



USING DIGITAL TOOLS FOR ACTIVISM

Level 2: Fundamental activist skills

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Amnesty International Australia - defending human rights
ABN 640 0280 6233 | Locked Bag 23 Broadway NSW 2007
www.amnesty.org.au | supporter@amnesty.org.au | 1300 300 920

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#activism

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Also #digital #online #grassroots #organising #mobilising

BEFORE WE BEGIN

If you haven't signed up to join our movement yet, head over to our [Get Active](#) page.

You can find other modules on fundamental activist skills [here](#). We recommend getting familiar with them all if you are new to activism.

If you have any questions please get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au.



Tasmanian activists in 2016 © Amnesty International

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our module on using digital tools for activism. In this module we're going to look at the power of being an activist in the digital space. We'll also cover how you can build your online persona and use it to spread a message. There's an overview of some popular tools you can use straight away. Finally we'll look at how to protect yourself online and keep your activities private.

Activists tend to be at the ready to use emerging technology for campaigning. This is because we always need to embrace new ways of getting people to pay attention and take action. It increases what we are able to achieve, including the ability to reach and engage with more people. We can better tailor our approaches to particular people based on what we know about them. That way we're able to get better results. We have to try to stay ahead of our opposition and be creative with how we use technology

The best part of modern technology is the access to activism that it gives a lot of people. People that don't have the access to grassroots activism on the ground are now able to get involved a lot more than they could before. This guide is for people to enhance their grassroots activism with technology. But it's also for people that only do their activism online. To make sure you have more options for activism than just signing online petitions. A whole lot more.



Technology for activism has come a long way since this was at the forefront.

Digital tools to enhance your activism

Let's start with an overview of some useful online tools that you can use. We'll give a bit of a summary of what you can do with them and when they might come in handy.

Social media tools

Facebook (www.facebook.com)

Is great for:

Sharing information and opinions about issues that are important to you. You can have your own personal profile to share your thoughts and other content to your own network. You can also comment on posts by other people or organisations.

Promoting your activities and events to a wider audience. You can set up a [public page](#), [create events](#) and share them to get people along. You can also use [paid promotion](#) to reach a targeted audience of your choosing.

Working with an online community to brainstorm, plan and share information about campaigns. You can [create or join Facebook groups](#) that have a specific focus. They can either be private groups or public groups open to anyone.

Tips on use:

Determine what you want to use Facebook for before setting anything up. If you want to use Facebook to promote your activities to a wide audience, create a page. If you want it to be more discussion based or only to share with a select number of people, create a group. If you don't want to do either, just use your personal profile.

Whether on your own profile or a page / group that you've set up, keep the number of posts low. 5 - 10 posts a week is optimal, with no more than 3 a day. This is a good balance of making sure others see what you are posting, but also that you are not overwhelming them.

Keep your posts short and sweet. Aim for fewer than 250 characters, this will lead to more engagement. Also use eye catching images / videos / links to do a lot of the talking for you.

[Track insights](#) on your posts on groups / pages. Keep an eye out for when your audience is more likely to see it and what type of post they respond to more. Consider the time of day you post, when is your audience online? Adapt your posting methods to best suit your audience.

[Instagram \(www.instagram.com\)](http://www.instagram.com)

Is great for:

Communicating with people in a visual way. Instagram only allows you to post photo or video content. You can create your own, a great way to show what you are up to. You can also share other people's content to get their message out to your followers.

Demonstrating the size and scale of the movement you are part of.

Tips on use:

Use hashtags on your posts. That way people outside of your followers list have an easier time finding your content. Discover and follow specific hashtags yourself. Follow and like similar organisations and individuals. That's so you can keep up to date on relevant content. There might be a hashtag for activism in your city for example.

Include [@amnestyaustralia](https://www.instagram.com/amnestyaustralia) in your posts so that we can easily share your content. This is the Amnesty Australia Instagram page.

Learn the basics of image / video editing tools such as [Canva](#), [Photoshop](#) & [Premiere](#). This way you can make sure your content looks more professional.

Link your Instagram account to your Facebook profile. Then when you post on Instagram it'll post to your Facebook account as well.



Creative combo of online and grassroots tactics © Amnesty International

[Twitter \(www.twitter.com\)](http://www.twitter.com)

Is great for:

Micro blogging your thoughts, opinions and broadcasting activities you are working on.

Keeping up to date on the latest news and opinions of others. Information tends to be posted on Twitter faster than it can be posted to news sites. You can also get this information from a more diverse range of people.

Direct contact with fellow activists and campaign targets. You can follow allies to network with them or for inspiration. Many politicians and other decision makers use Twitter as well. You can send direct messages to them so they know people in the community care about specific issues.

Tips on use:

It can feel overwhelming to be an active Twitter user. There is a lot of information coming through to your feed which is hard to keep up with. Our advice is to keep your activities on Twitter limited to what you are currently working on. Change who you are following to match this when needed. Don't feel like you need to be on it all day reading and posting.

Fact check any information that comes through your feed. Don't take things at face value.

Use hashtags to get your posts to a broader audience. Keep an eye out for trending hashtags and moments that you can be a part of. Tag specific people in your posts to get their attention.

Support other users by retweeting their posts.

These are three of the most popular ones, so it can be more worthwhile to use them. That way you have a better chance of getting your message out there. But if you have a specific audience in mind and you know they're more likely to use another platform then go for it. Some other options include YouTube, which is for uploading videos of any length and topic. Reddit is a popular collection of forums on just about every topic. Snapchat and TikTok are good for younger audiences and are for posting short video clips. Again it is worthwhile finding out what platform your audience uses and go to where they are. But, don't feel like you have to be on all of them, or even more than one.

Amnesty's social media guidelines

Action groups are welcome to create a social media account that uses the Amnesty name and brand. It's important to know that if you are posting on behalf of Amnesty that you need to remain impartial. This includes not supporting any political parties or posting anything that is not an Amnesty position. Also, please ensure a member of your Activist Leadership Committee has admin access. This is so if the group stops their involvement we can still access the account. You can read Amnesty's [social media guidelines here](#). If you are posting as yourself and do not have anything that identifies your involvement with Amnesty, then you can post what you please.

Email

Emailing is still the most direct way of contacting someone online. It's difficult to have an online presence without having at least one email address. But, there has been a decrease over the years of people using it for one on one communication. Instant messaging apps have taken over this space. It doesn't mean you shouldn't do it, but it might not be a lot of people's preference to communicate this way.

Email is still very useful for sending a message to a larger group of people, a mailing list. How successful those emails are depends on a few things. Are they short and easy to read? Do they have too much information? Do you send too many emails? Is the information you are sending relevant to the people receiving it? Bad email practice leads to low engagement. People will see your email come in and not want to open them. Or worse, mark them as spam.

Here are some suggestions to use email well. If you're going out to a regular mailing list don't send them from your email account. Use an email marketing app like [MailChimp](#) or [GetResponse](#) for example. Through these platforms you can set up your mailing list the right way. This will allow you to create segments based on people's interests. So you're not sending everything to everyone when they only want certain things.

You'll need to get this info from them in some way. You could ask them or you could look at how they engage with certain emails. If they don't click on emails about meetings, but do about campaign updates you can assume to segment them this way.

If you prefer to send a newsletter style email with everything in it, try only sending once or twice a month. These platforms also give people the option of unsubscribing from the list which is a legal necessity.

In the end think about whether this is the right option for communication with people. Newsletters, while good for getting information out, can be very one-sided. If your aim is informing people then go for it. But if you want to increase engagement and discussion then you might want to use something else. A Facebook group for example would fit that purpose.



"Three activist newsletters today?! Okay, I'll take 'em, but I won't read 'em."

Encrypted messaging tools

Communicating with others in privacy is important to a lot of activists. There are many tools you can use to make sure that it's very difficult for others to see what you are saying to each other. Many of these are very good, but they're not perfect. It's wise to stay on top of new tools that may do a better job.

The way it works is that when you send a message to others that information becomes encrypted. That means the message becomes unintelligible except to the person you have messaged. So, even if someone else intercepts it there's no way for them to read it. So it's far more secure than tools like SMS or email.

We'd recommend doing your own research to find the right messaging tool for you. But, a good place to start is to look at tools like [Signal](#), [Telegram](#) and [WhatsApp](#).

Project management tools

If you're working with a team or have a big project of your own, you might need a project management tool. You can use these to communicate with one another and set out your project plans.

Depending on the tool you use it will have different features. Common features include things like to-do lists, document links and task responsibilities. These are very useful to be able to keep on top of a lot of details at once. But again we recommend doing your own research to find the right tool for you. Many of these have free options with limited features. You could start with tools like [Trello](#), [Asana](#) and [Jira](#).

Copyright free media

It's important not to steal stuff from 'the internet' and pass it off as your own. If you're using someone else's words or image, credit them. Even better, link to them. But there are a lot of photos, videos, music etc that are free to use online. You can use them to create your own content.

If you're looking for images that are free and safe to use, try the sources below:

- [Google Advanced Image Search](#) (Free to use or share licence only)
- [Flickr](#) (Creative Commons licence only)
- [BBC World Service Flickr Account](#)
- [Creative Commons](#)
- [Pixabay](#)
- [United Nations Image Gallery](#)
- [Wikimedia](#)
- [Unsplash](#)



Protest against Google © Amnesty International

Developing your online identity

Now we're going to look at how you can use your voice in an effective way by developing your online identity. The idea behind this is having a clear idea about how you want to present yourself to the online world. Some aspects of this we have covered in our guide on [effective communications](#), so we won't repeat it here. That includes choosing your audience and expressing your communications through your values.

If you're worried you won't be able to make an impact online given how many people are on there, here's something to keep in mind. It's estimated that only around 1% of internet users are the main contributors. They're the ones you see creating content and responding to others. They're very active in online communities and tend to be the ones that develop an identity. About 9% are irregular contributors, they post or comment sometimes. The other 90% are the 'lurkers', they read content at various levels or regularity, but don't participate.

These percentages can vary depending on the online community you are in. But, if you commit to regular participation in a few spaces others will notice you. For example you might decide to engage with the regular readers of a particular news outlet. You want to give them a different perspective or show your support. If you do that all the time people might check out your profile and follow you because they like what you say. It's better to focus on a few communities rather than spreading yourself thin.

On sites like Twitter and Instagram it's a lot more accessible to building a wide following. On Facebook it might be about engaging with friends, family, colleagues etc on your own news feed. But, with that you want to make sure the way you're presenting yourself is in an authentic, relatable and inspiring way. That you are a member of the community who cares a lot about these issues. You're not doing this to get likes or followers, but because you want to achieve change. You also want people to be able to trust you. So before you are posting anything you are checking accuracy.

Beyond that it's about adding your own personality into the mix. That might be about using humour or outrage for example. It could be about how down to Earth or knowledgeable on the issues you are. Don't emulate others. Be yourself, be genuine, don't be afraid to show the more engaging parts of your personality.

Also it's important to use your platform to amplify the voices of others. Particularly people from marginalised communities. Share their messages and avoid adding your own spin onto it. That dilutes the original message and may even confuse it. If you follow these tips over time you should begin to reach the audience you are seeking. It takes time, so don't lose heart if it feels like you're speaking to an empty room for a while. Remember that you could be influencing all those 'lurkers' without you even knowing.



Activity: Choose one community to start participating in more. This might be your personal network on your own social media feed. Experiment a little and see what feels comfortable as you post more and more. Don't go overboard though, remember 1-3 posts a day is ideal.

How to protect yourself online

With all these rapid developments in technology come a few challenges as well. Some of these challenges can turn into potential dangers depending on your situation. You might now live in a country where it's generally safe to be an activist either online or on the ground. But we can't underestimate how that safety can erode through new laws or government. We may be safe today, but it's a good idea to prepare for a future where that may not be the case.

Right now it is very easy for others to store data about everything we do using digital technology. What we say and do online, the communications we receive. The associations we are a part of, who we interact with. Tracking our location and where we go. A lot of people worry about how others could use this against us. It's not uncommon for some activists to want to do this work in privacy. You might live somewhere where there are physical dangers to being an activist. Your workplace might discriminate against employees taking part in activism. There are lots of reasons why an activist might want some anonymity online.



There's no such thing as too much online protection

So we've got some tips here on how to better protect yourself online.

1 Increase your security

This is something most of us tend to neglect that puts our information at risk. But there are some easy things we can all do to better protect ourselves. Passwords should be at least 12 characters long and contain numbers and symbols. The longer the password, the more secure it is. Also don't use the same password for different sites. If one of those sites becomes compromised, then the rest of your accounts are in danger as well.

Modern advice is that if you've got a very strong password then you don't need to change it often. Particularly if it's unique to one website. But change your password as soon as there's any danger to your data on that site. You can use a password manager to store your encrypted passwords so that you don't have to remember them. Some popular examples include [LastPass](#), [Dashlane](#) and [KeePass](#).

If a website offers two factor authentication, use it. This is an added layer of protection after you have entered your password. It might be something like sending a code to your phone or a security question. This may be something you need to enable in the account settings for that site.

2 Protect your privacy

This is about what others are able to see you do online. There are a few levels to this depending on what you are comfortable with being public. At the lower end of privacy protection is what others are able to see on things like social media. A rule to follow is if you wouldn't want someone to share a screenshot of something you've posted, then don't post it. That includes private message conversations and emails. So regardless of your privacy settings nothing can become public that you hadn't meant to be.

Speaking of privacy settings, on social media sites you are able to adjust these. You can set these sites up so that strangers only see a certain amount of info on your profiles. If you're wanting to keep your online activism secret from others a few things you can do include removing any identifiable information (e.g. photos, personal details) and keeping your friend list low.

Also don't use any of your social media accounts to log into other sites unless that's the only option. If you can create a new log in then use that option. This way you keep your data as separate as possible. If some data becomes compromised it won't connect back to other sources.

If you're wanting to reduce your data trail in a broader way, here are some steps you can take. Sites you go to track what you do while on there. There are pros and cons to this. But for those wishing to browse without leaving a trace this is not a good thing. To fix this you could use an anonymous browser like TOR or Epic Browser. These will block your data, including from your internet service provider. You can also use a Virtual Private Network (VPN). These will mask your specific internet identity from others. Each internet account has a unique IP address number. So it is possible to connect internet activity to one of these specific IP addresses. A VPN will change your IP address so that activity cannot connect back to you.

These are a few suggestions, we recommend doing your own research on this. A good place to start is via the [Electronic Frontier Federation](#).

3 Recognising false information

Another way you can protect yourself online is by analysing false or misleading information. Anyone can post anything online without having to verify whether it is true or not. Sensationalist news aimed at getting high engagement is nothing new. But it is getting more difficult to tell the difference between fact and fiction. We've included some tips here to help you. So you can make sure you're not sharing false information yourself. Also that you can help educate others to spot it.

a) Read more than the headline. The headline's purpose is to drag people in as click bait to generate ad revenue. But the headline may not reflect what the story is actually about. The site is hoping people will share the article without reading it. Never share something without reading and verifying the whole article first.

b) Does it have spelling mistakes, errors in grammar or formatting? Does it include quotes? Prominent news sites have editors that look for errors. So these wouldn't be in a reputable news article. Trustworthy news sites always have genuine quotes from people the story relates to. You can disregard it otherwise.

c) Are other news sources reporting on the same story? Do a quick search and see if the story appears elsewhere. The more times you can verify it through other sources, the more likely it is true. If it appears on only one site then be suspicious.

d) Is it too biased? While it can be difficult to find completely unbiased news, there are extremes to this. If you can see in the article where the source of the information has come from, do a bit of research on them. Most of the time it should be obvious if those sources have a particular agenda. If it has come from a politician or lobbying group then they have an interest in sharing biased info. Research the author of the article as well.

e) Is it satire or parody? This is intentional fake news for humour. It is usually intended to raise awareness about the absurdity of a real life situation. But people still react to it and share it as if it were real information. A good indicator that people are not reading the whole article. It should say somewhere that it is satire on the page. Examples include: The Onion, Betoota Advocate and The Chaser.

It is better to find a few news sources that you can trust and only share information from them. It's also recommended that you start using media literacy sites that debunk fake news.



Activity: Before you start jumping into your online activism related activities, set up your workspace so you feel safe. How private do you want your identity to be? How will you adjust to additional engagement with others? How will you make sure you're using this space in a healthy way? Make sure to check out our [guide on self care](#) beforehand as well.

What's next?

That brings us to an end of our guide on how to use online tools for activism. We hope that has given you more confidence to dive a bit deeper into the online space. Anyone can do it with practice. We've covered some of the tools you can use. How to be yourself online and to gain a following from it. Also how to protect yourself online, so you can feel safe while doing your activism.

We recommend you also check out our guide on [effective communications](#) to pair with this one. Also our guide on [structured conversations](#). At the more advanced level we have a module on [choosing the right tactic](#). Here we include some examples of tactics you can use online to deepen your activism even further.

If you have any questions you can get in touch with us at communityorganising@amnesty.org.au. Thank you for your time!

Society

A variety of human rights abuses have occurred. To continue:

Try switching society off and on again, or;

Join Amnesty International and become an activist today,
make your voice heard and protect the rights of all people.

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Press any key to continue _

Visit the Skill Up page for more activist development resources.

www.amnesty.org.au/skill-up/

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