

# Web 2.0 – The Web’s Edge

Instructor Teresa Pelkie

Feeds / RSS / Aggregators – Class # 6– Ch 1 (48-54) Ch2 (118-123)

## Feeds / RSS / Aggregators

**Feed? Web Feed? News Feed? RSS Feed? Syndicated Content? XML Feed? Channel?**

**All of the above terms refer to the same thing.** A feed is a method for subscribing to frequently updated content, which is published by a website. If a website has a “feed”, it means that you can subscribe to it and receive the updates, whenever that content is updated. The phrase “syndication” refers to the fact that users can subscribe to it. Web feeds give us a new method of publishing and accessing content online. You need a feed reader to view the content.

### Web 2.0 brings us new ways of distributing information

Using a Web feed, you can subscribe to a Web page and receive updates whenever the administrator for that page made any changes. With Web 1.0, you needed to go to the Web page each time, to see if there was new content.

### Overview of a Web feed:

- It is a text document that resides on the Web server (just like an HTML Web page)
- It can be written in any text editor (just like an HTML Web page)
- It is written using XML, and saved with a .xml extension
- It is written using either the RSS (most common) or Atom specification
- You subscribe to a feed by sending the URL of the file to the Feed Reader
- The Feed Reader stores the feed (the file) and displays it so you can see the contents

### What type of content does a feed deliver?

Web feed are typically webpage content, links to Web pages and other kinds of digital media. Web feeds are operated by many news websites, schools and online magazines. Blogs are probably the most common type of application that uses a feed. Web feeds are a great way of staying on top of news, announcements, class lectures etc.

### RSS – Really Simple Syndication

The technical format that most Web feed use is a language called RSS. **Although the term “feed” and “RSS” are commonly used interchangeably, a Web feed is not always RSS.** A Web feed can be written in another language called “Atom”. Both feed formats use XML. Currently RSS 2.0 is the most popular format used.

The RSS and Atom languages hold content like blog posts and headlines in a format that's simple for computer or Web program, such as a feed reader, to read and use.

### History of RSS:

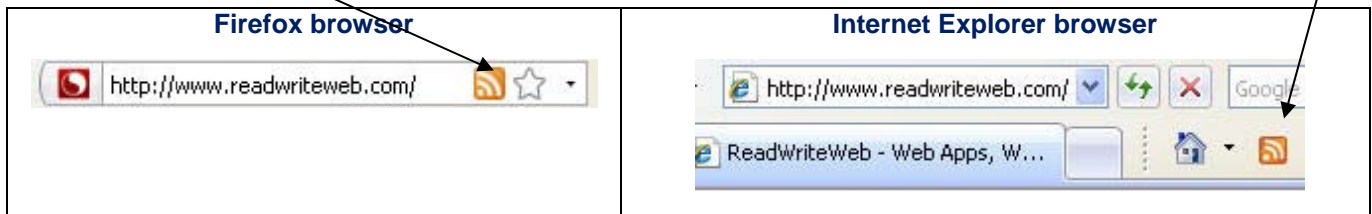
1. Rich Site Summary (RSS 0.91 - 1999)
2. RDF Site Summary (RSS 0.9 and 1.0 - 2000)
3. Really Simple Syndication (RSS 2.0 - 2002)

## How do I recognize a Web feed?

If a website has a feed, it will usually display an icon (shown below). Also, the browser has a “feed icon” that will turn on, if a feed is available. Sometimes, the website will have additional icons, such as feed reader icons. **When you click on these icons, they allow you to subscribe to the feed.**



The universal feed icon is a rounded orange box with a dot and wavy lines. If feeds are available, the **Feed button** will change color in the browser. There may be other similar buttons to indicate a feed.



Other buttons that may indicate a feed:



Feed reader icons also indicate a feed:



**When you click on the above icons, they allow you to subscribe to the feed using that feed reader or aggregator.**

## How does a feed differ from a website?

A feed can have the same content as a webpage, but it's often formatted differently. When you subscribe to a feed, the feed reader checks the website and downloads new content so you can see what is new since you last visited the feed.

## How do I view or read a Web feed?

The program for reading feeds is called a feed reader, news reader, feed aggregator or simply an **aggregator**. A feed reader pulls headlines, articles, blog posts, and other data from as many sources as you choose and displays them all in one place. It does this automatically, saving you the time and effort of checking a dozen news sites and blogs every day.

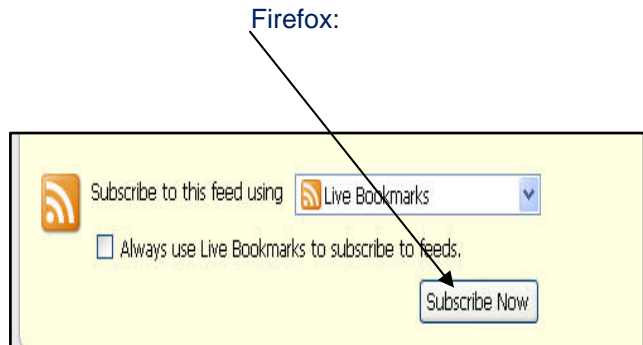
## How do I subscribe to a Web feed?

You subscribe with the feed reader or aggregator. The **aggregator** is desktop software or a Web application which aggregates syndicated web content such as news headlines, blogs, and podcasts in a single location for easy viewing. Most browsers have built-in feed readers which makes it easy to subscribe to a feed. The content is sometimes described as being "pulled" to the subscriber, as opposed to "pushed" as with email.

**There are 3 ways to subscribe to a Web feed:**

**A. Subscribe using the browser**

1. Click on the RSS icon in the browser (see screenshots on page 2)
2. Click "subscribe to feed" –



Note: Remember, that the browser is only available on your computer, similar to browser bookmarks. In this case, you cannot view your subscriptions if you are at a different computer.

**B. Subscribe using a desktop software feed reader application – this has the same limitations as above.**

**C. Subscribe using a Web based feed reader, also called an aggregator**

1. Copy and paste the feed URL to subscribe



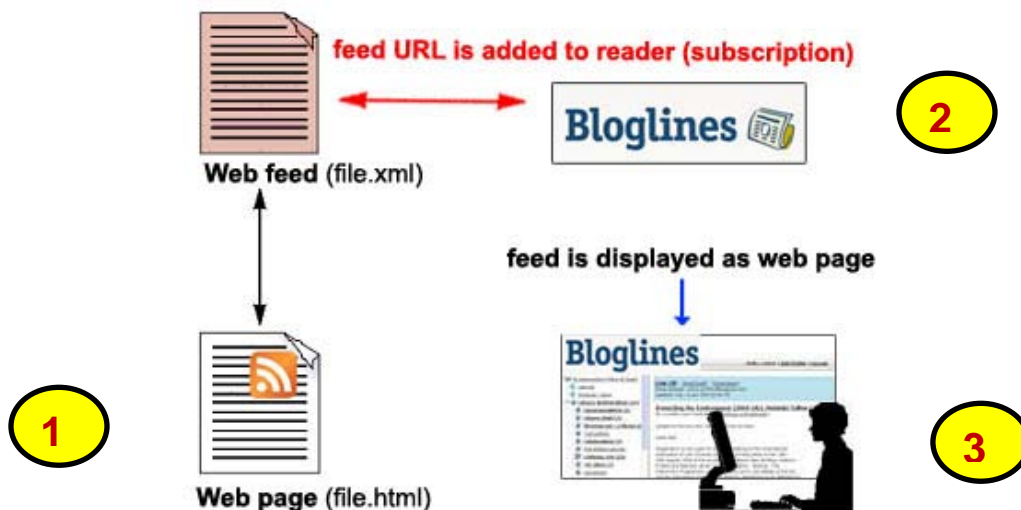
Copy feed URL and past into the feed reader



2. Click on an aggregator icon to automatically subscribe to the feed, such as those shown below:



**Overview of a feed:**



### **How a RSS feed works**

RSS (and also Atom) organizes information within **XML tags** or labels and places this information into what could be considered an outline format. As an example, an article website is made up of articles. Each article can be considered its own part of the site. Within each article there are parts as well, such as the title of the article, a description of the article, the date the article was published, who wrote the article, and so on. What RSS does is to present these parts in a uniform, organized format.

RSS organizes information the same way every time. An RSS feed can be broken down into a few parts.

1. First RSS presents the header information such as the XML version and various comments. This is more for the computers than it is for the readers.
2. Next RSS presents information about the website. The information presented here can vary, but typically there will be the name of the site, a link to the site, the webmaster s e-mail address, and maybe the last time the feed was updated.
3. The next part to an RSS feed is the actual content of the feed. This is the information that you want to send to your subscribers.

### **How do I make an RSS document?**

- Blogs automatically generate the RSS file for you – this is the most popular and easiest way
- Write it yourself if you are a geek
- Use a feed editor to help write it - <http://allrss.com/rsseditors.html>
- Use a feed generator - <http://www.rssfeedssubmit.com/rss-generator>

### **How can I check my RSS document?**

You can test that your feed is written correctly at <http://feedvalidator.org>

### **Where can I find feeds to subscribe to?**

- [infoworld.com](http://infoworld.com)
- <http://www.search4rss.com>
- <http://subhonker6.userland.com/rcsPublic/rssHotlist>
- <http://www.rss-syndication.com/find-feeds.htm>

Below is a **simple RSS XML document** created for the Lecture pages at csit70.pbwiki.com.

An RSS document can contain additional tags and information depending on what you want to syndicate.  
This demo RSS document is located at:

<http://www.sights.com/csit70/rss.xml> - use the browser's view menu (choose source) to see the XML code

```
<?xml version="1.0"?>
<rss version="2.0">
  <channel>
    <title>CSIT 70 Spring 2009</title>
    <link>http://csit70.pbwiki.com</link>
    <description>This feed contains the lecture information for this class</description>
    <language>en-us</language>
    <copyright>Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 United States License</copyright>
    <lastBuildDate>Tue, 17 Feb 2009 15:44:01 -0800</lastBuildDate>
    <docs>http://www.rssfeedssubmit.com/rss-generator/</docs>
    <image>
      <url>http://www.sights.com/csit70/podcast/logo.jpg</url>
      <title>CSIT70 Web 2.0 - the Web's Edge</title>
      <link>http://csit70.pbwiki.com</link>
      <width>144</width>
      <height>45</height>
    </image>
    <item>
      <title>Class 1</title>
      <link>http://csit70.pbwiki.com/Class_01</link>
      <description>Introduction to Web 2.0</description>
    </item>
    <item>
      <title>Class 2</title>
      <link>http://csit70.pbwiki.com/Class_02</link>
      <description>History of web 2.0</description>
    </item>
    <item>
      <title>Class 3</title>
      <link>http://csit70.pbwiki.com/Class_03</link>
      <description>Technologies that made Web 2.0 possible</description>
    </item>
  </channel>
</rss>
```

**XML declaration**

**Opening <rss >tag**

**Opening <channel> tag**

**Web Site information**

**Image information**

**First item**

**Second item**

**Third item etc**

**Closing </channel> tag**

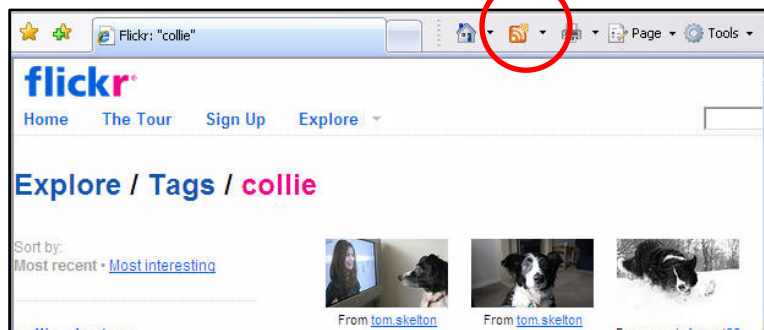
**Closing </rss >tag**

## Feeds are everywhere!

- Blogs
  - <http://www.whitehouse.gov>
- News sites
  - <http://signonsandiego.com>
  - <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5216556>
- Magazines
  - <http://www.infoworld.com/rss/index.html>
  - <http://www.forbes.com/>
- **Delicious** – allows you to subscribe to bookmarks
- **Ebay** – allows you to subscribe to a search



- **Flickr** – allows you to subscribe to a search



- Our **wiki** allows you to subscribe to it, but you get the updates, which are very numerous

