

RSS - Don't miss the latest news

Like a lot of new techniques, using RSS is much easier to do than to describe. For a very quick and non-technical introduction take a look at this short video http://www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english

What is RSS and what does it do?

RSS lets you see at a glance what's new on whole websites, parts of websites, blogs or podcasts without you having to visit the website.

Jargon alert! RSS stands for either *Really Simple Syndication* or *Rich Site Summary* but you don't have to worry about this. More important is what it does, which is to *summarise* and *syndicate*.

How does it work?

Many websites automatically generate lists of new items. These are known as *RSS feeds*, *news feeds*, *web feeds*, *XML feeds* or simply *feeds*.

A feed typically contains

title (or headline) of the item

date

summary

a link back the actual item

The feed is delivered in a format (*XML*, if you really want to know) that can be read and displayed by web browsers and by specialist software known as *feed readers*, *aggregators*, *news readers* or *RSS readers*.

Websites usually indicate the availability of a feed by displaying icons like these:



... or text like *subscribe to this feed*.

To *subscribe*, click on the icon or text. *Subscribing* simply means *add to my list* – it doesn't mean you have to pay.

Your *web browser* or *feed reader* will automatically check the websites for new content.

Unlike email alerts, which tend to clog up your inbox, your RSS feeds will wait patiently in the background until you have time to look at them.

What do I need to do?

First you need a *feed reader*. There are three kinds to choose from.

Web-based services

Sign up for a free account with, for example

Google Reader www.google.com/reader

Bloglines www.bloglines.com

An advantage of web based services is that you can read your feeds on any computer simply by logging in to your account.

Web browser

Internet Explorer (version 7, not 6!), Firefox and Safari all have an inbuilt feed reader. Click on the RSS icon and the browser adds the feed to a list in the same way as bookmarks or favourites.

Specialist feed readers

These work in much the same way as web browsers but usually provide a bit more functionality. You need to download the software to run on your own computer. Some examples:

FeedDemon for Windows

<http://www.feeddemon.com>

NetNewsWire for Mac

<http://netnewswireapp.com/mac>

(also for iPhone)

Don't worry about which method you choose – you can change your mind later.

Google Reader is an easy and painless way to start. Sign up for a free account at www.google.com/reader Google will guide you and offer lists of feeds to get you on your way.

Now that you're up and running, here are some useful feeds:

British Journal of Social Work

bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/rss

International Social Work

isw.sagepub.com/rss

Applied Social Work jobs

www.jobs.ac.uk/categories/appliedsocialwork

Community Care

www.communitycare.co.uk/static-pages/rss

Community Care Social Work blog

www.communitycare.co.uk/blogs/social-work-blog

Changing from one reader to another

It's easy to export your RSS subscriptions from one reader and import them into another. **Jargon alert!** Most feed readers will refer to something called an *OPML file*. OPML is a format that enables feeds created in one reader to be understood by another. Don't be scared.

Your reader will have an import/export feature (try looking under the *file* menu. In Google Reader, go to *settings* and choose the *import/export* tab). Choose *Export* and choose a name (eg *myfeeds*). This file contains details of all your feeds and it can be imported into any other feed reader.