Every time I invite a new person to Bluesky, I feel like I have to explain a lot of things about what it is, its culture, and how to use it, so I have written this guide to help you get the most out of Bluesky.

The info and screenshots are current as of 18 August 2023 and will be updated as necessary. I hope it helps!

**What is Bluesky?**

Bluesky is a social networking application that on its surface appears similar to Twitter, but the way it functions in practice is quite different — from its lack of algorithm to its online culture.

You can access Bluesky via a browser or an app on your phone. (All of the screenshots for this article were taken using the latest Android download.) There are also additional clients, such as kite.black and Tokimeki.

Right now Bluesky is still in beta, which means that it’s not fully opened up yet, though the application has recently passed 1 million downloads. In order to participate on Bluesky, you need an invite code (colloquially called “gregs”). The invite codes were rare, but as the app continues to open up, more are being distributed, and it’s curious to observe the new waves of people as they arrive and adapt or begin to change Bluesky’s culture.

**Bluesky culture**

The app is still in beta and its early adopters tended to be people from marginalized communities who were fleeing outright persecution from Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and other apps that limited their public
presence online. This has created a space that is more trans friendly and more sex worker friendly than many other public online spaces. This is a very good thing. Everyone needs spaces where they can feel safe. (If you have concerns about seeing NSFW content, see the section below on content filtering and moderation — much of this is user determined.)

When Elon Musk misunderstood the Latin prefix “cis” and erroneously declared it a “slur” on 21 June 2023, Bluesky gave everyone on the platform an invite code. This was clearly intended as a rescue for trans folks who were trapped on a platform that was actively hostile to their (our) existence. It was very refreshing to see a social media platform that took an active interest in supporting its marginalized users.

Unfortunately, a swift and immediate response was not what happened when it was revealed that Bluesky’s username moderation software did not automatically pick up slurs against racial minorities — most notably those impacting its Black users. (For more on this, see Morgan Sung’s article in Techcrunch summarizing the issue.) However, while Bluesky’s communications team failed to address these concerns in a timely manner, for a solid weekend and the better part of a week, Bluesky’s userbase advocated for an apology from Bluesky and called for actions such as hiring a trust and safety team. This apology would not arrive for several weeks, and even today Bluesky’s popular word cloud account Now Breezing continues to displays a reminder to #ListenToBlackVoices.

Overall though, my experience of Bluesky has been that it is a fairly playful place that’s sex positive and where people tend to assume good-faith takes rather than always searching for the worst in people. (For example, “posts” on Bluesky are often called “skeets,” and, yes, we know what it means. NBC
has written about it. It’s mainstream, but if you don’t want to call them that, that’s totally fine. You can just write “posts,” and everything will be ok.)

**Hellthread interlude**

There was an glorious but broken thing called the hellthread that was **unblessed by Paul Frazee** to much gnashing of teeth. Its lore is varied and complex. Know Your Meme has a great breakdown, Nori briefly maintained a timeline, and Schweg has posted a heartfelt lament about its death. (I may have written a sea shanty.)

Basically, it was a glitch that sent notifications to everyone who responded to a certain thread regardless of where they responded on the thread. It completely broke people’s notifications. Some were horrified while others were enchanted by it. It was dizzying, yet also dazzling to many.

It was a place of friends, nudes, lewds, memes, inside jokes, and it was a joy to wake each morning to an absurd number of notifications that have absolutely nothing to do with anything you’d skeeted about the day previous.

**tl;dr:** It’s gone, and some folks are still nostalgic about it, but you probably don’t need to worry about it anymore.

(RIP hellthread.)

**Accessibility features**

Alt text is not automatically required on posts, but it is recommended. Blind and low vision folks need alt text in order for their screen readers to describe the image to them, and autistic folks and others need it for context in order to understand what the image is supposed to be doing. Sighted and allistic
folks use it to get context on characters in tv shows they might not have seen. Basically, alt text makes everyone’s life better. Please use it! You can enable alt text reminders for all images in the settings.

If you are unable to type alt text (an accessibility issue in itself), then there is a bot that (mostly) works for text within images. If you reply to a post without alt text with @alt-text.bsky.social, a bot will try to retrieve the alt text for you. There is also a community sourced option called ALT4Me for you to request a human being to type out alt text for images without it and a feed to capture these requests.
Feed where users can request manual alt text

For those who have difficulty with bright light, Bluesky also has a dark mode that can be enabled in the settings. (The screenshots for this article all have dark mode enabled.)
How your feed works

Your Following tab will only show you the users that you are actively following, and may only show you their original posts and not their replies, if they haven’t received enough likes. You can change this in your settings by going to Home Feed Preferences and selecting whether you’d like to see replies (default is two likes, otherwise you don’t see it), whether you see reposts (reskeets), and quoted posts (quoteskeets).

Set your home feed preferences to display the kinds of posts you want to see
There is no default algorithm that will push ads or people you aren’t following onto your skyline. If you don’t deliberately choose it in some fashion, then you won’t see it in your Following tab. Bluesky currently opts for a very user-directed experience.

Many folks are multilingual, and you can set which languages you communicate in and would like to see in your feeds by going into Settings and selecting Content languages. From there, you can select from a list, which will filter only for the selected languages; or leave everything unchecked, which will allow you to see all languages.

You can also add and/or create feeds based on your interests. Feeds are a major source of interaction on Bluesky, and if your Bluesky experience feels
quiet, then you definitely need to follow more people and/or subscribe to more feeds.

**Find friends**

You can find your follows from Twitter and Mastodon via Skeet.labnotes.org, which is a great place to find people you’re already familiar with and decide whether you want to follow them on Bluesky as well.

You can also find friends via the person who invited you, presuming you have similar interests. Check their follow list and follow anyone who seems interesting.

**Feeds**

The best way to find new folks, though, is via feeds. Feeds appear at the top of the app and can be scrolled through. Basically, feeds are lists of posts (and sometimes replies) on a certain topic, or that capture a certain userbase. Anyone can create one, though only the most popular appear on Bluesky’s Discover Feeds page.

In order to find more of these lists, try goodfeeds.co and enter a keyword ("books," "TTRPG," "vampires," etc.), and you’ll find all of the feeds that
match that keyword.

Liking a feed helps to increase its visibility (and position on Bluesky’s Discover Feeds page), adding it to your list of feeds makes it available in your list of My Feeds (found in the menu or on the sidebar), and pinning it makes it available as a tab on the top of the app.

Himbofeed is an example of a feed that is both liked and pinned.

If you don’t find what you’re looking for, you can create your own lists based on users you want to see and/or keywords that you want to populate.

SkyFeed is an incredible tool that allows you to see everything on Bluesky — it acts like a firehose. (If you enjoy the very chaotic, you can see the live
firehose at firesky.tv.) You can create custom feeds using SkyFeed’s Feed Builder, and another Bluesky user has already created a helpful thread of how to go about doing that, so I won’t repeat it here, but please do check out the thread. (For example, I’ve created feeds for [typically less visible] trans masc folks who opt-in to be included, as well as a genderqueer feed that picks up any post that contains certain keywords in the body of the post or its alt text.)

Some good feeds to subscribe to in order to get started are What’s Hot Classic (minimum to appear is 12 likes, so you’ll see more interesting stuff from smaller accounts, and far superior to What’s Hot), Newskies (which shows the first post of new users to the app), Blacksky (amplifying the voices of Black users), Indigisky (amplifying the voices of Indigenous users), Latest from Follows (self-explanatory), MyBangers (your most liked posts), and Feed of Feeds (every time a feed is mentioned it appears here).

You can change which feeds you subscribe to at any time, which are pinned, and move them up and down in the rotation under My Feeds.
Interactions

Mostly, you post (skeet) into the void and hope someone likes it. If you’ve included a keyword or hashtag that a feed picks up, then more people will see it. If it receives a minimum of 12 likes within an hour, it will appear in the What’s Hot Classic feed.

If someone replies to your post, then, depending on one’s settings, it may also appear in someone else’s following feed. (I find a lot of people to follow this way. The cool people I follow also tend to follow and interact with neat folks.)

Bluesky allows you to like posts and courtesy liking is popular. Love Fairy is a bot that will automatically like every post and reply you make on the app, and there is an adorable user named Stovey who will manually like the posts he finds interesting. (Yes, he has confirmed that he does actually read or at least skim them. Additionally, a term has been coined — the Stovey Threshold — to indicate that any like count above 10k per day is likely a bot. Stovey likes are life.) The CourtesyBot will tell you how many likes you’ve exchanged, and the Jazbot! allows you to challenge other users to like battles (among other features).

Some users also like to share their interactions circles, a weighted interaction tool found at wolfgang.raiос.xyz, which also includes a variety of other metrics worth checking out. It can be fun to see familiar faces each week, or check in to find out who you’re interacting with more these days. (There was a dramatic shift post-hellthread, for example.)
Another way to see interactions is with Jaz’s Atlas, which groups users idiosyncratically into various clusters. You can see which cluster(s) you fall into with a scalable spatial representation of who you have mutually interacted with most recently. Since the depreciation of the hellthread cluster and with the introduction of new userbases (most notably furries), some new and interesting clusters are emerging.
### Atlas of mutual interaction clusters on Bluesky

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Connections</th>
<th>Interactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>106,771</td>
<td>323,663</td>
<td>2,807,971</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search for a Handle

- □ 2°Neigh...
- ☑ Labels
You can also repost (reskeet) others’ posts (skeets), and quote posts to add your own comment. These quote threads are very popular on themed days like Tummy Tuesday, and can also be used to show which album was the first one you purchased with your own money, or what have you, as well as do negative things like quotedunking.

Perhaps I’m biased against the practice, since when I was a little 300 follower account (I’m still a little account, but I was even littler then), an account that was 8.6k quotedunked me and encouraged her followers to harass me, so I really don’t like it. (This was during the Incident with antiblack racism on Bluesky, and I was on the side of giving a shit about marginalized people harmed by the app’s lack of response, which wasn’t well received by some fragile white users. Idk, judge for yourself.)

If you’re a larger account, and someone said or did something you disagree with, by all means disagree with it, but you can do so obliquely, or, if you must quoteskeet, blur that person’s profile picture and user name so they don’t receive targeted harassment. There are responsible ways to call someone out. (Even if you’re actually the one in the wrong.)

Named quotedunking was done to another online friend of mine by an even larger account and it was brutal. Don’t do it, folks. Be kinder than that.

**Content filtering and moderation**

There’s a lot of body positivity on Bluesky, and it’s lovely, but that may not be for everyone, and that’s perfectly ok and you absolutely do not have to see it.

If you are uncomfortable with Tummy Tuesday, Wagon Wednesday, Thighsday, Fat Cock Friday (yes, really) and any of the other horny variations that appear, that’s totally ok! And it’s easy to filter out those posts, both with
the (often sexist and problematic) AI that will filter out these posts for you, and most especially with the new moderation tool that allows users to self-describe their posts. (Alternatively, if you’re super into Tummy Tuseday, Wagon Wednesday, Thighsday, and Fat Cock Friday, there are several feeds for these; I’ve only included the most liked here, but you can find the rest on goodfeeds.co.)

You can hide, warn, or show any of the following image categories: explicit sexual, other nudity, sexually suggestive, violent/bloody, and hate group iconography. (The last one is sus; it’s not clear to me why it might be necessary to show hate group iconography at all.) “Hide” means that it won’t appear in your feed at all; “warn” means that it will appear behind a filter that you can click on to view the image or post, and “show” shows everything as normal. You can also disable “adult” content in general, which will set everything to “hide” status as described above.
### Content Filtering

- **Enable Adult Content**

- **Explicit Sexual Images**
  i.e. pornography
  - Hide
  - Warn
  - Show

- **Other Nudity**
  Including non-sexual and artistic
  - Hide
  - Warn
  - Show

- **Sexually Suggestive**
  Does not include nudity
  - Hide
  - Warn
  - Show

- **Violent / Bloody**
  Gore, self-harm,
  - Hide
  - Warn
  - Show
**Mute lists and blocking**

You can also create mute lists to hide anyone you’re not interested in seeing, or block them outright. However, know that your block lists and mute lists are public, and can be seen by anyone with the technical know-how to find out.

You can also find out who has blocked you via [Thieflord.dev](https://thieflord.dev) and which mute lists you’re on via [Twexit.nl](https://twexit.nl). (Though, to be honest, some of these mute lists are very funny and can be a good place to find like-minded folks, such as when fascists put you on a communist list.) Though it is important to know that mute lists can also be used to generate a feed; however, when this is the case, it is typically indicated in the mute list’s description.

There are Bluesky users who maintain mute lists of bad actors on various topics (transphobia, antiblack racism, anti-sex work, etc.) that any user can subscribe to. I won’t highlight some of the most popular here, because the user who maintains it has received a lot of unfair negative pushback. Of course, if you’re not comfortable subscribing to someone else’s mute list, you
definitely don’t have to: you can create your own, mute or block individually, or just get annoyed every time That Person appears in your feed. You do you! (I’ve created one that mutes bots that don’t use alt text, for example, because I’m tired of being frustrated by them, but afaik, I’m the only person subscribed to it. If these bots bother you too, feel free to subscribe.)

Whether you subscribe to the “block liberally and move on” method or the “mute and let them live their quiet little lives,” arguing with someone who is only interested in bickering and not genuine engagement is a wasted effort, and you will see a lot less of it on Bluesky than Twitter. (At least so far. Each new wave of invites brings more and more folks traumatized by previous bad-faith interactions, and it can be a challenging habit to break.)

You can also report individual posts and accounts for violating community standards (there’s a list). In my experience, Bluesky responds relatively quickly to these and will often remove posts or ban users for bad behaviour.

Bluesky posts their latest updates on development, moderation, and all things Bluesky on their blog and shares highlights from their account, @bsky.app.

**Advanced features**

When you feel a little more at home on Bluesky, and if you’re techy enough (or have friends who can help), you can do things like set your own domain as your handle and experiment more with creating your own feeds with SkyFeed.

**Have fun!**
Honestly, this is my favourite social networking site right now. I hope you enjoy it. I hope you find your people. I hope it continues to be responsive and kind. Good luck, little app.

**What have I missed?**

What should be added to this guide? Is there something that I’ve misunderstood? (Please be kind: I’m a historian, not a developer.)

Has this been helpful? If so, and you’d like to give me a follow, you can do so here: @plutopsyche.nicomaramckay.com.
How to Bluesky. This article explains how Bluesky works... | by Nico Mara-McKay | Medium

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