

MEDIA SKILLS FOR SCHOLARS

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PART I

Main Body

10 Things about Twitter for Academics

by Jessie Daniels

Academics who are skilled at writing long, nuanced, complex arguments may be flummoxed by the 140-character constraints of Twitter but they needn't be.

I've been using Twitter since 2008, and in the six years (how time flies when you're sharing in 140-characters!) since then, I've gleaned a few things that may make Twitter easier for my academic friends.



1. **There is Twitter lingo, but it's not that hard.** When you're learning a new software platform (or, a new anything really) there's often specialized language that goes along with it. We all know this from the jargon in our academic fields ([post-structuralism](#) anyone?), but somehow it often comes as a surprise in Internet-land. Really, if you've mastered any field well enough to get a PhD (or, through the first few years of grad school), you'll be able to master Twitter lingo. The first term you should know about Twitter: "handle" or, the name you use on Twitter.
2. **Choose a short, easy-to-remember handle.** When you choose a handle, you want it to be something that's short (your handle takes up part of your allotted 140-characters).

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And, you want something that's easy to remember. Usually, people include part of their name. Many times, academic folks want to include "Prof" as part of their handle. Fine if you want, to but there are a lot of these now, so it might not be as easy to remember. You probably don't want to include your institution in your Twitter handle in case your Dream School calls and you switch affiliations. Or, if you're already at your Dream School, you might not want to include it because people may mistake it for an 'official' account. My Twitter handle is [@JessieNYC](#). It seems to work fine except for the unlikely event that I decide to move out of New York City.

3. Write a bio that captures your interests. Take a few minutes to set up your profile. You can always change this, and should update it as your interests change. People will read this to get a sense of who you are and what kind of information you're likely to share on Twitter. So, your profile should give some sense of your interests in 160-characters (slightly longer than the standard Tweet).

4. Include a photo of *yourself* so people know you're not a spam bot. The default icon that you get on Twitter is an "egg" (get it, like a bird's egg?). When there are spam bots — and yes, this happens sometimes — they can be easily spotted by the default egg icon. So, an important way to distinguish yourself from the spam bot is to change that default icon to a photo. You want to show people that you're a real person, and at least moderately friendly. Put a photo of *yourself* in there. Yes, we're all pleased that you got married and had kids, but leave those photos for your Facebook page. On Twitter, people expect to have a glimpse of who *you* are.

5. Figure out what you want to contribute. There are a bunch of metaphors that are useful for explaining Twitter, one of my favorites is "DJ." Think of yourself as a DJ, and the Tweets you're putting out into the world as your playlist. What do effect do you want to have on people listening? On my scholarly blog, Racism Review, my focus is on race and racism. On Twitter, I have a broader range of topics I'm interested in and that I share. I Tweet about race

and racism, and also about: academia, higher ed, digital media, documentary films, and memoir writing. For academic folks, think about sharing what the latest news is in your field. Did you see a recent journal article that seems especially path-breaking for people in your field? Compose a Tweet about that and then people will begin to look to you for the latest news in that field.

6. Learn to tune your TL. More Twitter lingo! (breathe) “TL” stands for “Timeline.” Timeline is the string of Tweets I see when I log into Twitter. Every person’s TL is different. What I see in my Timeline is a result of who I choose to “follow.” So, at the moment, for someone who is very into the World Cup, their TL may be filled with updates about who won the latest game and what the prospects are for their favorite team. For someone else who is very interested in Supreme Court decisions about reproductive health, their TL could be filled with updates about the Hobby Lobby decision. When I first started Twitter, I didn’t get it. It just seemed boring to me. But, a friend who’s opinion I respect, said “this is where the action is, keep trying.” Finally, I figured out how to adjust my Timeline so that the flow of information is useful to me. It’s sort of like learning to tune a radio in the car, you want more “signal” than “noise.” For academic folks, you’ll want to figure out who to follow so that Twitter is useful for you professionally. Often this means following other academics, but it can also mean finding journalists, activists, policy makers, and philanthropists who are Tweeting about the topic you’re interested in. These sorts of connections can help inform your work, and may even yield real, material benefits for social change or just career advancement.

7. Getting the flow of Twitter into Academic Life. “I’m so busy already, I don’t have time for Twitter!” I hear this a lot from academic colleagues. I’m busy too. And, I’m on Twitter often. My experience is not that Twitter takes me away from the flow of academic life and knowledge production, but rather that it is now a part of how I conceive of what we used to call “the life of the mind.” When I say that I’m on Twitter often, by that I mean that I usually have

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one browser tab open to Twitter if I'm working on a desktop or laptop computer, or if I'm out in the world, I'll check Twitter on my phone. But, it doesn't mean I Tweet that often. I read Twitter and "listen" in the morning while I'm having coffee, and at breaks from work during the day. Twitter is something I learn from and something I think with. I've written more about how I use Twitter in knowledge production [here](#).

8. Find people you want to connect with. Re-Tweet them. Talk to them. Connect with them. I've heard it said that "Facebook is for connecting to people you already know, Twitter is for connecting with people you *want* to know." I don't know if that's true for everyone, but it's certainly been true for me. In many ways, finding and connecting with people on Twitter allows me to [curate the ideal academic department](#) (which also includes lots of non-academic folks). On Twitter, I can follow people that I want to know, without the reciprocity required and expected of being "friends" on that other platform. I can also go beyond merely "following" and reading the Tweets of someone by "re-tweeting" them. Re-tweeting, sometimes abbreviated as RT'ing, just means re-sharing a Tweet that someone else composed. When you're on Twitter, you can see that someone has RT'd you and that's a form of connection (people like it when you RT them). You can also talk to people using the "@reply" – more lingo! – which is just simply clicking on the "reply" button and it appears as a mention, sort of like a RT. Too much lingo? Don't worry about it. It's one of those things that sounds harder than it is. It's just a way of connecting with people.

9. Academic conferences with Twitter. Perhaps one of the most useful implementations of Twitter is at academic conferences. For the uninitiated, the junior, the marginalized, or the just-plain-shy, academic conferences can be a nightmare of face-name-badge-scanning. Twitter changed this for me. Whereas I once felt alienated, connecting with people on Twitter (see #8) transformed the hallways of academic conferences into giant meet-ups where warm embraces replaced dismissive face-name-badge scowls.

The Twitter backchannel has also enlivened sometimes dull academic conferences. The backchannel is just a conversation going on about the conference by people using Twitter. The way this works is that people are using a particular hashtag (just any word, set of letters and numbers with a # symbol in front of it). For example, #ASA2014 becomes a hashtag for the sociology conference and so on. It also means that I can follow the conversation at a particular conference even if I didn't get to attend it in person. This is a tremendous boon for academics with both intellectual curiosity and a limited travel budget.

10. **Be generous and kind.** There is often some anxiety about using Twitter as an academic, especially for folks who are still in graduate school or early in their careers. "Won't this hurt my career chances?" Well, it depends on how you use it. If you say evil, hurtful things – like wishing death on someone's children – it can get you in trouble. My experience is that if used without malice, it won't hurt and it might help. I started on Twitter when I was pre-tenure and got tenured (and promoted) since then. Some of my colleagues even suggested that [getting added to this list](#) helped my chances. In general, I think the world would be a better place if people were generous and kind, so I'm adding that as a recommendation for how academics should be on Twitter.



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URL: <http://justpublics365.commonsgc.cuny.edu/2014/06/30/10-things-twitter-academics/>

A Guide to Blogging for Academics

by Nathan Palmer

Blogging can be a great way to find a broader audience for your academic research. Moving research out of the ivory tower and into the public sphere has the [potential to address](#) some of the most pressing social problems. In the words [Patrick Dunleavy and Chris Gilson](#) of the London School of Economics, “*Blogging is quite simply, one of the most important things that an academic should be doing right now.*”

I'm writing a new article,
should be out sometime
next year

I'm writing a post,
should be out in
the next few hours



freshspectrum.com

Image by Chris Lysy FreshSpectrum

On the fourth anniversary of my blog, [Sociology Source](#), I want to share some of what I've learned about making research in my field of sociology accessible to a broad, public audience. Throughout my teaching, my work on [Sociology In Focus](#), and the one-off projects like the “[Doing Nothing](#)” video, I've been developing my skills at

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communicating highly complex ideas using language that most people without specialized training in sociology could easily understand. The guidelines that follow are designed to help your scholarly work find it's largest audience.

1. Talk to Me: Acknowledge the Reader.

EXAMPLE: Many scholars today argue that when sharing your ideas with your audience the use of the third grammatical person places distance between the two parties whereas employing the first and second person delivers a reading experience that is superior in it's intimacy with the reader.

- Write as if your reader is in the room with you.
- Show don't tell. Don't be afraid to slip into a narrative to allow your reader to experience the event first hand.

2. Just Say It: Don't lead with a disclaimer or qualifier.

EXAMPLE: I don't want you to read this and think I am trying to be mean. I'm also not trying to say that this applies to all forms of writing. As I said above, these are just my opinions.

- Your first sentence exists to entice the reader to read the second sentence. Your first paragraph's job is to intrigue your reader so they are compelled to read the second. And so on and so on.



(Image source)

3. K.I.S.S. : Keep it Simple Scholar

EXAMPLE: Academic writers who use jargon and esoteric language are often preoccupied with communicating their cultural capital to their peers and because of this they sacrifice what could be a learning opportunity for a lay audience.

- Mercilessly destroy jargon. If you absolutely have to use a piece of jargon, don't just define the term. Introduce the term to your reader using an anecdote or other illustrative tool.
- The greater the pre-requisite amount of education a reader must have to understand your reading, the smaller your audience will be and the smaller your impact will be.

4. Get in & Get Out.

- Keep it succinct. If possible, keep any blog post to less than 500 words.
- Oh the hypocrisy! This blog post is 790 words long!

5. No, It's Not All Important

- Only present the reader with information that is essential for them to understand your larger points. “**Kill your darlings**” as the saying goes. Delete non-essential information.
- As an academic, you have an expert's mind, so to you it's *all* essential. Try to remember back to when you were a novice to your subject and how you saw your subject as a beginner. Then, write to answer the questions of the reader with a beginners mind.

6. If You Have Something to Say, Say It

- Say something compelling, intriguing, challenging, inspiring, evocative, poignant, or otherwise interesting.
- If what you write is something that you sincerely believe and something that empirical research can back up, then take the risk and hit publish.

7. Don't Let Perfection Be The Enemy of The Good

- Focus on clearly communicating your ideas. It's more important that you share your ideas with the world than it is to make sure your writing is 100% error free. Get in the public arena and mix it up with people.
- Your writing isn't etched in stone. Remember that unlike print, you can immediately change errors as your readers point them out to you.



(image source)

8. Scholarly Writing vs. Public Writing

Not every scholarly publication needs to be written so that a the general public can read it. There is value in scholars writing for peers in academic journals in ways that are highly technical and complex. However, as academics we need to cultivate a community of scholars that are highly skilled in communicating esoteric research into texts that can be read by a general audience.

You can [download my full Guide to Writing Online here](#). For more tips on academic blogging (and some terrific drawings), see the [Illustrated Blogging Advice for Researchers](#), created by [Chris Lysy](#).

Happy blogging!



Nathan Palmer is a sociologist at Georgia Southern University and founder of the blog SociologySource.org. You can follow him on Twitter [@SociologySource](https://twitter.com/SociologySource).

URL: <http://justpublics365.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2014/06/30/academic-guide-to-blogging/>

Dipping into Analytics: Maximizing and Measuring the Reach of Your Online Scholarly Content

by Roxanne Shirazi

Being a scholar means keeping track of your productivity – all those articles, conference presentations and books we work so hard to create. With the proliferation of digital technologies, scholars can have an impact in lots of ways and there are new ways to track this impact, but it can be confusing and overwhelming at first.

In this post we're going to offer you a brief introduction to the mechanics of maximizing the impact of the kinds of digital media tools we've already covered in [this series](#), like Twitter, blogging and podcasting.



An important part of taking your scholarly identity online is minding the details. When we create print documents, we routinely perform familiar tasks that make the work appear more polished and professional, like formatting the cover page or setting the margins. Yet the online equivalents of these activities are too often brushed aside for expediency. Who has time to add tags and tinker

with all those settings?

[image source](#)

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Take the time. Simple actions like using thoughtful titles and headers in your blog posts, assigning tags or keywords, and summarizing your posts into 2–3 sentence abstracts can enhance the visibility of your content in search engines and improve the look of your posts when they are shared on social media. If you use WordPress for your blog, many of these functions are provided by easy-to-use plugins, so you don't have to become a web designer or metadata expert to benefit from these techniques. But there are some basic principles to remember as you create content on the web to help you connect with your audience—and ensure that they can find you.

What is SEO and what does it have to do with academic blogging?

SEO stands for search engine optimization, and the basic premise is that understanding how search engines index and retrieve materials on the web allows us to structure our work so that it has a better chance of showing up in search results.

If you're blogging on a self-hosted WordPress site, I highly recommend using the [WordPress SEO by Yoast](#) plugin, which installs a simple set of menus on your dashboard so you can easily customize the most important components of your post's metadata (the data *about* the post that helps web crawlers identify the main topics of your post). Regardless of what platform you choose, the following tips will help you flag the most important keywords to search engines and improve your chances of getting your posts included in search results.

- **Choose your title carefully.** We all love being creative, but if your post is about unsafe working conditions, include those words in the title. It helps in search engine retrieval *and* in social media sharing.
- **Use html headers (h2, h3, etc.) when breaking up blog posts and make them meaningful.** Descriptive headers allow readers to scan through quickly, and search engines will place greater weight on the keywords used there when indexing your post.
- **Get to know your meta tags.** [Meta tags](#) include descriptive information about your web page. You know that snippet

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that appears in Google's search results? That's controlled by your site's meta tags, so it pays to pay attention to them.



image source

Optimize your posts for sharing on Twitter and Facebook

If you use Twitter to share links, as many academics do, you've likely noticed that some websites include a preview of the content directly within the tweet. Likewise, Facebook includes an image and summary content whenever a link is shared. As authors on the web, we have control over what is displayed in these areas, but it means taking a few minutes to check the details of our posts.

Librarian Eric Phetteplace has written an [excellent introduction](#) to using [Twitter Cards](#) and Facebook's OpenGraph Metadata Protocol to enhance the way a site appears when it is shared on these platforms. Facebook's [OpenGraph Debugger](#) tool provides a preview of what a link will look like when it's shared on someone's timeline, and will flag any errors in the metadata for that site.

Measuring your reach with analytics

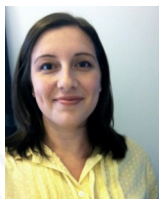
To see how visitors to your blog are interacting with your posts, most platforms provide basic data and will distinguish between page views and unique visitors. Many will also tell you what search terms brought people to your post, and what site or social media service linked, or referred, them to your site.

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To drill further down into detailed metrics, [Google Analytics](#) stands alone for in-depth analysis, but it can get rather complicated quickly. Google offers free [resources](#) (online courses and tutorials) for learning and implementing Google Analytics on your website, including a [Setup Checklist](#) that goes over the details for getting started with the service.

Altmetrics tools like [Impact Story](#) and [Plum Analytics](#) can capture the reach of work outside the traditional formats of academic articles and books, including blog posts, datasets, and slides, and will measure stats from social media sites as well.

Bottom line: don't let the immediacy of digital publishing platforms lead you to neglect the mundane tasks that lead to polished publications. Your audience depends on it.



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URL: <http://justpublics365.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2014/07/09/dipping-analyt...olarly-content/>

From Scholarly Research to Crafting an Op-Ed: A How To for Academics

by Tressie McMillan Cottom

When your area of scholarly expertise becomes part of a news cycle, you have a chance to jump in and add your perspective to the conversation. You may be burning to refute an argument or clarify a popular opinion or, more ambitiously, change the direction of a longer conversation. However, it can be hard to know how to do just that. Here are a few simple tips to help you get started.



An excellent way to bring your work and perspective to a broader audience and inform public opinion is to write Op-Eds for mainstream publications. In this post, I'll give some basic guidelines for writing Op-Eds that effectively present your academic work and link it to the topic of the moment (or longer!).

The challenge for many academics is striking a balance between the complexities of a subject and making it accessible to an intelligent public. Academics are fluent in the language of expertise. We often define this in terms of our discipline, sub-discipline, and

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methodological practices. But even smart, informed readers cannot be expected to know disciplinary ins-and-outs, (and they may not care).

For example, labor experts who focus on intersectionality may have significance among our tribe, but that can mean very little to readers of the *Washington Post*. However, if that labor expert can link her specific niche to broader issues of public concern, it will have far more meaning to the average reader. For example, her scholarship can inform issues about gender wage gaps, criminal background checks on hiring practices, and the decline of the black middle class. Those are all issues generally understood and hotly debated in the media.



[image source](#)

Whichever media outlet you pitch a piece to or its subject matter, an Op-Ed should: 1) establish your credibility 2) argue for a compelling point-of-view and 3) consider counter-perspectives.

It should also follow a general structure. The one presented here is recommended by [The Op-Ed Project](#), a great organization that seeks to increase the range of voices and quality of ideas we hear in the world, especially from women. An Op-Ed should have:

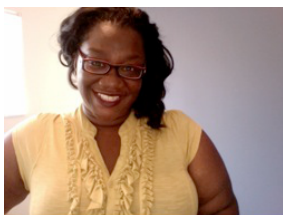
1. **Lede:** Establishes why and for what this Op-Ed matters, and it needs to be pegged to a [news hook](#);
2. **Thesis:** Statement of your argument, either explicit or implied;
3. **Argument:** Based on evidence, such as stats, news, reports from credible organizations, expert quotes, scholarship, history, first-hand experience;

4. *"To Be Sure" Paragraph*: In which you pre-empt potential critics by acknowledging any obvious counter-arguments;
5. *Conclusion*: Have a clear ending, and if you can, circle back to your lede.

Your *lede* should be brief, to-the-point, and make the connection to the news hook clear. If you are a labor sociologist, it is clear how your argument relates to that a news story on disparities in earnings. At other times, the connection can be less clear, but no less compelling. For example, a labor sociologist could just as easily use a popular movie like *The Wolf of Wall Street* to discuss gender, sexism and financialization during the 1980s.

In either case, your lede should establish who you are, why you are talking about this topic, and how it relates to a news item of interest. To present who you are *and* why you are talking to this subject, you should establish your credibility very early on. One way to do this is to lead with your baubles. Consider every title, position, and publication you hold and highlight the ones that best represent you and the relevance for the topic. Each of these signal to editors and a general audience that you are expert. This is analogous to using citations efficiently in an academic article. The primary difference is that general audiences generally do not want a literature review or bibliography. Instead, they need to trust that *you* know the literature. To establish that; speak to who you are rather than what you know.

The *thesis*, *argument*, *counter-argument*, and *conclusion* are more self-evident. Just remember to stick to one point, make the connections between each piece of evidence clear for your audience, and do not rely on jargon. A well-crafted Op-Ed, written by an expert who can translate relevant research for a broad public audience is both attractive to a media outlet and a valuable contribution to public intellectual life.



Tressie McMillan Cottom (@tressiemcphd), a PhD Candidate in Sociology at Emory University and a PhD Intern at the Microsoft Social Media Collective in Cambridge, MA. She has written Op-Eds for the New York Times ([here](#) and [here](#)) and is a regular columnist for [Slate Magazine](#). More of her writing can be found on her website [here](#).

URL: <http://justpublics365.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2014/07/14/op-ed-how-to-for-academics/>

The Importance of Audio and Podcasts

by Heidi Knoblauch

The first thing I learned about podcasting was that it is powerful medium. Podcasting is powerful not only because it has the ability to relate complex arguments into digestible bits of information, but also because it can transform those arguments into relatable stories. Rather than shoving statistics at an audience, podcasts can transform statistics about subjects (i.e. the number of people arrested in 2012 in the U.S. on nonviolent drug charges was 1.55 million) into stories about real people who felt the impact of those statistics. The unique ability of audio to highlight the experience of making knowledge can also connect listeners to scholarship in a way that books often fail to do. Podcasts can allow academics to infuse themselves into the arguments they make rather than downplay their connection to their scholarship.

Podcasts – meaning audio uploaded to iTunes – are just one way to use audio to connect with a wider audience. There are many other platforms including WordPress, [SoundCloud](#), and [MixCloud](#) that allow you to share audio. Often, these non-iTunes venues allow for a stronger engagement with your audience because they allow users to post comments on audio files. And, depending on your resources, posting at all four of these venues can give you the most engagement.

Making a good podcast requires planning. A podcast posted on iTunes should have a consistent length, release time, and theme to be successful. In other words, if you want to create a weekly interview-based topically connected 15 minute podcast series, iTunes is probably the most powerful platform to gain a strong following. On the other

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hand, if you want to post interviews sporadically and have audio that varies in length and topic then something like SoundCloud or your own personal WordPress site would probably gain more traction.

Not all good audio projects have to be formatted like a podcast. Projects can vary in length and subject but use the same intro and outro to make the audio files cohesive. For example, the [JustPublics@365 Podcast Series](#) uses the same music intro and outro for every episode. We also use that slice of audio for our shorter audio projects that we post exclusively to [SoundCloud](#).

Collecting audio does not have to be expensive, but it can be. Like most media projects, you can make podcasts as expensive or inexpensive as you want. SoundCloud has the hefty price tag of \$121.50 per year to upload an unlimited number of tracks. Using services like [BuzzSprout](#), which offer podcast hosting can cost between \$12 and \$24 a month. You can upload audio to a [server](#) and link that file in a post in your WordPress site. Audio files take up a large amount of room so, often, you will have to pay for some type of server space.

You can be scrappy with equipment. Smartphones have the ability to record surprisingly excellent audio. iPhone apps like [Voice Recorder HD](#) (\$1.99) or the built in [Voice Memos](#) can give you high quality audio. If you want to have higher quality audio you can purchase a number of different microphones that plug directly into your computer (I like the [Apogee Electronics MiC Studio Quality USB Microphone](#)) or that plug right into your iPhone or Android (I like the [Rode SmartLav](#) or the [iRig MIC Cast](#)).

Editing can make all the difference. You can use a number of different programs to edit your audio. [GarageBand](#) is one of the easier ways to learn to edit your audio. You can record directly into GarageBand or import audio from prerecorded files. It is free to Mac users so it is a great option for beginners. [Audacity](#) is free, open source, cross-platform software for recording and editing sounds that is compatible with PCs and Macs. It is slightly more clunky than GarageBand, but is an equally effective way to edit audio.

Length is up for debate. There are ongoing [debates](#) about how long a podcast should be. Some say 3 minutes, some say 30 minutes. I

say, the most important thing is to pick a length and stick to it. If your audience is engaging with 30-minutes of content, there is no reason to switch to a 3 minute format. On the other hand, if you are making 30-minute podcasts and no one is engaging with them, it may be time to rethink your strategy.

There are many different types of podcasts. One powerful way to weave stories for listeners is through audio interviews. The podcasts and audio that I have produced for JustPublics@365 have mostly consisted of these. I think interviews are most effective when combined with “on the ground” audio, but they can also be powerful in and of themselves.

When JustPublics@365 interviewed people affected by the East Harlem Building Collapse the interviews were edited to have the same intro and outro for every interview in addition to the same music from the JustPublics@365 Series.

For example:



<https://soundcloud.com/justpublics-365/community-conversations-east-harlem-resident-louise-burwell>

This method of interviewing consisted of asking the interviewee a series of questions to get them primed for the interview and then recording their uninterrupted story from start to finish. When editing these interviews, I inserted myself only in the beginning and end in order to give context to the story.

When creating the JustPublics@365 Podcast Series, I took a different approach and included my questions in the produced audio. This interview style podcast involved in-depth research and thought out questions, which I shared with the interviewee before the interview. These podcasts are structured in a way that allows for replicability and their format is designed for a structured ongoing series.



<https://soundcloud.com/justpublics-365/juan-battle-on-the-social>

The most important thing is consistency. However you decide to structure your podcast, you should be consistent and stick to your strategy!

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URL: <http://justpublics365.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2014/07/02/podcasting/>

PART II

Concluding Our Topic Series

We hope you have found these introductions useful and that you continue to explore using media outlets to share your work and further your research.

Check our website regularly for resources and tips, and help us keep the conversation going.

Following us on Twitter (@JustPublics365) is a great way to stay in the loop and share your discoveries. See you there!