

## Working in the wicked Web

by Alison Brackenbury

If, like me, you find that your family or job often stop you doing readings, or meeting other writers, the Internet could be your wormhole into a richer writing universe.

But two stern warnings! First, be secure. Your computer is protected by its firewall and up-to-date virus detection. You must also protect yourself. Never publish personal details such as address, phone number or birth date. Do not give them to anyone you don't know well. Do not publicise absences from home, and invite burglary. Do not believe all you read! Wild rumours abound on both Facebook and Twitter.

If you have doubts about an online contact, e.g. a potential Facebook Friend, don't deal with them. Always log in to social sites such as Facebook by your normal method. Do not type in your password into a form which pops up unexpectedly. This could lead to your account being hacked. Think before you click, especially before you instal (e.g. Facebook applications can cause trouble). If you can, first consult a knowledgeable friend!

Secondly, guard your time. If you are very busy, or easily distracted (e.g. by Facebook's games), target and restrict computer use. Don't sit still at the computer for long. Get up, and walk around. Thrombosis is increasingly common in office workers!

But there is much to gain. The Internet offers permanent world wide exposure for a writer's work, and a relatively safe method of contact. If you don't have a website, a blog (e.g. at [www.wordpress.com](http://www.wordpress.com)) can display poems and allow readers to contact you. Have you submitted work to online magazines? Snakeskin, or The Flea, are high quality and friendly. Poems there will show up in Google searches.

Facebook allows you to keep in touch with a circle of like-minded people. You might like to start by sending Friend requests only to people you know well. Hint: if you look at the Friends lists on your Friends' pages, you may spot people you know, to whom you can send Friend requests. Facebook also flashes up suggestions for Friends, which may help.

Facebook can be used, tactfully, as an occasional window upon your work. For example, you can post a Status message when you have poems online, with a link attached to the magazine. You can set up a group to give news of your new book, and invite your Friends to join. Facebook is also a good source of information. If you are interested in a particular publisher or magazine, add them as a Friend, and join any group they run. Check 'Messages' regularly on your Home page. You may find useful news about magazine submissions, or news from a Friend about a new magazine. Check Events and Group invitations regularly from your Home page. Hint: if you register your normal email with Facebook, you may get overwhelmed by updates about Friends etc. You may prefer to set up a new email, e.g. via Hotmail, and register that with Facebook.

Relentless self-promotion is tedious for both you and everyone else. You might enjoy posting Status messages about books you admire. On your Home page, you may see interesting comments on another Friend's status, e.g. about housebuying, to which you can contribute. Think carefully about what you write. If you don't like arguments, avoid 'threads' which look rancorous. If you have a query – especially a technical one – Facebook users often provide very helpful replies. People may appreciate suitable offerings from your own non-literary life, such as photos, which you can easily upload from your computer (use the 'Browse' button, which appears, to locate them). Many Facebook users – including me! – are less likely to respond immediately to a discussion of Russian poetry than to a picture of a really lovely cat!

Twitter appears a more disconnected place to communicate (and in 140 characters!) But you can 'Follow' your friends. Again, you can 'tweet' links to, and news of, your work (and even entire haiku!) I was wisely advised to 'tweet' about enthusiasms such as birdwatching. If you put the symbol # before key words, other users will find them in searches. Look out on Fridays for #FollowFriday tweets, which list favourite Twitterers. You can 'tweet' your own list of favourites. They may in turn list you, which can attract new Followers. You can 'retweet' interesting tweets from others. Twitter is an excellent place for getting answers to questions, e.g. for writing research, often from knowledgeable strangers!

I find Twitter much easier to use with a programme such as Tweetdeck (available free from [www.tweetdeck.com](http://www.tweetdeck.com)), which sorts messages –e.g. those mentioning you – into different columns. But use your normal Twitter page to check the list of your Followers. You may wish to follow them, or, if you are doubtful about them, to block them from following you!

Finally, if you wish to enrich your own reading by encountering fine and varied new poems, try Poetry Daily ([www.poems.com](http://www.poems.com)), Verse Daily ([www.versedaily.org](http://www.versedaily.org)) or The Writer's Almanac (<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org>).

Baffled? New to blogging, Facebook, or Twitter? Do look me up, as a very amateur example, and a possible Facebook Friend/follower of your Tweets! My Wordpress blog is at [www.alisonbrackenbury.co.uk](http://www.alisonbrackenbury.co.uk). Search for me on Facebook as Alison Brackenbury, and on Twitter as ABRACKENBURY. I look forward to meeting you, not just briefly at Second Light events, but more regularly in the strange but rewarding spaces between the not-too-sticky threads of the Web!

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