also been adding features, like auto-captioning, that provide turnkey ways to make content more accessible.
  - If you have a sizable YouTube viewership, your videos can be monetized.
  - There's a thriving community of YA book influencers on YouTube (BookTubers) who promote books and engage with their community of readers regularly. These are great accounts to follow for entertainment and inspiration, and great people to build relationships with.
- **Cons:**
  - The biggest con to YouTube is the amount of work that goes into making good videos. Unless you or someone you know has video lighting, filming, and editing



skills—or you’re willing to teach yourself—it can be hard to create videos for YouTube, and even with these skills it’s still time-consuming.

- Discoverability is challenging. Given the amount of content being posted daily on YouTube, it’s difficult for even the best produced videos to stand out and find viewers. It takes a long time and lots of effort to build a subscriber base.
- Though YouTube has added some community features in the past few years, the primary place where users interact with creators is in video comments. Because of this, most creators maintain active channels on Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok to interact more directly with their fans.

## Pinterest

Pinterest is an image sharing social media platform centered around providing users with the ability to discover and save information and ideas across the internet into a digital scrapbook. If you’ve ever planned a wedding or redecorated a room in your home, you may have used Pinterest to some extent.

- **Pros:**
  - Many authors and illustrators use Pinterest to gather inspiration for their books, so even if you’re not using it to build and engage with an audience of readers, it can still be a helpful tool.
- **Cons:**
  - Content posted to Pinterest tends to live on and gain impressions and engagement over time, as more people discover and repin. It’s not a platform built for timeliness, urgency, or direct communication with followers.
  - Users are also more likely to follow boards than accounts, because they’re more interested in specific pieces or categories of content than content creators or curators. So it’s not an ideal place to build a community of readers around yourself as an author or illustrator.
  - User behavior is often focused around life events (weddings, new babies, birthdays, etc.) rather than the day-to-day.

## Tumblr

Tumblr is a microblogging platform with built-in social media functionality that allows users to post image, video, audio, and text content of any length, though typically most of the content is short-form. Tumblr was very popular with teens and young adults for many years following its 2007 launch, but it has lost much of its relevance.

- **Pros:**
  - Tumblr is a place where fandom activity thrives. If you write YA fantasy or science fiction, especially if it contains romance, Tumblr might be a good place to find fan art for your series

- Tumblr can be used as a content management platform for websites, and its blogging functions are quick to learn and simple to use on desktop or mobile—good for those who want to blog with very little fuss.
- Tumblr is a platform that relies heavily on reblogging (amplification of other users' Tumblr posts, like retweeting on Twitter), so you can populate your feed with mostly reblogs rather than having to create a ton of original content.
- **Cons:**
  - Only 9 percent of US teens say they use Tumblr today, so other platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat are better bets for YA authors.
  - Tumblr requires a high post frequency, about 10–15 posts a day. There's so much content being posted that it's important to stay active daily to remain top of mind for your audience.

# SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

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There's no one right way to promote a book online or one single action that will create immediate results, but there are some best practices that can help demystify how you should be using social media as an author or illustrator.

## Link to all retailers.

We're listing this first because it's an extremely important thing to note! Whenever you're promoting your book, be sure to link to *all* retailers so that you're not giving undue preference. The easiest way to do this is to link to the page for your book on [simonandschuster.com](http://simonandschuster.com) or [rivetedlit.com](http://rivetedlit.com) (YA titles only). If you have a dedicated page for your book on your own website and all retailers are represented, it's totally fine to send people there instead. The only time you should link to or encourage purchasing from a specific retailer is when they have a promotion for your book that no other retailer has.

## Be authentic.

Fans follow authors (and celebrities and other public figures) because they want to know more about who they really are. Growing an audience on social is so much harder if they don't feel like they're hearing from the real you. Privacy concerns are common with social media, so remember that you are in control of how much you share, but whatever you choose to put out there should be true to who you are. There are many things you can learn from how others use social media, but don't feel as though you need to replicate things that don't feel natural to you or your channels in order to be successful.

## Do no harm.

When it comes to social media, you always want to do things that will *help* your books and your author brand reach and impact people in ways that make them connect with and support you. You don't want to harm your brand by engaging in behavior or promoting content that doesn't reflect well on you or your books. "Harm" can be anything from using social media to respond defensively to a bad review to posting a dark and blurry photo that isn't aesthetically pleasing, to using your channels so sporadically that fans aren't sure if you're ever going to post again.

## Think about your audience.

Knowing who your intended audience is will help you figure out which platforms you should be most active on, what kind of posts you should be creating, and what messaging you should use.

If you're a picture book author or illustrator, your audience will mostly be parents and other adults with young children in their life, who are more active on Instagram, as well as booksellers, teachers, librarians, other authors and/or illustrators, and publishing folks, who tend to be active on Twitter and Instagram. Illustrators may also want to tap into conversations about art on Instagram and post content that will appeal to fellow artists or art aficionados.

If you're a middle-grade author, reaching your readers—kids ages 8 to 12—will be hard on social media. Most platforms require users to be 13 or older due to federal privacy laws that prevent the collection of data on children under 13 without explicit parental consent. For this reason, you may want to focus your social media efforts on reaching booksellers, educators, authors, and others in the publishing industry on Twitter and Instagram and creating posts that will be interesting or useful to one or more of those groups of people.

If you're a YA author, consider spending your time reaching teens and adult readers of YA where they live on social: Instagram, Snapchat, and/or TikTok.

There's no one right answer—every creator is carving out their social presence at the intersection of multiple professional areas and personal interests—but asking yourself the question “Who am I trying to reach and have conversations with?” will help you figure out where you want to concentrate your efforts.

## Post frequently and consistently.

All social platforms contain a steady stream of information, so to be heard, you have to be present. This doesn't mean you have to be on social media 24/7, but in order for your posts to be as discoverable as possible, you should be posting regularly across your active channels.

The frequency with which you post is one of the most important factors in social media success. Between 1 and 3 times per day is ideal for placements where the best performing content requires more work to create, like the Instagram Feed (including photos, Reels, and IGTV) and TikTok. With placements where content is more in-the-moment, organic, or turnkey, like Instagram Stories and Snapchat, suggested frequency is higher, about 3–7 times a day.

Twitter's waterfall of content is fast-moving and ephemeral, so to have the highest impact you will need to post between 5 and 20 times a day, depending on your goals. Start with 3–5 tweets per day, then experiment with increasing your frequency to see how it affects your engagement overall and per tweet.

If you have a Facebook Page, you may find you struggle to get any engagement at all on your posts; this is because the Facebook algorithm, which the company constantly tweaks, prioritizes content from a user's friends and connections over content from brand Pages they've liked. Unless you have a very large or engaged Page, you can get away with a frequency of 2–3 posts per week.

Don't be alarmed if these suggested frequencies, even on the low end, feel like too much. You can still use social media effectively! Even more important than frequency is the consistency with which you post. It's totally okay if, for instance, you only have time to post on your Instagram feed once or twice a week, as long as you stick to that and the content you're posting is interesting and engaging.

Building a community on social media requires effort, but creating relationships with readers who love your work and will follow you from book to book is worth it. Over the course of your career, you may find that there are times when you need to take a step back from social media because of a deadline or

for personal reasons. If you have invested the time and effort into establishing a regular connection with your audience on social media, your fans will understand, and they will be there when you come back.

## Post at the right time of day.

Facebook and Instagram have built-in analytics called Insights that will tell you when the majority of your fans are active on the platform. Posting at or around that time means more people will have the opportunity to see your content. Note: Facebook Insights are only available on Pages (not personal profiles), and Instagram Insights are only available on business or creator profiles (you can change your personal account to a business or—more recommended—creator account at any time).

But even for platforms that don't have this feature, people are more or less active based on the time of day. Think about when *you* have time to be on social—mornings (before work/school), lunchtime, and evenings are “drive time” for most platforms. Save important posts for when people are likely to be scrolling around a social app looking for cool stuff.

If you can't post in real time during high traffic periods, use a post scheduler like TweetDeck or Hootsuite, or Facebook Creator Studio.

## Find balance.

An important part of maintaining a healthy social media channel is balancing **original content** with **amplified content** and **interaction**. Everyone's mileage will vary, but each type should take up about one third of your social behavior.

For example, rewarding fans by promoting their loving tweets about your books (amplified content) is important, but nobody wants to follow someone who only uses their Twitter account to share praise about themselves. Balance retweets with your own photo, video, link, or text content (original content), and direct engagement with your followers or people you follow, like replies to tweets or comments (interaction).

## Post natively.

Just because you *can* sync up all your social media accounts doesn't mean you *should*. Every platform is different, so content that is ported in from other sources automatically via apps tends to look strange, turn people off, and perform badly.

Content performs much better when it's posted to each platform natively. This means that you post to the platform directly through their website or mobile app. It might take a little more time to optimize posts for each platform, but it's worth it to keep your channels attractive and your fan base engaged.

This doesn't mean that all content needs to be exclusive to one platform. In fact, if you can use one piece of content, like a video or photo or link, across multiple channels, more people are likely to see that piece of content. That's why you will see people reposting TikToks across Instagram and Twitter or taking screenshots of their tweets and putting them in their Instagram Feed. You just want to make sure that you format the content for each channel so that it looks good.

## Shine a spotlight on fans.

Recognizing fans is key to building loyalty. Did someone post a beautiful photo of your book? Screenshot and crop the photo so you can repost it to your Instagram Feed (make sure you credit and tag the original poster in the caption—giving credit is *very* important). Did someone post a nice review of your book on Twitter? Retweet the fan and thank them. If someone posts a piece of fan art they made of one of your characters, comment on their post saying how much you love it. A little can go a long way.

## Be accessible.

It's important to make sure your social media posts can still be enjoyed by users who have visual and/or hearing impairments. Here are some ways you can make your posts accessible to everyone:

### Camel case your hashtags.

To make it easier for screen readers to recognize individual words in hashtags, capitalize the first letter of each word in the hashtags you use in your post copy (e.g., #ChildrensBooks vs. #childrensbooks or #CHILDRENSBOOKS).

### Use alternative text.

Provide descriptions of the images and videos that you post so that screen readers can relay them to users. This can be done in post copy on every platform, but some social platforms have tools to add alternative text to posts with visual elements.

- **Twitter:** When you upload a photo into a draft tweet, you will see an Add Description option. Click that to get a text box where you can type your alternative text.
- **Facebook:** When you upload a photo into a draft post on desktop, click Edit > Alternative Text and then add your alternative text. When you upload a photo into a draft post on mobile, click the button with three dots on the upper right and choose Edit Alt Text to add your alternative text.
- **Instagram:** There are three ways you can do this.
  1. On the page where you can add a caption to your post, scroll to the very bottom and click on Advanced Settings. At the very bottom of that page, click Write Alt Text.
  2. Post your photo to your feed, then go back to your Instagram profile and choose the photo. Click the three dots in the upper right and choose Edit. Click Edit Alt Text on the lower right to add your alternative text.
  3. Many people also add alternative text between brackets at the end of their captions.

The more descriptive alternative text can be, the better. So instead of “Photo of a flower,” try something like “Photo of a single red rose in a simple white vase sitting on a marble kitchen counter” to make it easier for someone to imagine exactly what the image is depicting.

Add open or closed captions to videos.

Captioning your videos makes it possible for people to enjoy them without sound.

Closed captioning (which can be turned on and off by the user) is a good option that can also help with SEO on YouTube and can be autogenerated on some platforms (though you should always edit it, if possible, for accuracy).

Open captions (which are visible by default) increase accessibility and are also useful to users who have their sound off, particularly on platforms like Instagram Stories, Instagram Reels, TikTok, and Snapchat. You can typically add these via native text overlay tools.

## Create good content.

The original content you post to your channels should be ownable and unique to you, but ideally should also tap into existing conversations. When you're thinking of what content you want to post, ask yourself: What do I want people to do with this? Comment or share? Click through to somewhere else? Just see it?

Figuring out your desired outcome will help you decide what kind of content you want to make. Here are some types of content you should consider:

### Images

All social platforms are highly visual, so posts perform better if they have a photograph or nicely designed graphic. On some channels, like on Instagram Feed or Twitter, you'll want to make sure the image looks as aesthetically pleasing as possible in order to get the best engagement.

The good news is you don't have to be a professional photographer to take a nice photo! Take photos in natural light during the day, either outside or near a window, and have a few reliable backgrounds on hand (tables, chairs, bedspreads and blankets, countertops, and hardwood floors work nicely, or you can buy a few online). Make use of lightweight photo editing programs—your phone probably has one, and you can also use Instagram's built-in filters, but if you're looking for something more substantial, Adobe Lightroom is a good option.

On other channels, like Instagram Stories or Snapchat, content can be much more in-the-moment and organic, no lighting adjustments or touch-ups necessary.

### Text

You can still get some mileage out of a text post if it's engaging. Sometimes a simple question is enough (such as "What are you reading this weekend?"). Text posts work best on more ephemeral platforms like Twitter, Instagram Stories, or Snapchat.

### Video

Social platforms want people to post video content, so they tend to favor it in their algorithms. Some platforms, like TikTok, only allow video content. Upload or create video natively (rather

than posting a link to another channel, like YouTube) to see the best results. Posting a book trailer that doesn't look professional won't get you what you want, but there are simple ways to integrate video into your social content strategy. Try asking fans for questions and answering them in video format—just film on your smart phone and upload!

If you add music to your video content, make sure you have permission to use it, or else your video may be flagged for copyright infringement. This may mean purchasing a royalty-free license for a one-time fee, choosing a song that's available to use for free, or using a song that's in the public domain.

### Link

If you want to drive people somewhere else (an article you read and loved, a post on your blog, a roundup on a media outlet your book is featured in, etc.), that can be great content. But remember to still make the post engaging: ask a question related to the article to get comments/responses, for example. Anytime you post a link, tidy it up with a link shortener like [bitly.com](https://bitly.com). Facebook and Twitter will automatically “scrape” links you post, so you can remove the link from the text. It looks so much cleaner that way!

On Instagram, where your bio is the only place you can link out, consider using [Linktre.e](https://linktr.ee) (which is free) or another link-in-bio service where you can add multiple destinations.

### Live

Most social media platforms allow users to broadcast live from their channels, usually via the platform's mobile app. If you feel comfortable being on camera, you can go live whenever you want with the push of a few buttons.

The most successful live social events are the ones that are promoted beforehand, so that fans know to look out for the event and attend if they can. Some platforms allow multiple users to livestream together, so consider working with one or more of your author friends (Instagram Live can now support up to four participants) on an event to cross-promote to each other's audiences.

### Experiment with new content types.

Social media platforms are constantly evolving. When a platform launches a new product (e.g., Instagram Stories, Instagram Reels, Facebook Live, Twitter Spaces), they typically give people who are using that product preference in their algorithm or build in additional discoverability opportunities. Try to play with as many content types as possible within your chosen platforms, and test out new products when they launch. You might find a perfect new content niche for your channel.

### Suggestions of things to post:

- **Quotes:** Post teaser quotes from your upcoming book in the weeks leading up to release, or quotes from your work in progress while you're writing. Use hashtags like #AmWriting to tap



into existing and ongoing conversations. Also, consider posting quotes you love from books you're *reading*, too, using #AmReading and tagging the author—you might end up making a new author friend.

- **Day in the Life Posts:** This can be anything from a quick tweet at the grocery store to a series of Instagram Stories showing the highlights of a day in the life of you as a writer. Snacks that keep you going while on deadline, your writing space, productivity hacks, inspiration for your current project, small teasers from your WIP, or newly arrived galleys of your upcoming book could all be interesting to your fans. And don't forget to post photos of events and/or stock signings—you can increase the reach of your events by including your followers in the experience, even if they can't attend in person. Thanking the store on social is a nice act of goodwill, too!
- **Book Photos and "Shelfies":** Readers love seeing photos of books and pretty bookshelves. Take your own book pictures or shelfies and post them, then ask your fans, "What are YOU reading?" or "How do you arrange your shelves?" You can also amplify beautiful book shots from book influencers on Instagram, bookstores, or libraries. As long as you properly credit and tag the creator, bookstagrammers usually do not mind if you republish their photos on your own channel, although asking permission first is always a safe practice. If you want to amplify a photo that has a child in it, you should absolutely DM the parent who posted the photo and secure their permission first.
- **Commentary:** Are there things going on in the world you have opinions about? Just read an article and want to give your two cents? Say what you think! Obviously, do no harm applies here, but on social you should be a person first (authenticity!), and if you have something to say, say it.
- **Lists:** Everybody loves a good list—of favorite books, TV shows, movies, etc. If you can make it relate to your book, even better.
- **Writing Tips:** There's a high likelihood that some or many of your followers will be aspiring writers themselves. If you have advice to impart, create posts with tips and tricks you've learned for your social media channels. This will be useful for your followers, especially if you can encourage them to keep going and not give up, even when things are hard.
- **Fan Rewards:** Is there something your fans have been asking for that you know they would enjoy and share? This could be deleted scenes, a short story from another character's POV—there are lots of possibilities. And if you don't know, ask your fans what they'd like. When you post this type of content, be sure to use "gifting" language—let fans know you created or posted this content to reward them for their support.
- **Exclusive Material:** Followers like content they feel they can't get elsewhere. For novelists, this could be snippets deleted during the revision process, playlists, a Pinterest board inspired by your book, etc. For illustrators or author/illustrators, this could be work-in-progress art, sketches and doodles, spot art, or art tied to a season or holiday. Just reach out to your editor to make sure they're cool with it before posting.
- **Q&As:** If you can't be on social all the time answering fan questions as they come in (And really, who can be?), try setting aside some time weekly or monthly to take fan questions and give them the answers they're craving. There are many ways to do this—in comments on a post, or

Stories, an AMA on Reddit, in a live broadcast, etc. Just be clear about when and how you'll be answering questions, and make sure to promote the Q&A/chat beforehand to get as much participation as possible.

- **Fan Art:** Have your readers been creating art related to or inspired by your books? Share it and credit/tag the fan who made it. The artist will love being acknowledged by a writer whose work they love, and it might inspire others to create their own fan art. Just be sure to ask permission from the original creator if you want to repost their art natively—this is very important! Even with credit, they may feel more comfortable with a simple share to Stories, a Facebook share, or a retweet instead.

#### Best practices for self-recording video content:

- **Lighting:**
  - Record your videos in a well-lit area. Natural light is best, and you should stand facing a window rather than with your back to it so that the light hits your face. This will prevent your videos from looking grainy.
  - If you don't have natural light in your living space and you plan to create a lot of self-recorded video content (Instagram Reels, TikToks, YouTube videos, etc.), consider purchasing a ring light. These are available rather cheaply, and even inexpensive options have multiple lighting settings and a phone holder to make recording easier.
  - Avoid having a window or light source directly behind you, as you will look silhouetted.
- **Focus:**
  - If you're filming on a phone, tap your screen to ensure you're in focus.
  - Mount your phone/camera on a stand or lean it against an object so that the video isn't shaky.
- **Composition:**
  - If you're filming on your phone, consider carefully how your video will be used and adjust the orientation accordingly.
    - If a video is going to be used on Instagram Reels, Instagram Stories, TikTok, or Snapchat, the camera will need to be oriented vertically.
    - If a video is going to be used on Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube, your camera must be oriented horizontally.
    - If you're filming a video requested by Simon & Schuster and you're not sure what the orientation should be, ask and we will direct you!
  - Keep your backdrop minimal with as few distractions as possible.
  - The frame should be middle of your chest up, with a little headroom and space on either side of you.
  - Look at the camera/screen when you're talking so the end result will feel like you're engaging with the viewer.
- **Length:**
  - Start filming a few extra seconds before you start talking and a few extra seconds after you finish talking. This will help ensure you don't get cut off.

- Don't feel like you need to do one perfect take. You can use editing software on your phone to stitch clips together.
- If you're filming a video requested by Simon & Schuster, try to stay within the length guidelines provided in the request. If you're not sure how long a video should be, ask and we will direct you!
- **Sound:**
  - Film your video indoors, in a quiet room, with no music or TV in the background.
  - If you're filming on a phone, don't position the phone too far away from you. This is to avoid a hollow, faraway sound.
  - If you plan to film a lot of videos, consider getting a microphone. These are available online rather cheaply.
  - Don't add any music to the video unless you've purchased the rights to use that music, and you have a registration confirmation or license that proves you have the right to use the music.
    - If you plan to use a video on YouTube, don't add music from iMovie's library. YouTube removes videos that contain tracks from iMovie, and you don't want to risk having your video removed.
    - If you're filming a video requested by Simon & Schuster, never add your own music, regardless of whether you are willing to purchase a license. If the video requires music, we will add it on our end.
    - If you create a video for use on Instagram Reels or TikTok and you add music from either app's music library, remember to remove the music if you want to use the video on any other channels. Otherwise, you may run into copyright issues, since those songs are licensed only to those apps.

# GROWING YOUR FAN BASE

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While there is no quick and easy way to grow your social following (besides paying for followers, which we do not suggest), there are some good strategies you can employ that, when applied consistently over a period of time, can help grow your fan base and increase your fans' engagement with you on social. Engagement is more important than follower count—it's better to have 5,000 very engaged fans you can reliably activate at key moments than 50,000 followers who aren't paying attention.

If you're starting out on social media, or just want to broaden your reach, here are some strategies and tactics to try:

## Focus.

As previously mentioned, trying to keep up with all the different social platforms can be time-consuming and often frustrating. Don't spread your resources too thin—you don't have to have accounts on every major media platform, especially the ones you don't enjoy. Less is more! It's better to have fun on one channel than feel kind of okay on five. If you're trying to grow your fan base, it's easier to do that if you pick one channel to focus on.

While your target audience should factor into your decision of where to focus, your comfort level is also very important. Having a TikTok channel will not help an author reach teen readers if the author feels uncomfortable on video and almost never posts there. It might be better to concentrate on building an Instagram or Snapchat channel instead.

## Be discoverable.

Make sure it's clear who you are in all social media profiles so that offline fans can find you online. Use a photo of yourself as your profile picture, list your real name (or the name you're publishing under), and include information on yourself and your books in your bio. If you have a website, be sure to link to it from the bio of all your social media channels or include a link to your website in your Linktree or other link-in-bio tool on Instagram.

When you're posting about your own books, use title hashtags or common hashtags related to your category or genre, so that new readers can stumble across them. This is especially important on Instagram and Twitter, but while on Twitter 1–2 hashtags should be your limit, you can use many more on Instagram.

Popular Instagram hashtags evolve over time, but here are a few per age category to get you started:

**Young Adult:** #CurrentlyReading #BookNerd #BookLover #YALit #YABooks #Reading #BooksOfInstagram #YAReads #Book #Books #Bookstagram #YABookstagram #Bookish #BookLove #BookWorm #BooksToRead #YAAuthor #AuthorsOfInstagram #Author #AuthorLife

**Middle-Grade:** #ChildrensBooks #KidLit #Reading #TeachersOfInstagram #LibrariansOfInstagram #MomsOfInstagram #TeachersOfIG #MiddleGradeBooks #MiddleGradeLit #MGLit #KidsBookstagram #AuthorsOfInstagram #Author #AuthorLife

**Picture Books:** #ChildrensBooks #KidLit #Reading #TeachersOfInstagram #LibrariansOfInstagram #MomsOfInstagram #TeachersOfIG #PictureBooks #KidLitIllustration #ChildrensIllustrations #KidsBookstagram #AuthorsOfInstagram #IllustratorsOfInstagram #Author #AuthorLife

Also consider including a few highly trafficked hashtags and then adding several less popular hashtags where you're more likely to be seen (just make sure they're still relevant to your book). This will require some research and experimentation up front, but once you have a list of hashtags you like to use, you can keep them in a note on your phone and copy/paste to save time.

If you're using hashtags in your post copy, remember to write them in camel case (#ChildrensBooks vs. #childrensbooks or #CHILDRENSBOOKS) so that screen reading software knows to pronounce the words separately.

## Engage.

Social media isn't a one-way street. Think of a social media platform like a party—you wouldn't expect people to like you if all you did was show up and start talking about yourself. How do you do this? Here are a few turnkey ways:

### Ask questions.

One of the easiest, most important things to do on social is to ask your fans questions and reply to their answers. Even if you don't get a lot of comments right away, over time your fans will learn that you want to hear their opinions, and they will start to respond. When in doubt, just ask, "What do you think?" And definitely spend time making fans feel heard—even a simple like and a "Thank you!" is better than silence.

### Tell people what you want them to do with your content.

Posting the cover of your new book for the first time? You want as many people as possible to see it. Tell your fans and followers to share (or retweet, or reblog—whatever is native to the channel you're on). Wrote a blog post you want them to read? Tell them to **CLICK THROUGH** for more! You'd be surprised how much this simple tactic can impact engagement. Making things simple for people is an important best practice on social, and there's nothing simpler than being told *exactly* how to show support or share your opinion.

### Use native engagement tools.

Some platforms have extra engagement tools built in. For example, Twitter allows users to create and post simple polls to their channels. Use this feature to let your followers vote on something as big as which new author photo you should use or which character you should write a bonus scene about to something as small as what you should snack on during your writing break. Instagram Stories allows users to poll followers, too, as well as ask followers questions, subscribe to a countdown, take a quiz, or say how much they love something using the sentiment slider sticker.

### Learn from your successes.

Do you have a post that got great engagement? See if you can figure out why, then try to replicate it. This also applies to things your fans ask *you* about—for example, if you start to get a lot of tweets about a specific character in your book, see if posting more about that character increases shares and comments.

### Engage on other people's posts.

Engagement isn't just limited to the people who follow you and comment on your posts. Make sure to leave comments on the posts of people you follow, even if they don't follow you. Active engagements like this help platforms with algorithms curate your feed with content you want to see more of, and they may also make your channel more visible to people with similar interests.

### Reach out.

Keeping your current fans engaged is important, but you also want new fans, and you may have to go out and find them. Hashtags and search functions on social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram are great ways to find people talking about your books, your category or genre, or even other non-book-related things you care about.

If you're looking to connect with book influencers on Instagram, for example, try scrolling through the #Bookstagram hashtag or another, more niche hashtag, and then liking and commenting on images that catch your eye. If you do this consistently, over a long period of time, you should start to see your follower count rise.

### Tag people.

If there's a particular person you want to see your content, tag them (for instance, if you read a book you loved and want the author to know). They're more likely to see—and share—the content if you call attention to it with a tag. That will help them discover you, and/or expose you to their followers. Just make sure the content you post is relevant to the person you're tagging.

Don't forget to tag us at Simon & Schuster as well! We strive to create balance on our channels in order to maintain high levels of engagement, so we can't amplify everything, but we will try our very best. Never feel shy about tagging us in posts about your book—we want to support our authors whenever possible!

If your book is a board book, picture book, Ready-to-Read, chapter book, or middle-grade book, tag us @simonkids across all channels. If your book is a young adult novel, tag us @simonteen across all channels.

One thing to note: for legal reasons, we aren't able to amplify (retweet or repost) sweepstakes or giveaways from third parties, including authors or illustrators, unless the promotion has official legal rules and mini-rules.

# BUILDING OR UPDATING YOUR WEBSITE

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Every author and illustrator should have a website. If a reader, bookseller, or educator wants to know more about you, the first thing they will do is search for you online. Your website will serve as a destination that contains all the information they might want to know about you.

That doesn't mean that your website needs to be flashy or complicated. In fact, it's best if your website is simple and easy to navigate, so that the most important details are right at the user's fingertips.

The first step is to secure a domain name. Most domains are available for a nominal, recurring registration fee through services like GoDaddy. The domain for your website should be as close to your name (or your pen name) as possible, so that the connection with your books is obvious. If you have a common name, your ideal domain might already be taken. Try variations with dashes or "books" or "writer" until you find a domain that both makes sense and is available to purchase.

If you don't currently have a website or are looking to build a new one, you can hire a website developer/designer to create one for either an hourly rate or a flat fee. The best way to find one is to ask your author friends for recommendations or see if your agent knows of any designers who their agency or other clients have used. Another trick is to go to the websites of other authors, or your favorite small businesses, and check the website footer to see if the designer is credited.

Try to find a couple of options, then contact each of the designers to get a quote for what it will cost. Be sure to give them a sense of the scope of the project. How many pages do you want? Is it a new site, a redesign, or small fixes to a current design? What do you want the site to look like? Do you want the designer to build the site on a content management system so that you can make future updates yourself? (We recommend you do this! It will save you time and money in the long run.)

If you have the time and would rather build your own site, website building and hosting services like WordPress, Squarespace, or Wix have templates that you can use to put together a simple site. You can purchase templates for these content management systems from designers for a much smaller fee than it would cost to have someone build you a custom site.

Regardless of how you build your website, here are some sections and types of information we recommend you include:

- **Home Page** – This is where you should feature all the most recent information about you and your books. This should include important details about your most recent book and its publication date (if it hasn't released yet) and any upcoming events. You should also put links to your social media channels and an email newsletter sign-up form (if you have or plan to create a newsletter) in the header or footer of the site, so that they're accessible on every page.
- **About** – This section should include your bio, photo, and any other information that you want visitors to know about you.



- **Books** – This section should include information about each of your books, including the cover, book description, publication date (if the book hasn't come out yet), and links to purchase from all major retailers (Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Books-a-Million, Bookshop, IndieBound, etc.). If any of your books are available in other formats (like audio), include those links as well.
- **Events** – If you are doing several public events to promote your book(s), or you do public events frequently, you may want to feature those in a separate section of your site.
- **Contact** – This section should contain information on how to contact you. You can provide an email address here or a contact form. You can also put links to your social media channels here.

Here are some additional sections you may want to add, based on your needs:

- **School Visits** – If you are available for school visits, you can put information on how to book a school visit with you and what your presentations typically cover in its own section. Or, if there's only a little bit of information, you could put it on your About page.
- **Resources** – If there are discussion guides, downloadable activities, links to articles, or other resources for your books, you may want to put them in their own section so that they're easy for kids, parents, or educators to find.
- **Videos** – If you have a lot of video content related to your books, you may want to put it in its own section.
- **Blog** – If you have a blog that you update regularly, you could give it its own section.
- **FAQ** – If there are questions you get from readers a lot, you may want to compile the questions and answers into a Frequently Asked Questions section of your website.
- **Extras** – This catchall section could contain fan art, book or series playlists, deleted scenes, etc. Anything you think your readers might love!