

# Language for ...

## social media

**Age:** Young adult / adult

**Level:** Upper-intermediate-advanced

**Length:** 45-60 minutes

**Language Focus:** key vocabulary associated with the internet and social media

**Skills:** speaking, reading

**Materials:** one copy of the worksheet per student and one copy of the Social Media Slang page per student

**Aims:** to allow students to effectively understand and use common language for social media



### What are red words?

Ninety per cent of the time, speakers of English use just 7,500 words in speech and writing. These words appear in the Macmillan Dictionary in red and are graded with stars. One-star words are frequent, two-star words are more frequent and three-star words are the most frequent. 'Language for' lessons are based on red words and encourage students to improve their English through communicative tasks using collocation and commonly used phrases.

- 1 Start the lesson by writing the term *social media* on the board. Ask students to talk in pairs and try to come up with a definition for this term. Then hand out the student worksheets and ask students to read the definition at the top of page 1. Next, ask students to work in pairs. Each pair must have a pen and paper ready. Read aloud the instructions on the worksheet for Exercise 1a. Allow the students 30 seconds to write the names of all the websites and apps they can think of. When the time is up, they must submit their suggestions to a different pair of students. Go through this part as a class, writing up the names on the board and seeing which pair has come up with the most. Most of the suggestions will be obvious (Facebook, Instagram, etc). However, there might be some discussion about what can be defined as 'social media'. The definition given includes the term 'online community', meaning that sites and apps that focus on one-to-one communication (Gmail, etc) would not generally be seen as social media.
- 2 Ask students to discuss the questions in Exercise 1b. Allow them a few minutes to do this. Monitor and give some feedback, focusing on good language which they have used related to the internet and online communication.
- 3 Again in pairs, ask students to complete Exercise 1c. Encourage discussion (in English) between students as they do this. Then elicit the correct answers.
- 4 Tell the students that they are going to read four short texts in which people talk about social media. Refer them to the question in Exercise 2a. Tell them that they have about a minute to scan the four texts and decide the answer. Once you have elicited the answer, refer them to Exercise 2b. Ask them to read the texts again, this time in more detail, and to find the answers. Allow a few minutes for this. Students should first compare their answers in pairs and then all answers should be checked as a class.
- 5 Ask students to work independently to complete Exercise 3a. Remind them to refer back to the previous four texts to see these words in context. Ask them to compare answers in pairs, then elicit the correct answers.
- 6 Read aloud the instructions on the worksheet for Exercise 3b, emphasizing that some (but not all) the verbs will need to be converted into their past form. Allow students a few minutes to complete

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this task individually, monitoring them as they do so and helping weaker students. Ask them to compare answers in pairs, then elicit the correct answers. As a conclusion to this activity, you may wish to draw attention to the verbs *friend*, *troll*, *trend*. Highlight that these words were originally nouns but are used as verbs when talking about online communication. Ask students if they can suggest any other nouns which have come to be used as verbs (e.g. *to blog*, *to bookmark*, *to Facebook somebody*, *to Skype somebody*, etc).

- 7 Ask students to complete Exercise 3c in pairs. Encourage them to discuss their logic behind choosing certain answers. Finally, check the answers as a class. Allow the class to discuss why certain answers are correct (e.g. in sentence 3, the verb *friend* implies that there is a personal connection between the two people on social media, whereas the verb *follow* is more common when talking about celebrities or brands).
- 8 Refer students to Exercise 4a and ask them to discuss the questions in pairs. Remind them that they should try to incorporate new language from this lesson into their conversations. Monitor the class as they talk, making some notes on good language and frequent errors. Finally, provide feedback to the class as a whole.
- 9 Refer students to Exercise 4b and read aloud the worksheet instructions to the task. Allow students a minute or so to discuss their answers to the initial two questions. Before talking about the answers as a class, try to elicit the meaning of the acronyms *LOL* and *NSFW* (*Laugh Out Loud* and *Not Safe For Work*). Then elicit the correct answers to the two questions.

- 10 Ask students if they can suggest any other acronyms which are common on social media. If so, write some of these on the board. Tell them that in this final task, Exercise 4c, they are going to try to understand internet slang (both acronyms and common words). Tell them that this is a speaking activity, where they need to guess possible meanings from context. Point out that at the end of this task you will provide them with a photocopy with definitions of the slang terms (so they don't need to write during this task). Allow the students a few minutes to work in pairs, reading the four chats and trying to guess the correct answer to each subsequent question. Once they have done this, ask students for their interpretations of certain chats, but without telling them if they have guessed correctly or not. Hand out the **Social Media Slang** page and ask students to use the definitions to decide whether they have guessed correctly. Finally, elicit the correct answers to the four questions.
- 11 If there is more time, perhaps write some other internet slang terms on the board and ask students to discuss the meaning. Some suggestions:
  - BFF* = *Best Friends Forever* (perhaps you would use this term when commenting on a photo of yourself with a good friend)
  - BTW* = *By The Way* (an expression which people use to add some extra information at the end of a conversation)
  - I feel you* = an expression which means 'I agree' or 'I understand' but in a very deep sense
  - Yas!* = a very excited, emphatic way of saying 'yes' (to express further excitement, it's common to repeat letters, e.g. 'Yaaaaassss!!!')

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**KEY:**

- 1a** students' own answers
- 1b** students' own answers
- 1c**
  - a. Instagram
  - b. Facebook
  - c. VKontakte
  - d. LinkedIn
  - e. QZone
  - f. Twitter
- 2a** Donna and Jeff express generally positive ideas about social media (Maya used to enjoy social media but these days she doesn't).

**2b**

- *Why does Donna want people to write #healthyhearts on their social media?*  
She wants her charity's events to get as much publicity as possible so if people write #healthyhearts, there is more chance that other internet users will see it.
- *In Maya's opinion, what is the main way that social media has changed?*  
She feels that years ago, social media was more personalised and a good way of interacting with family and friends. These days she finds it very commercial and anonymous.
- *What happened to Jeff after he mentioned Chelsea Clinton on Twitter?*  
After Jeff's initial tweet, Chelsea Clinton shared it on Twitter. This meant that Jeff's tweet was seen by many people, some of whom gave online reactions to it.
- *How did Phil solve his problem with Simon?*  
After Simon's disrespectful behaviour, Phil instructed the website not to allow Simon to write any more messages to him. Phil also contacted the website to inform them that Simon had broken their rules.

**3a**

Nouns from the text	Definition
1. a hashtag (text: Donna)	( 3 ) A sentence that a person writes publicly on Facebook (this sentence is not a response to a different person).
2. a newsfeed (text: Maya)	( 4 ) An eye-catching or shocking headline/photo/video with the objective of attracting people to click on a link.
3. a status update (text: Maya)	( 2 ) Usually the initial page that you see on a social network, showing you videos, photos, etc from the people who you follow.
4. clickbait (text: Maya)	( 6 ) A person's name on Twitter, which comes after an @ sign (e.g. @chelseaclinton). Using this allows you to publicly mention a person.
5. a like (text: Maya)	( 1 ) A word or phrase that comes after a # sign to identify a certain topic on social media.
6. a handle (text: Jeff)	( 7 ) A sequence of comments which appear below an initial comment or post. These comments are reactions to the initial post.
7. a thread (text: Jeff)	( 5 ) An action in which a person reacts to an item on social media by clicking an icon to show that they like this item.

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- 3b**
1. follow
  2. friended
  3. trolled
  4. go viral
  5. shared
  6. trended / was trending
  7. blocked
  8. posted
  9. DM (Note: *DM = to send a direct message*. To express the same idea, it is also possible to say *PM*, meaning to send a personal message.)
  10. retweeted

- 3c**
1. hashtag
  2. likes
  3. followed
  4. DM
  5. tag
  6. trend
  7. newsfeed
  8. trolled

**4a** students' own answers

- 4b**
- *What type of video is it?*  
Funny (The comment includes the term *LOL*. This means 'Laugh Out Loud' and is commonly used to suggest that something is very funny.)
  - *Where would be the best place to watch the video?*  
At home (Your friend has included the term *NSFW*. This means 'Not Safe For Work'. It is commonly used to suggest that a video or image may be rude or offensive to some people, so it is not ideal to look at if you are at work or in a public place.)

- 4c**
1. No. Tim thinks that Beyoncé's performance was wonderful but Jess was not completely impressed by it.
  2. No. Alex feels a little shocked by it and Clare thinks that it makes him less attractive.
  3. Yes. Maggie had been feeling sad that she was going to miss lunch. When Nina suggests that she cancel her dentist appointment, Maggie admits that perhaps it would be a good idea to seize the moment.
  4. Yes. Terry thinks that she seems to be clever and in touch with everyday people. Emma agrees and adds that Meghan is a role model for her.

**4d** See the 'Social Media Slang' worksheet

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Common word or phrase from social media	Explanation
<b>OMG</b>	<i>Oh my god!</i> A phrase which expresses shock, which could be positive or negative.
to <b>slay</b> (something) /sleɪ/	To do (something) incredibly well.
<b>IDK</b>	<i>I don't know.</i> A phrase to express uncertainty.
to be <b>basic</b> /'beɪsɪk/	To be less impressive than expected.
to be <b>shook</b> /ʃʊk/	To be shocked or in a state of disbelief.
<b>TBH</b>	<i>To be honest.</i> A phrase to accompany an opinion which a lot of people might disagree with.
<b>bae</b> /beɪ/	An attractive person or a term of endearment towards someone you love (this word can also mean boyfriend or girlfriend).
<b>RN</b>	<i>Right now.</i> At this exact moment.
<b>FOMO</b>	<i>Fear of missing out.</i> A concern that your friends/family are going to do something fun but you will not be able to participate.
<b>YOLO</b>	<i>You only live once.</i> A phrase which is used to encourage somebody to take an opportunity, giving the idea that life is short.
to be <b>woke</b> /wəʊk/	To be educated and aware of current affairs; to be informed about the problems that exist in the world.
<b>goals</b>	A word which expresses an ambition that you have (e.g. you see a couple who you admire and say 'relationship goals!').
<b>boo</b>	A boyfriend or girlfriend.
<b>JSYK</b>	<i>Just so you know.</i> A phrase to inform someone of something which may be of importance/interest to them.

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### 1 Warmer



**social media:** websites and applications which people use to create and/or share messages, ideas, images, videos, etc as part of an online community.

- a. Work with a classmate. You have 30 seconds to name social media websites and applications. How many can you name?

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- b. Discuss the questions below with your classmate.

- Do you use any social networks? Explain.
- Why do you think social networks are so popular?
- Do you notice any differences between how younger and older people use social media?

- c. The table below shows information for six of the world's top social media websites. Can you guess the website from its description?

Twitter / Facebook / QZone / LinkedIn / Instagram / VKontakte

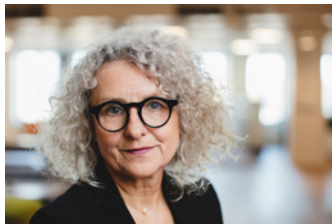
Name of website:	Country of origin	What can you do?	Approx. users
a. _____	USA	Share your photos and videos	800 million
b. _____	USA	Express your ideas, write to friends, share photos and videos	2.2 billion
c. _____	Russia	Write to friends, share photos and videos, play games	97 million
d. _____	USA	Look for job opportunities, promote your professional skills	106 million
e. _____	China	Write blogs, send photos, listen to music, watch videos	563 million
f. _____	USA	Express your ideas in short sentences (280 characters max)	336 million

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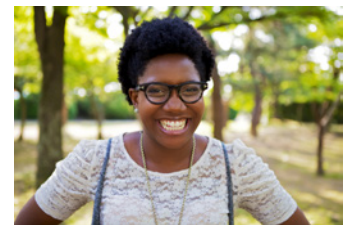
### 2 Text

a. Read the four texts. Which of the people express generally positive ideas about social media?



**Donna:** I work for a medical charity called Healthy Hearts and we really rely on social media. To promote an event, we usually **post** an ad and then people **share** it. We always ask our followers to use the hashtag #healthyhearts so that we can get more attention and maybe even **trend** in our local region. If people need more information about an event, they can **DM** us and we try to respond as quickly as possible.

**Maya:** I remember when Facebook first began, it seemed more personal. I didn't **friend** many people, just close contacts. When I used to log in, my newsfeed was full of cool photos and funny status updates from my friends and family. These days, social media is very different. It's full of celebrities and brands who want you to **follow** their pages. They're constantly posting clickbait, hoping that their videos or photos will get millions of likes and **go viral**. I feel like social media has lost its personal touch.



**Jeff:** I once interacted with Chelsea Clinton on Twitter! After listening to a speech that she gave at my university, I wrote a tweet saying how much I had enjoyed it. I included her handle in the tweet (@chelseaclinton) and, much to my surprise, she **retweeted** me! It was amazing! My tweet got hundreds of likes and it started a really long thread of comments where other users gave their opinions on the speech.

**Phil:** I'm a hairdresser and I use Instagram to promote my work. About a year ago, I got a new follower called Simon. And he started **trolling** me! He kept posting photos of dogs with funny hairstyles and then **tagging** me in the photos. It was so cruel! I had to **block** him and report him to the site administrator.



b. Answer the questions about each respondent.

- Why does Donna want people to write #healthyhearts on their social media?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- In Maya's opinion, what is the main way that social media has changed?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What happened to Jeff after he mentioned Chelsea Clinton on Twitter?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- How did Phil solve his problem with Simon?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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### 3 Language in use

- a. Read the four texts in the previous exercise again. Match the seven underlined nouns in the texts to their definitions below. Number 1 is completed as an example.

Nouns from the text	Definition
1. a hashtag (text: <b>Donna</b> )	( 3 ) A sentence that a person writes publicly on Facebook (this sentence is not a response to a different person).
2. a newsfeed (text: <b>Maya</b> )	( ) An eye-catching or shocking headline/photo/video with the objective of attracting people to click on a link.
3. a status update (text: <b>Maya</b> )	( ) Usually the initial page that you see on a social network, showing you videos, photos, etc from the people who you follow.
4. clickbait (text: <b>Maya</b> )	( ) A person's name on Twitter, which comes after an @ sign (e.g. @chelseaclinton). Using this allows you to publicly mention a person.
5. a like (text: <b>Maya</b> )	( ) A word or phrase that comes after a # sign to identify a certain topic on social media.
6. a handle (text: <b>Jeff</b> )	( ) A sequence of comments which appear below an initial comment or post. These comments are reactions to the initial post.
7. a thread (text: <b>Jeff</b> )	( ) An action in which a person reacts to an item on social media by clicking an icon to show that they like this item.

- b. For each of the ten sentences below, rewrite the sentence using one of the verbs in bold from the four passages in the text exercise. For some sentences, you will need to write the verb in the past (in these cases, all the verbs are regular). There is one verb you don't need.

Example: 'I hate that photo of me! Don't publicly insert my name if you put it on Facebook!'

= 'I hate that photo of me! Don't TAG me if you put it on Facebook.'

(the verb 'tag' is in Phil's text)

- Selena Gomez has over 100 million followers on Instagram.  
= More than 100 million people \_\_\_\_\_ Selena Gomez on Instagram.
- My old classmate added me as a friend on Facebook.  
= My old classmate \_\_\_\_\_ me on Facebook.
- An anonymous person repeatedly wrote horrible comments about my photos on Instagram.  
= Somebody \_\_\_\_\_ me on Instagram.



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4. Funny videos of little babies laughing often become extremely popular online.  
= Funny videos of little babies laughing often \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Tim read an interesting article and clicked a button so that his friends could read the same article.  
= Tim \_\_\_\_\_ an interesting article for his friends to read.
6. Yesterday, a lot of people spoke about Christmas shopping on social media.  
= Yesterday, the phrase 'Christmas shopping' \_\_\_\_\_ on social media.
7. A stranger kept sending me messages on LinkedIn so I instructed the website not to allow him to send me any more messages.  
= A stranger kept sending me messages on LinkedIn so I \_\_\_\_\_ him.
8. Jane added a new photo to her Instagram.  
= Jane \_\_\_\_\_ a new photo on her Instagram
9. I don't want to publicly ask Harold about his exam results, so I'll write to him directly.  
= I'll \_\_\_\_\_ Harold to ask about his exam results.
10. A lot of people clicked a button to show the politician's tweet to their friends.  
= A lot of people \_\_\_\_\_ the politician's tweet.

**c. Look at the words and phrases in bold and circle the correct option to complete the sentences.**

1. The school in Townsville promoted the summer concert using the **hashtag/handle** #townsvilleconcert.
2. Yesterday, Martin shared a photo of his new painting and it already has hundreds of **threads/likes**.
3. During the last X-Factor, I **followed/friended** all the contestants on Instagram.
4. Hi everybody. Can't wait to see you at the party this Saturday! Please **DM/follow** me if you have any questions about how to get to my house.
5. Sorry, Chris. I don't think we're friends on Facebook so I couldn't **share/tag** you in the photos from the festival.
6. Every year, as soon as Halloween finishes, the word 'Christmas' starts to **trend/retweet** on social media.
7. Anna first heard about the Paris marathon when she saw a video about it on her Facebook **status update / newsfeed**.
8. Public figures like politicians and journalists often get **trolled/blocked** on social media by people who don't agree with their ideas.

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### 4 Communication



**a. Discuss the questions below with your classmate.**

- Do you know any stories about people who had lost contact but got back in touch because of social media?
- Are there any people who you would never friend on social media? Explain. (For example, your parents, your children, your partner, your ex, your teacher, your boss, etc.)
- Do you follow any famous people on social media? If so, describe their style of interaction.
- Are there any people on social media (famous or personal contacts) whose style of interaction you find irritating? Explain.
- What type of information would you be comfortable putting on a public profile on social media? (For example, date of birth, job, telephone number, interests, home address, etc.)
- According to the World Health Organisation, internet addiction is a 'significant public health concern'. How can social media have an addictive element?

**b. Social media is a context where people use a lot of slang. For example, imagine your friend sends you a link to a video on YouTube and includes this message:**

This totally made me LOL. But really NSFW, so be careful!

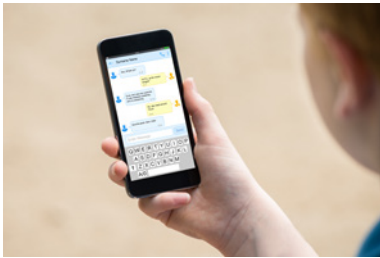
**Circle the correct answer to each the following questions.**

- What type of video is it? *sports/funny/interesting*
- Where would be the best place to watch the video? *at work / at home / on the bus*

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- c. With your classmate, read the following four short social media chats. They each contain slang words. In pairs, discuss the question after each chat.



Jess: Did you see Beyoncé's performance at Coachella?

Tim: OMG, she slayed it.

Jess: IDK, I found parts a bit basic.

1. Do Jess and Tim agree about Beyoncé's performance?

Clare: What do you think of Justin Bieber's enormous new tattoo?

Alex: I'm a bit shook, TBH.

Clare: He used to be a total bae but RN he's definitely not.

2. Do Clare and Alex like Justin Bieber's new tattoo?

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Nina: Are you coming to lunch with the girls tomorrow?

Maggie: I have to go to the dentist! I've got total FOMO!

Nina: Oh, come on. Can't you cancel the dentist?

Maggie: LOL. YOLO!

3. Is Maggie considering cancelling her dentist appointment?

Emma: What do you think of Meghan Markle?

Terry: I think she seems pretty woke if you read some of her interviews.

Emma: I know, right? Goals!

4. Do Emma and Terry have a positive opinion of Meghan Markle?

- d. Now your teacher will provide you with a list of meanings for the above slang words. How many of the questions did you guess correctly?

### Red Words

like (noun)\*    thread\*\*    follow\*\*\*    share\*\*\*    block\*\*    post (verb)\*\*    basic\*\*\*