

# PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Responsible:	People & Culture
Last Updated:	June 2023
Related Policy:	ABC Code of Conduct

## PURPOSE OF THESE GUIDELINES

The ABC Code of Conduct requires Workers to be conscious of their responsibility to protect the ABC's reputation, independence, impartiality and integrity where personal use of social media may intersect with their professional life.

The vast majority of personal social media activity by ABC Workers is innocuous and has no bearing on their ABC work or the ABC's reputation. However, personal use of social media is not without risk. Misjudgements and indiscretions can have consequences for Workers and the ABC.

It is important to note that the ABC does not require or encourage Workers to be active on personal social media accounts as part of their employment. The ABC does not endorse the content of any personal social media by anyone associated with the ABC.

The purpose of the Personal Use of Social Media Guidelines (Guidelines) is to assist ABC Workers and managers to navigate the risks associated with personal use of social media and to take appropriate step to ensure compliance.

## WHO THESE GUIDELINES APPLY TO

All ABC Workers defined as:

*“Any person who carries out work in any capacity for the ABC, including work as: an employee; a contractor or subcontractor; an employee of a contractor or subcontractor; an employee of a labour hire company who has been assigned to work at the ABC; an outworker; an apprentice or trainee; a student gaining work experience; or a volunteer.”*

“Social media” includes all social media and third-party platforms services that allow the creation, sharing and distribution of various types of media such as text, audio, images and video. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok and Mastodon.

The ABC is not responsible for Workers' personal use of messaging services and platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger.

## USING PERSONAL ACCOUNTS FOR WORK PURPOSES

The ABC does not require or encourage Workers to use public facing personal social media accounts for work purposes (including to promote ABC content) and any such use of personal social media is at the Worker's own risk.

However, many journalists and content makers use social media platforms like Twitter to research stories and establish contacts. Be aware that using social media can often attract adverse responses from members of the public (e.g. online bullying and trolling). Advice and support are available and should be sought in the first instance by raising with your manager and/or with [People & Culture](#). It is important to take steps to remain safe and Cyber safety resources are available to help prepare for and respond to incidents or concerns, including trolling, harassment, and exposure to distressing content.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF BREACH**

While the ABC does not control or endorse a Worker's use of personal social media if a Worker's social media content could reasonably be considered to breach the Guidelines outlined below, the ABC may:

- direct the Worker to delete that content;
- take disciplinary action against the Worker (including dismissal or cessation of engagement);
- exercise contractual remedies.

Workers should also be aware that if their conduct amounts to a breach of any law (such as defamation or vilification), action may be taken by the ABC, concerned third parties or law enforcement agencies. Workers will be personally liable in relation to any such claims or actions including all associated costs and damages.

## **PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA STANDARDS**

For all ABC Workers personal use of social media is subject to the following standards:

- Do not damage the ABC's reputation for impartiality and independence.
- Do not undermine your effectiveness at work.
- Do not mix the professional and the personal in ways likely to bring the ABC into disrepute.
- Do not imply ABC endorsement of your personal views.
- Do not disclose confidential information obtained through work.
- Do not post or share ABC content on personal social media prior to it being published or distributed by the ABC.

## **OFFICIAL ACCOUNTS, PERSONAL ACCOUNTS AND EDITORIAL POLICIES**

The ABC distinguishes between its official social media accounts and Workers' personal accounts. Content on official accounts is ABC content and it must adhere to the [Editorial Policies](#), just like ABC content on other platforms. Personal social media activity is not ABC content; it is not subject to the Editorial Policies and the ABC does not take editorial responsibility for it.

This means that if a complaint is received about content on a Worker's personal account, it will not be investigated as an editorial complaint or assessed against the Editorial Policies. Any issues related to personal use of social media will be managed by line managers, in consultation with People & Culture where required.

However, while personal social media activity is not required to adhere to the Editorial Policies, there are two key areas of the Editorial Policies which are nonetheless relevant to Workers' personal use of social media:

- (1) **Impartiality:** For many Workers, remaining impartial in the public eye is crucial to maintaining effectiveness in their ABC roles. A thoughtless post or tweet can instantly compromise this perception of impartiality. The Editorial Policies [guidance note on impartiality](#) is a useful resource.
- (2) **Independence and integrity:** Editorial Policy standard 1.4 states: "External activities of individuals undertaking work for the ABC must not undermine the independence and integrity of the ABC's editorial content." A Worker's personal social media activity can affect the independence and integrity of any ABC content.

## **APPLYING THE STANDARDS**

A Worker's risk level is largely determined by their role with the ABC, whether they are involved in content making and their public profile and recognition as an ABC Worker.

Attached at schedule A are some examples of conduct likely to breach the Guidelines, illustrating some of the different risks across different roles to assist you in assessing your risk level and to apply the Guidelines.

## **IDENTIFYING YOURSELF**

To ensure personal accounts are not mistaken for official ABC accounts, usernames/handles must not include 'ABC' or a program name or station callsign.

It is important to note that the Guidelines apply regardless of whether an account identifies an individual as an ABC Worker or not. If a pseudonym is used, or there is no mention of a connection to the ABC, adherence to the Guidelines is still expected.

## **ADVICE FOR ALL WORKERS**

- Any publication or distribution of ABC content must be in accordance with these Guidelines.
- Regardless of privacy settings, it is sensible to assume that any information shared or opinions expressed on social media could potentially become public to a wide audience.
- Consider the picture painted by likes, shares, hashtags and who is followed. Any of these may seem innocuous in isolation but viewed in aggregate could risk breaching these Guidelines.
- If you identify yourself as working at the ABC on your social media account (e.g. in a bio) a greater obligation arises to ensure you do not breach the Guidelines.
- Consider privacy and that of colleagues and sources. For example, before posting a group photo, it is advisable to seek permission from those in the photo.

## **ADVICE FOR HIGH RISK WORKERS**

Your profile and seniority determine if you are a high risk Worker. The higher your profile or seniority the greater the reputational damage to you and the ABC if you breach the Guidelines, and the more likely a breach will attract attention.

If you are a Worker with a high profile, such as a presenter or a journalist, you should assume you are a high risk worker.

High risk Workers should:

- Treat personal content with the same care as if being published or distributed on an ABC platform.
- Consider regular review or automated removal of historical posts on public facing social media. What may have been appropriate to say a decade ago could be seen in a different light now.
- Consider including a statement on each of their public-facing social media sites that the content published or shared reflects their own and not their employer's/ABC's views.
- Engage in debate in a respectful manner, avoiding abusive language.
- Avoid anything that could be construed as personal disapproval or personal support for policies and actions or inactions of public figures.
- Avoid engaging in advocacy on matters of contention.
- Where appropriate include a statement on each of their social media sites that the content published or shared reflects their own and not their ABC's views.

The ABC must ensure that its independence and integrity is maintained, and that news and information is accurate and impartial according to the recognised standards of objective journalism.

High risk Workers with a high profile must be particularly cautious when publishing any material using personal social media, because it has the potential to affect the perception of the ABC's independence, impartiality and integrity.

For the avoidance of doubt High risk Workers with a high profile are not required to use personal social media for any reason, including (without limitation) to:

- report news, events or other matters of public interest;
- provide commentary or opinion; or
- publish, provide links to, or promote, any ABC content.

This does not prevent High risk Workers using personal social media for the purposes of news and fact gathering (for example, engaging with sources), provided that in doing so High risk Workers do not breach the Guidelines.

## **OTHER RELEVANT PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES**

- ABC Code of Conduct
- ABC Cybersafety resources
- Social Media Hub

## SCHEDULE 1

Examples of personal social media activity that would be in breach of the Guidelines and potentially other ABC policies or guidelines.

- political reporter expressing a strong personal opinion on a contentious issue of the day
- A local radio producer tweeting something derogatory about the local mayor.
- A Worker in People & Culture sharing confidential information about forthcoming redundancies.
- A high profile employee revealing publicly how they vote or expressing support for a political party.
- A procurement officer involved in a telecommunications tender, publicly criticising one of the telcos in the tender process about their shoddy home internet connection.
- An executive revealing confidential matters discussed at a strategy meeting.
- A website developer with the ABC logo in their bio tweeting that the ABC endorses a technology application.
- A radio presenter promoting a commercial product as part of a sponsored post arrangement or in exchange for receiving it for free.
- A children's presenter using coarse language or posting lewd material.
- A Worker using social media to abuse or vilify another Worker.