

Why we require real names

Written by Cory Zaroni, Community Manager, The Conversation

Our real names policy is one of the defining features of our community. It's the part of our [community standards](#) that I receive the most questions about.

Why require real names

We strive for transparency on The Conversation – from our disclosure statements to our process for retracting articles – and requiring real names in our comment section is part of that.

Transparency is key to illuminating discussions. We want our readers and commentators to know when someone may have a conflict of interest: insisting on people using their real names can help in that regard (and has in the past during discussions on particularly polarising discussions).

The policy is also a signal to take discussions at The Conversation seriously: don't say anything you don't want published alongside your name.

The problems posed by real names

The first, and perhaps most obvious, problem presented by our real names policy is that it's difficult to enforce. There are few ways around that: it's easy to use a real-sounding fake name if you really want to.

But, more importantly, the policy can put some people off commenting for a lot of valid reasons. Someone may work in the public service or have concerns about their safety and, as such, be weary about using their real name online.

We sympathise with people who can't use their real names online and, as such, can't contribute to our comment sections.

However, the flip side to this are people who won't get involved in anonymous discussions for

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fear of abuse (that said, whether or not anonymity promotes abuse is [debated](#)).

Value judgements

Any decision we make about regulating our community will include some members of our audience and exclude others. As much as we'd like to make The Conversation's community a space for anyone and everyone, that's unlikely to ever happen.

We decided that requiring real names and, in doing so, bringing transparency and trust to the fore of our community was an important thing to do.

It's a philosophical decision and one that reflects the priorities and goals of The Conversation as a website.

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Read more <http://theconversation.com/why-we-require-real-names-69404>