

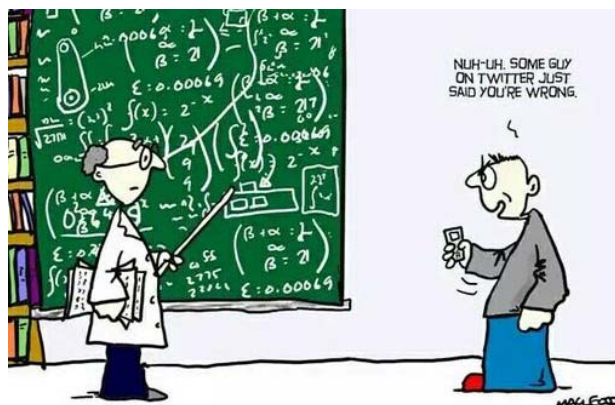
“Arguing with a troll is like mud wrestling with a pig. You both get dirty and the pig enjoys it.”

Trolls attack peoples’ reputations and integrity in a way that is not within the normal science-related discourse – scientists naturally feel an urge to respond to trolls. Trolls are just bullies – no-one outside of their circle pays any attention to what they have to say!

Recognising trolls

Do not assume that all critics or sources of scrutiny are trolling. Science trolls can be recognised by the following traits:

- **Gish Galloping** (drowning your opponent in a flood of individually-weak arguments) or creating straw men instead of responding to the points a target makes.
- Insisting they know what a target really means instead of taking responses at face value.
- Posing an endless series of questions to create more excuses for trolling.
- A seeming inability to acknowledge that other people may have different, valid opinions.
- Attempts to score points with a perceived audience rather than engage in direct dialogue.
- Taking a target’s statements out of context by twisting single words and short phrases.
- Failing to cite sources or citing sources that don’t back up claims.
- Focusing on criticism and complaints to the exclusion of solutions.
- Quickly devolving into ad hominem arguments (personal attacks, rather than arguments on the topic).



Scaled responses to trolling

- **Ignore:** tells them they have no power or influence over you.
- **Block buttons:** Blocking isn’t censorship or an admission of defeat – it’s simply a filter to tune out what we don’t need.
- **Minimise responses:** If you absolutely must respond to a troll, just make it a one-and-done:
 - “Hey – That’s not what I meant, but thanks for stopping by..”
 - “That’s certainly a perspective. Thanks for sharing.”
 - “I’ve heard that before. Here’s a link...”
 - “Haha. Good one.”
 - “Interesting. Thanks.”

Much advice is consistent across industries & topics:

- Don’t feed the trolls
- Keep a level head
- Respond to serious trolling on your own terms
- Go back to dealing with reasonable people

Trolls on science-related topics are generally part of a loose, insular network of the same old folks.

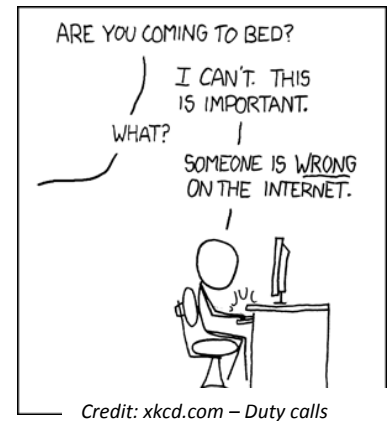
Trolls don’t actually read links – that would require genuine curiosity – and they don’t trust their perceived audience to read links either, so it’s usually a conversation-ender.

If you are having challenges please seek help. Speak with your mentor, the Chief Operating Officer or any member of the Gender Action Committee for advice and assistance on what to do next.

Email:
coo@caastro.org

If you NEED to respond

- Respond calmly and constructively to valid criticism and inquiries about your work and field of research—but avoid getting pulled into debates with people who only seek to waste your time.
- When you do respond, do so through mainstream sources (not privately).
- Use the resources available to you, such as your organisation’s legal counsel or public relations office, to help you determine the best strategy for responding.
- Remember that your work emails may become public in certain situations, and keep them accordingly professional.
- Keep records of harassing messages, and contact authorities if they become threatening.



Or do something constructive instead

Use trolling as a trigger to do something constructive:

- Reach out to an old colleague you haven’t been in touch with for a while.
- Post something interesting about your field on social media.
- Send a journalist/school science communicator a note about forthcoming research.
- Find out about upcoming outreach opportunities.
- Create a forum to share responses to trolling and swap ideas.
- Go for a walk.

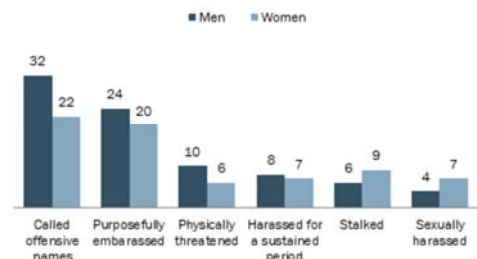
Gender issues

Trolling behaviours can also be closely related to sexual harassment. A [recent report from RMIT](#) found that women were more likely than men to report experiencing sexual harassment. Women overwhelmingly experienced digital harassment and abuse from male perpetrators while men experienced digital harassment and abuse equally from males and females.

Harassers should obviously face scrutiny and punishment and it’s good to see scientific institutions finally, haltingly start to deal with [endemic sexual harassment](#). But when such harassment takes place online and is anonymous, it’s hard for women who are targeted by it – and other people who see it – to know what to do beyond reporting it as abusive behaviour.

Men and women experience different varieties of online harassment

Among all internet users, the % who have experienced each of the following elements of online harassment, by gender...



Source: American Trends Panel (wave 4). Survey conducted May 30-June 30, 2014. n=2,839.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In Australia, trolls can be prosecuted under the Commonwealth Criminal Code Act Part 10.6. If you face serious threats – death, rape, cyber stalking – you should report this immediately with your local police as well as the [Australian Cybercrime Online Reporting Network](#) (ACORN – An Australian Government Initiative)

Other minorities, media & public perception

Trolling behaviour is unacceptable and, increasingly trolls and bullies are being publicly shamed and often face criminal charges. Some recent examples:

Media: Labour Senator [Nova Peris](#), ABC News; Labour frontbencher [Penny Wong](#), 2016 Election ABC News [Eddie McGuire](#), ABC News; [Zane Alchin](#), ABN News – Conviction for threatening comments on Facebook

Other Resources: Australian Federal Police – [Social Media Reputation Management](#); [eSafety for Women](#); [Office of the Children’s eSafety Commissioner](#) ;For trolling behaviour directed at women – contribute to Emily Temple-Woods Wikipedia. project by creating a new [‘women-in-science’](#) entry.