

# RSS and RSS Feed Readers

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## What is RSS?

**RSS** (which stands for "Really Simple Syndication") is a family of formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines, or podcasts. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with their favorite websites in an automated manner that is easier than checking them manually.

An RSS document, which may be called a "feed," "news feed," or "channel," contains either a summary of content from an associated web site or the full text. RSS content can be read using software called a "feed reader" or an "aggregator." These readers allow users to subscribe to RSS feeds. The reader program checks the user's subscribed feeds regularly for new content, downloading any updates that it finds.

(Adapted from Wikipedia, RSS, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rss>. Accessed August 23, 2007)


## Options for RSS Feed Readers

### **Option 1: Firefox Live Bookmarks**

(NOTE: you'll need to have Firefox 2.0 or higher to use this feature. You can download the latest version of Firefox for free at <http://www.mozilla.com>)

**Pros:** Very easy to use.

**Cons:** Not portable; lacks advanced features.

-  Websites with available RSS feeds usually will display the RSS symbol in the address bar
- Clicking on the RSS symbol will take you to a subscription page. Make sure you are subscribing using Live Bookmarks. Occasionally, there is more than one feed available from a given website and you will have a choice of which feed to subscribe to. From the subscription page, click on the "subscribe now" button.
- If you don't see an RSS symbol in the address bar, but see a link indicating that there are RSS feeds available from a site, you can:
  - Right click on the feed link and select Copy Link Location;
  - Go to Bookmarks>Organize Bookmarks in Firefox;
  - Select File>New Live Bookmark and past the address into the Feed Location box.
- I prefer to save my Firefox feeds to my Bookmarks Toolbar. This allows the links to be displayed directly on the toolbar and gives me easy access to them.
- Just like regular bookmarks, you can organize feeds into thematic folders for organization.

## **Option 2: Bloglines**

**Pros:** Web-based and portable; leader in the aggregator field; has advanced organization features.

**Cons:** Requires a login; slightly more complicated to learn.

- You'll need to setup a Bloglines account (with user name and password) before you can use the service. Set up an account here: <http://www.bloglines.com/login>
- Once your account is activated, you have various options for subscribing to an RSS feed:
  - Click the RSS symbol in the address bar when at a given site: select 'Subscribe to this feed using Bloglines.'
  - Click the Add button in Bloglines and enter the url of the feed you want.
- Bloglines allows you to save an "Easy Subscribe" button on your toolbar. This means when you are at a website with feeds, you can simply click the button and get to a subscription screen. To find out how to add this button to your browser, click on the Easy Subscribe bookmarklet under Additional Features.
- Bloglines also has a feature that allows you to search for sites with relevant feeds. Click the "Search" tab on the main page, or use the search box in the upper right hand corner (make sure the drop-down menu says Search for Feeds).
- Check out the Options tab to see how many ways you can configure your feeds in Bloglines. You can control the way Bloglines displays feeds (in short or long form), whether it shows content that you have already viewed, etc.

## **Option 3: Google Reader**

**Pros:** Web-based and portable; has advanced organization features; uses the same long-in/password as Gmail.

**Cons:** Slightly more complicated to learn; still in development.

- Start by going to the Google Reader site: <http://reader.google.com>. If you have a Gmail account, log in. If you don't, you'll need to set up an account first (look for the "Create account now" link in the bottom right hand corner).
- Once your account is activated, you have various options for subscribing to an RSS feed:
  - Click the RSS symbol in the address bar when at a given site; select Subscribe to this feed using Google.
  - Click the Add Subscription button in Google Reader and enter the URL of the feed you want.
- Click on the Browse link to find feeds bundled by theme (e.g. sports or celebrity news). You can also search for feeds at the browse page.
- Google also features a "one click" subscription button called "Subscribe as You Surf." You can find it under Settings>Goodies.

- Click on Settings>Subscriptions to see the various options for configuring and organizing your feeds. You can also toggle between List View (one line list) or Expanded View (gives you the whole item, but in the Google Reader format) by selecting these tabs in the upper right hand corner of the Reader.
- Google Reader allows you to "star" items that you'd like to highlight or return to later. Click the "Add Star" link at the end of the news story or blog item. To see all the items you have "starred" select Starred Items in the left hand navigation column.