

What is RSS and how can I take advantage of it?

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a method used by websites—mostly blogs and news organizations—to turn the content they post into a subscription. The content is delivered to you, so you don't have to visit the website to see if there's anything new!

In order to take advantage of RSS, you have to set up an RSS aggregator, which collects links to new content on the sites you've subscribed to. Think of it this way: you get subscriptions to your favorite magazines so you get new issues right away—they're delivered to your mailbox so you don't have to check the bookstore or news stand every few days. An RSS aggregator is like a mailbox for RSS feeds from blogs and some websites—new content comes to you, so you don't have to check the website!

Lots of libraries and librarians have started blogging, and they've added RSS feeds to their blogs. Reading some of these is a great way to keep up with new developments, ideas and resources within the field of librarianship, including finding out about what other libraries are doing with technology.

That sounds great! So how do I do this?

There are a lot of RSS aggregators to choose from—you can use some web browsers as an RSS aggregator, Microsoft Outlook and Mozilla Thunderbird include aggregators, and there are some programs you can download to your computer. There are also web-based services—when you set up a web-based RSS aggregator, you can log into your account and read your subscriptions from any computer that has an Internet connection! This handout includes instructions on how to set up a Yahoo! or Google personalized homepage, which includes RSS feeds. If you think you'd rather use another type of aggregator, check out Wikipedia's list of aggregators, linked below.

OK, but first I'd like to learn a little bit more about this stuff.

Here are some resources if you'd like to learn more about RSS feeds and aggregators.

MIT Libraries RSS Introductory Course

Part 1: <http://news-libraries.mit.edu/techtalks/rss-part-1/>

Part 2: <http://news-libraries.mit.edu/techtalks/rss-part-2/>

Wikipedia

What is RSS?: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_\(protocol\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_(protocol))

A more technical article

<http://www.xml.com/pub/a/2002/12/18/dive-into-xml.html>

Blog search engines

Technorati (just blogs): <http://www.technorati.com>

Daypop (blogs and news organizations): <http://www.daypop.com>

Books

Blogging and RSS: A Librarian's Guide, by Michael Sauers

Social Software in Libraries: Building Collaboration, Communication, and Community Online, by Meredith G.

Farkas, author of "Information Wants to be Free," a blog focused on technology in libraries (<http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress>).

Setting up a Yahoo! or Google personalized homepage

Yahoo! and Google both offer personalized homepages that you can set to be the default page that opens when you launch your browser (Firefox, IE, Safari, etc.). You can also log in and access them from public-use computers. These are easy to set up and allow you to see, at glance, whether you have new mail in your Yahoo! or Gmail account, check the weather, and see if any of your favorite feeds have been updated. Even if you set up Bloglines, these can be a great supplement.

There are plenty of other homepage services that you can use as well. Take a look at www.netvibes.com and www.protopage.com. Both of these work similarly to MyYahoo! and Google Personalized Homepage. All four of these look different, so take a look at them and see which one you prefer – and don't be afraid to switch if you change your mind once you're using one of them! A personalized home page is pointless if you don't use it.

MyYahoo!

1. Visit www.yahoo.com and click “MyYahoo” at the top left.
2. If you already have a Yahoo! account, click on the blue “Sign In” link at the top. If not, click on one of the signup links. Follow the instructions to register. If Yahoo! doesn't direct you back to the MyYahoo page, repeat step 1.
3. Under the Yahoo! search box on your MyYahoo! page, you'll see that you can Add Content, Change Layout, and Change Colors. Play around with these to change the look and content of your homepage.
4. The Yahoo! homepage is made up of modules which you can drag-and-drop to rearrange (if you want to move something from one column to another, use “Change Layout”). To delete a module you don't want, click the X in the top right corner of the module. To hide or view the content of a module, click the arrow to the left of the title.
5. When you click “Add Content,” Yahoo! offers you several ways to pick from popular feeds. If you've already got the URL of a particular RSS feed handy, click “Add RSS by URL” to the right of the search box, and paste in the URL. (See the Bloglines instructions if you're not sure what this means!)

Personalized Google Homepage

1. Visit www.google.com and click “Personalized Home” in the top right.
2. If you already have an account, click “Sign In” in the top right. If you do not have a Google account, you can set up your page and then create an account to save it. Follow the instructions, and at the end of it Google should display your Personalized Homepage. If not, follow step 1 again.
3. The Google Personalized Homepage is made up of modules which you can drag-and-drop to rearrange. To delete a module you don't want, click the X in the top right corner of the module. Click “edit” to set how many items (such as headlines) to display in any given module.
4. To add content, click the “Add Stuff” button in the top right of the screen. Here, you can quickly add popular RSS feeds. If you've already got the URL of a particular RSS feed handy, click “Add by URL” at the top of the screen, to the left of the big Google search box. (See the Bloglines instructions if you're not sure what this means!)

So how do I actually set this to be my homepage?

Once you've set up your Yahoo! or Google homepage, the best thing to do with it is to make it the page that first opens when you use your web browser. Make sure your page is open, and then follow the appropriate instructions:

- **Firefox:** Select Tools > Options > General, and then hit “Use Current Page.”
- **Internet Explorer:** Select Tools > Internet Options > General, and then hit “Use Current.”
- **Safari:** Select Safari > Preferences > General, and then hit “Set to Current Page.”