



# Building Community and Improving Discussion in Online & Hybrid Classes with Twitter

Dr. Rebekah Fitzsimmons

Georgia Institute of Technology

@DrFitzPhD

[rebekahfitzsimmons.wordpress.com](http://rebekahfitzsimmons.wordpress.com)

[rebekah.fitzsimmons@lmc.gatech.edu](mailto:rebekah.fitzsimmons@lmc.gatech.edu)

# Background

## Article

- "Possibly Impossible; Or, Teaching Undergraduates to Confront Digital and Archival Research Methodologies, Social Media Networking, and Potential Failure."  
Rebekah Fitzsimmons and Suzan Alteri. *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, January 2019.

## Classes

- Writing Through Media: Fairy Tale Adaptations (Fall 2013)
- Rhetoric, Propaganda and the High Stakes of YA Dystopian Fiction (Spring 2016, 2017)
- Making the List: Best Sellers, Best Of, and Banned Books (Fall 2017)
- The History and Rhetoric of Science Writing for Children (Spring 2018, Fall 2018)

Slides and citations available at: [rebekahfitzsimmons.com](http://rebekahfitzsimmons.com)

# To Discuss Today

1. Embracing the informal elements of Twitter
2. Replacing traditional online assignments with Twitter
3. Best practices for Twitter in the college classroom



# Embracing the informal elements of Twitter

Informality as a feature, not a bug!

# Multimodality

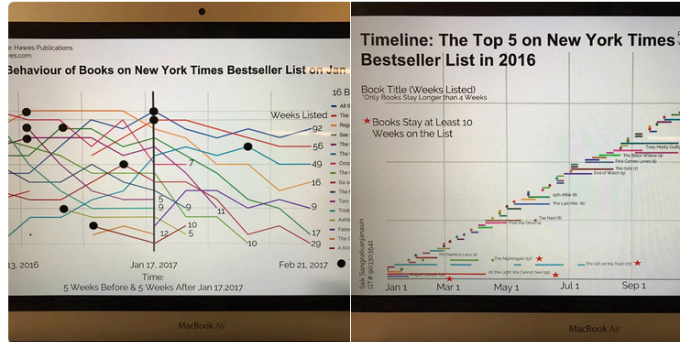
- Images of text
- Gifs
- Screenshots
- Drafts of work



**Sek S.**  
@sekeng1101

Follow

I could not be any happier with my visualization. I used semi-graphic method by creating graph from Google Sheet and adding more graphics. This is a proof that there is no right or wrong in doing research. There is only 'your' way of doing it. #1101list



10:58 AM - 5 Dec 2017

1 Retweet



Tweet your reply



**Anbus Iqbal** @anbus\_iqbal · 5 Dec 2017

Replying to @sekeng1101

Amazing visualizations! I like how you are portraying a large amount of data in an easy to grasp manner. #1101List



**Alex Dulisse** @Sir\_Lemmmings · 5 Dec 2017

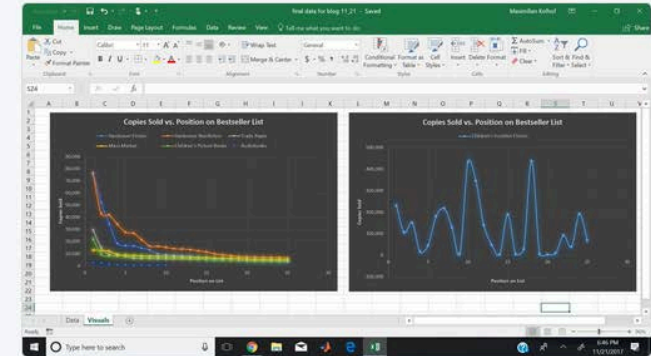
Replying to @sekeng1101

That data looks really neat! Good job on your visualization.



**Maximilian Kolhof** @max\_kolhof · 21 Nov 2017

@DrFitzPhD Just made some preliminary visualizations on my data... seems like every Publisher's Weekly Bestseller category strongly values sales in how the books are ranked in the list...except for Children's Fiction! What do you think about this? #1101list



**Rebekah Fitzsimmons**

@DrFitzPhD

Replying to @max\_kolhof



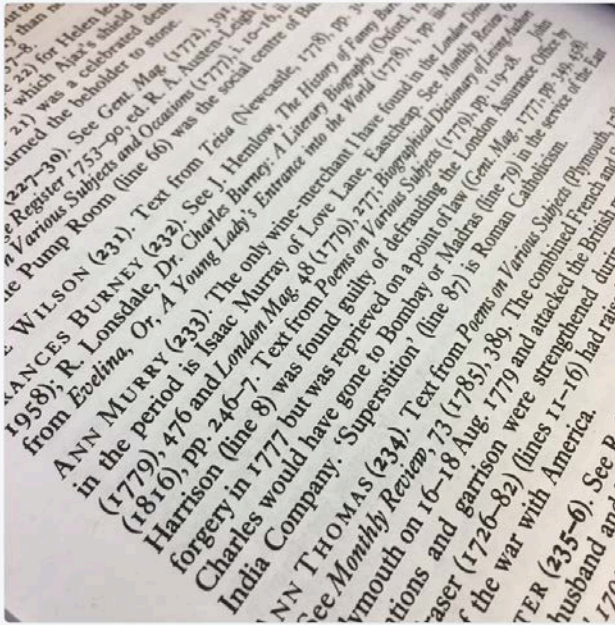
9:49 PM - 21 Nov 2017



# Discussion Space

- Same message, different media
- Faster response time
- Personalized
- Conversational and interactive

**Murray** @eng\_1102\_Murray · Feb 6  
OMFG!!! I'm finding more information. The back of this book as the sources and additional information. Supposedly I now have a name for her father. #rj #1102kidsci



**Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD  
Replying to @eng\_1102\_Murray  
Yay! (Though the tone of that entry looks like the author of that blurb experienced similar frustration?) #1102kidsci

**William Donspeare** @db110223 · Jan 31  
Aaaaagggghhh just found a new source and finished my blog post. I'm feeling great. I'm gonna waste the next few hours doing nothing important. That's just what I do. #RJ #1102kidsci

**Dr Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD  
Replying to @db110223  
I just want to say that this is ABSOLUTELY a vital part of the research process. You have to give your brain time to recharge (which is also why you should start projects early, so you have time for breaks!) #1102kidsci



12:47 PM - 1 Mar 2018

# Organic Collaboration

- Safe space for students to complain/vent
- Free flow of ideas between students
- Public acts of collaboration helps everyone

The screenshot shows a Twitter thread with four tweets. The first tweet is from Hgrove3 (@hgrove32) on Feb 10, asking for help finding information on Jane Bragg. The second tweet is from Nana Awere (@nawereGT) on Feb 10, offering help by suggesting Ancestry.com. The third tweet is from Hgrove3 (@hgrove32) on Feb 11, thanking Nana Awere for the help. The fourth tweet is from Nana Awere (@nawereGT) replying to Hgrove3, saying "No problem! Glad it helped" and including the same hashtags. A "Follow" button is visible next to Nana Awere's profile.

**Hgrove3** @hgrove32 · Feb 10  
Still wondering why I can't find any information on Jane Bragg actually being an author?!?!?!?! #RJ #1102kidsci

**Nana Awere** @nawereGT · Feb 10  
I used Ancestry to find a census indicating my author was a teacher at some point, maybe you could try there. We also have free access to Ancestry through the GT databases. Hope this helps! #1102kidsci #RJ

**Hgrove3** @hgrove32 · Feb 11  
Thank you! The free ancestry was a blessing #1102kidsci #RJ

**Nana Awere** @nawereGT  
Replying to @hgrove32  
No problem! Glad it helped #1102kidsci #RJ  
7:46 AM - 12 Feb 2018



# Replacing traditional online assignments with Twitter

Let the “social” part of social media work for your course!



# Student Research Questions (#RQ)

1 1 1 1

**daddiMath** @daddiMath\_JEazy · 14 Nov 2017  
Taking in account book sales, book reviews, book trends, and popularity to compile dataviz [#1101list](#)

2 1 1 1

**Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD · 16 Nov 2017  
Sounds interesting! How do you plan to quantify book reviews (especially given that in your given time period, Internet reviews were not a thing). Do you have access to an archive of book sale data from this time period? You might check with [@karenaviars](#) to see what [@GTLibrary](#) has

1 1 2 1

**Karen Viars** @karenaviars **Following**  
Replying to [@DrFitzPhD](#) [@daddiMath\\_JEazy](#) [@GTLibrary](#)  
Recommend checking out Proquest Historic NYT, one of our databases that has the newspapers for that time. Email me if further questions 😊  
2:34 PM - 16 Nov 2017  
3 Likes

1 1 3 1

**Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD · 18 Nov 2017  
How will you quantify something like "mood"?

1 1 1 1

**Andrés García** @gtandresgarcia · 21 Nov 2017  
Although I cannot completely quantify themes or moods, I can divide the books until categories (by mood/theme) and then compare the number of books in each category to find a correlation. [#1101list](#) [#RQ](#)

1 1 1 1

**Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD · 21 Nov 2017  
Ok! That sounds much more feasible! You might consider the Library of Congress categories for consistency

1 1 1 1

**Andrés García** @gtandresgarcia **Follow**  
Replying to [@DrFitzPhD](#)  
Okay, I will definitely look into it. Thanks for the help! [#1101list](#)  
4:59 PM - 23 Nov 2017

1 1 1 1



Jacob Evans @Jwevans218 · 22 Nov 2017

#1101List when the authors you are researching are at the very front of the library.



Jacob Evans @Jwevans218 · 28 Nov 2017

Replying to @mreger6

# Informal Peer Review

Example



2 replies, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share



Michael Reger @mreger6

Follow

Replying to @Jwevans218

#1101list Seems like the best selling authors are better able to sell more books, thus making it easier to get back on the list. To see if this is true check out my blog post. "Would the NY times best seller list make Newton Proud"

2:31 PM - 28 Nov 2017

1 reply, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share

the list in the following week, it may be higher than that though because my data was only concerning the top 10 each week.

#1101List

1 reply, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share



GT Student @bstudent3 · 30 Nov 2017

Wow! That's higher than I thought #1101List

1 reply, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share



Atharv Marathe @CosmicQuasar22 · 30 Nov 2017

I know It's actually kind of insane if you think about it, it also turns out that looking at twelve weeks worth of top 10 authors only gives you enough names to create a little over 4 completely unique lists, but that kinda makes sense.

#1101List

1 reply, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share



Jacob Evans @Jwevans218 · 30 Nov 2017

Here's some crazier data for you (if that's possible). Looking at 929 data points of the number one position over 18 years, there are only 73 unique authors (and two authors combining on one book counts as unique) #1101List

1 reply, 1 retweet, 1 like, 1 share

# Real Time Research Journals (#RJ)

emailed the admin of the MA vital records website, and it turned out 10 December 1815 was her baptism date, and now I know birth certificates did not exist in 1815...

#1102kidsci #RJ

MA Vital Records Project

**PK** Patricia, Karina  
Good afternoon, Thank you very much for your help. It would be really great if I can acquire a copy of the baptism record before ... Today, 5:55 PM

**VA** Vital Records Admin <Admin@MA-VitalRecords.org>  
Yesterday, 1:21 PM  
Patricia, Karina

Good morning, Karina.  
I had a little trouble tracking some of the information as you didn't give her married name.  
The first thing to note is that Harriet's birth wasn't recorded. What you saw was her baptismal date. This is not uncommon. According to the published records, she was baptized at Theological Seminary Church. My research indicates this is what is now called Phillips Academy in Andover. I have a call in to them to see if they have records of baptisms done in 1815. If so, I'll see if they will e-mail you a copy of the record.

There were no birth certificates in 1815. Those didn't come into being until the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1815 it was just an entry in a ledger book. Sometimes they were slips of paper given to the Town Clerk. If he didn't get it recorded, well, there is no record.

John Slaughter, Owner/Administrator MA Vital Records Project  
In loving memory of our son, Brennan, 11/10/88-5/31/01 - <http://Brennan.MA-VitalRecords.org>

From: [Karina Patricia](#)  
Sent: Thursday, February 8, 2018 20:11  
To: [Admin@MA-VitalRecords.org](mailto:Admin@MA-VitalRecords.org)  
Subject: MA Vital Records Project

4:58 PM - 10 Feb 2018

1 Like



\*and

1



**Nana Awere** @nawereGT · Feb 9

I also found another census 20 years after the original one I found but there is a large discrepancy when it comes to Frances and her husband ages. In 1871 they are 53 and 55 respectively but in 1891 they 94 and 93. #1102kidsci #RJ

1



**Nana Awere** @nawereGT · Feb 9

It also seems that they moved from Hitcham, Suffolk, England to Bildeston, Suffolk, England (only 3 minutes away from each other) sometime within that 20 year period. #1102kidsci #RJ

1



**Nana Awere** @nawereGT · Feb 9

Frances also had an occupation listed this time! From what I made out she was a "Preacher of school"? It also appears her husband had some sort of position at a school as well (I'm assuming that it was the same school) #1102kidsci #RJ

1



**Nana Awere**

@nawereGT

Follow

At this point though, I know more about my author's husband than about her...

#1102kidsci #RJ

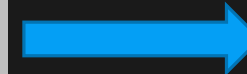
# Additional Assignment Conversions

Precis/  
Summary of  
Reading



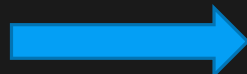
- Twitter thread to summarize reading
- Tweet the thesis (extra points for 280 character limit)

Literature  
Review/  
Locating  
additional  
sources on a  
topic



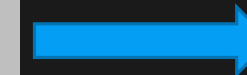
- #FollowFriday or #ScholarSunday for topical academic accounts
- Class thread with links to articles

Response  
Papers or  
Discussion Posts



- Live Tweet reading
- Tweet discussion questions (#DQ), respond to 2 peers

Peer Review  
Feedback



- Live Tweet as students watch presentations
- Q&A via Twitter
- Critique thesis statements



# Best practices for Twitter assignments

Structuring a Social Media Component In a College Class

# Help Students Consider Privacy

- Discuss community norms and privacy concerns FIRST
  - Recognize legitimate safety concerns for women and students of color in public facing social media, especially on controversial topics
  - Give students the option of an **anonymous** handle
- Start a new Twitter account specifically for the class
  - Tailor the user name, photo, and bio for privacy AND maximum effectiveness
  - Curate a follow list particular to the course
  - More efficient for self-evaluation and faculty assessment
- **NEVER NEVER** give grades or protected info back via Twitter

# Minimize Anxiety

- Be clear with expectations
  - How many tweets?
  - Twitter conventions versus English class?
  - What makes a "high quality" tweet?
- Concrete instructions (5-10 tweets a week) with broad topic guidelines
  - Complaints, commiseration, frustration can all be useful

# Twitter Genre Conventions

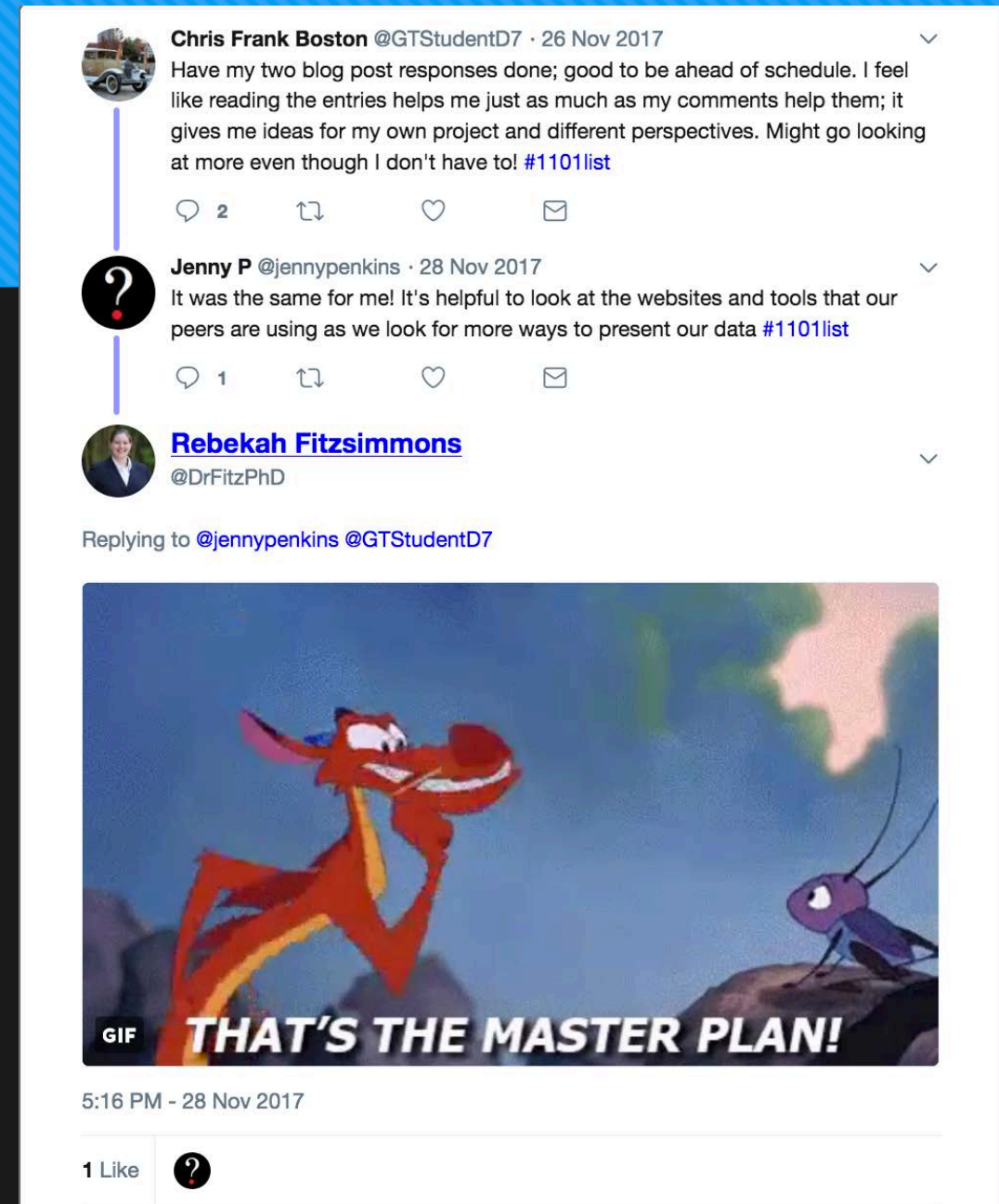
- Teach Twitter conventions like any other genre
  - Profile pictures, bios = not a bot
  - Replies on Twitter (@ versus .@)
  - Threads
  - Quote Tweet versus Retweet
  - Accessibility challenges of multimodal elements (turn on image descriptions)
- Teach lessons on entering existing conversations respectfully
- Emphasize the more you interact, the more you'll get back



# Model Twitter Use for Students

- Model the digital behavior you want to see
  - Engage with scholars in your field
  - Retweet relevant information for the class – articles, topic ideas
  - Respond to students (office hours!)
  - Livetweet your own reading/writing/work


@DrFitzPhD



**Chris Frank Boston** @GTStudentD7 · 26 Nov 2017  
Have my two blog post responses done; good to be ahead of schedule. I feel like reading the entries helps me just as much as my comments help them; it gives me ideas for my own project and different perspectives. Might go looking at more even though I don't have to! [#1101list](#)

**Jenny P** @jennypenkins · 28 Nov 2017  
It was the same for me! It's helpful to look at the websites and tools that our peers are using as we look for more ways to present our data [#1101list](#)

**Rebekah Fitzsimmons** @DrFitzPhD  
Replying to @jennypenkins @GTStudentD7



5:16 PM - 28 Nov 2017

1 Like



# Thank you!

Dr. Rebekah Fitzsimmons  
Georgia Institute of Technology  
@DrFitzPhD

[rebekahfitzsimmons.com](http://rebekahfitzsimmons.com)  
[rebekah.fitzsimmons@lmc.gatech.edu](mailto:rebekah.fitzsimmons@lmc.gatech.edu)