ONLINE CONDUCT POLICY
FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF
THE SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

Twitter, Facebook and other platforms that enable online social interaction offer unique opportunities for communication, building relationships and strengthening communities. However, when disagreements occur, comments are misunderstood, or conversations are hijacked and these positive arenas can quickly become sources of misinformation and conflict – or worse, become toxic environments that damage the reputations of individuals and organisations.

This policy is designed both to protect the Society of Authors (SoA) and to provide direction for SoA representatives when difficult situations arise online.

SOA REPRESENTATIVES
This policy applies to anyone who could be perceived as representing the SoA, this includes, but is not limited to:

- Staff (permanent and temporary)
- Chair and members of the SoA Management Committee
- Chairs and members of SoA group and network committees
- President and members of the SoA Council
- Charity trustees
- Prize and grant judges and assessors

If you represent the SoA and its communities, you need to consider the impact you can have on the reputation of the organisation and its membership, even when writing in a personal capacity.

PLATFORMS
By ‘social media,’ ‘online platforms’ or ‘social networking sites,’ we mean any online environment that facilitates discussion, whether publicly or with a closed community. These include, but are not limited to:

- Twitter
- Facebook
- Public and private Facebook groups, including those facilitated by the SoA
- Instagram
- Discourse
- Subreddits
- Comment threads
- Discussion forums, including those hosted on the SoA website
- Emails, calls or any communications with news outlets, press or journalists

PURPOSE
The aims of this policy are:

- To ensure that messaging about the SoA is clear, accurate and reflects our strategy and policies.
- To help protect the SoA against potential liability.
Online Conduct Policy: for representatives of the Society of Authors

- To help SoA representatives to better understand how and when they should communicate on behalf of the SoA.
- To ensure that SoA representatives know where they can go for clear guidance on what can and cannot be said about the SoA.
- To comply with the laws on discrimination, data protection and protecting the health of members, staff, and the wider author community.
- To further the aims of our [Dignity and Respect policy and SoA Code of Conduct](#) in an online environment.

It is **not** designed to:

- Restrict SoA representatives’ use of online platforms.
- Restrict the free expression of SoA representatives in their personal capacity.

**POLICY**

The SoA expects representatives to avoid using social media sites in ways that could bring the SoA into disrepute or share (deliberately or otherwise) misinformation about the SoA’s activities, plans and strategies. We also ask you to comply with the [Dignity and Respect policy and Code of Conduct](#).

**When speaking in a private capacity:**

- Include a disclaimer on any social media accounts that the views you express are your personal views.
- Make it clear when you are speaking for yourself and when on behalf of the SoA.
- Use good judgment. Be aware that, as a representative of the SoA, what you say online can impact how people perceive the SoA, our work, and our members, even when you are not speaking on our behalf.
- Be sensitive to the context in which you are speaking – see [Speaking in a personal capacity](#) below.
- We do not seek to fetter your free expression in any way – but we would ask that you consult us before commenting on issues to do with authorship or other authors. We may have helpful background to brief you and may be able to warn you of particular sensitivities.
- Think before you share content. If you share defamatory or other problematic content with a new audience, you could be held liable for a new defamation. If in doubt consult the Chief Executive or an appropriate lawyer.
- Respect copyright – ensure you have permission for anything you share.
- Respect privacy and confidentiality – do not share private information. Note that all SoA Committee proceedings are private until the minutes have been approved and even then some information is redacted.

**Before speaking about, or on behalf of the SoA about issues to do with authorship or other authors:**

- Check with SoA staff before you post. We can make sure you are familiar with the details of policies, campaigns, membership benefits and product knowledge. We can also help you with drafting and timing.
- Talk to the Communications team or the Chief Executive if you are asked by a journalist to speak on behalf of the SoA.
- Contact the Chief Executive if you are drawn into a conversation online that you believe could harm the reputation of the SoA.
Please never:

- Purport to speak or write on behalf of the SoA or any of its committees unless you have been fully briefed by the staff team – see Speaking on behalf of the SoA below.
- Post defamatory or negative comments about the SoA.
- Reveal confidential information or information about SoA members.
- Present opinions as the views of the SoA unless we have explicitly stated those views.
- State personal opinions about the SoA online where those opinions conflict with your responsibilities to protect the reputation of the SoA and the author community.
- Make comments which amount to bullying, harassment or any other detriment towards staff/members/partners or any other individual.

**SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF THE SOA**

Please do not communicate on behalf of the SoA or its committees unless you have been fully briefed.

The SoA is a member-led organisation representing 12,000 members. We have a duty to those members to ensure that, when we communicate on their behalf, we do it effectively and in as informed a way as possible. To do this we have to work collaboratively – whether this is within the staff team, or between committee members, directors and staff.

Working together, we are more likely to take full advantage of opportunities and amplify our messages, more likely to get the facts right, less likely to duplicate effort, and more likely to make the difference we want to achieve.

We know that our members are all experts in their own fields and environments, so there may be circumstances in which you think SoA staff cannot possibly add value. That might be true, but if you intend to act as an SoA spokesperson, or if you are likely to be perceived as speaking on behalf of the SoA or its committees, we need to know in advance.

If we cannot respond in time, or if you prefer not to involve us, you can still speak out in a personal capacity.

**SPEAKING IN A PERSONAL CAPACITY**

When you speak out in a personal capacity, it is still possible that the context in which you are speaking and the position you hold at the SoA, could mean that you might be perceived as speaking on behalf of the SoA.

This is partly about reading the room. Who are you speaking to? What do they know about you? What are you talking about? It is also about having a full appreciation of your professional standing alongside the organisation. What is your relationship with the SoA? How public is your profile? All these things could affect how what you say in a personal capacity, might be perceived in relation to the organisation.

We have seen plenty of instances on social media in recent times to show what can happen when these things are misread.

This relies on personal judgment and your ability to gauge each situation and how you are perceived by the people around you. As a rule, the more senior the level at which you are involved with the SoA, and the greater your online platform or your profile in the environment in which you are speaking, the more likely it is that you will be seen as speaking on behalf of the SoA. Please do contact us if you are ever in doubt.
SOA MATTERS
There will be times when SoA representatives will be invited to share SoA content, messaging, and campaigns. If this leads to challenging conversations on social media, please refer to the procedure below and contact the Communications team.

BOARD ELECTIONS
It is appropriate for SoA representatives to share details on their social media channels of general information around SoA Committee elections, such as key dates and reminding members to vote. See our Code of Conduct for more information.

Encouraging other authors to put themselves forward for election is appropriate, but should be done in a general way i.e., to tweet publicly that the process is open rather than explicitly mentioning that specific people should put themselves forward.

SoA staff must always remain impartial during any nominations or elections process to the Management Committee or to group and network committees. This includes: no promoting of individual candidates, reposting nomination bids or election statements, or any action online that could be counted as endorsement.

As with other challenging situations on social media, approach each issue on a case-by-case basis and contact the Communications team if you need clarity or feel unsure of what action to take (see below).

PROCEDURE
If SoA matters are brought to you on social media, please immediately pass all enquiries and comments to the Head of Communications before responding.

If the Head of Communications is unavailable, please contact another member of the Communications team or the Chief Executive. The staff team will advise you on how to respond.

If such an event happens over the course of a weekend or public holiday, please wait until the team are back in the office. You need not reply to anything until you are ready to do so. If there is exceptional urgency, please email or phone the Chief Executive (but be aware that she will not respond on the Jewish Sabbath).

POLICY REVIEW
We will review this policy periodically and when the need arises.

Last updated: May 2022