

# Understanding RSS Feeds

by Audrey Shaffer

## What ARE RSS feeds?

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is an XML format for distributing public web content. RSS Readers collect news in the background at intervals you choose, and alert you with a popup in the system tray that a new message has arrived. You can click the headline to see a short description of the news and click or open the original news web page in a browser window.

If the blog is configured by its owner to show its messages to the public, it will have an RSS feed. The feeds are normally free of charge.

The feed is a way for you to know when the author has updated their page, without you having to keep going back and checking on it.

## How do they work?

Blogs have coding in them called "RSS feeds". This means that every time the blog is updated, a signal is sent out across the web. Every person who has signed up for that feed is instantly notified that there is new content to be read.

If you have an RSS Reader, it will gather these signals for you. All you have to do is open the Reader, and you will have info on all updates to the sites you are tracking.

## What's the point?

I don't know about you, but I'm always time-crunched. I don't have time to visit 50 different sites to see if there is anything new on them. If I go back to a site two or three times, and there is nothing new, I'm not likely to check again. That site owner just lost me.

But with my Reader and their RSS feed, I automatically receive their updates whenever they make them. I currently have my Reader tracking 46 blogs. When I have time to read them, I open the Reader and updates to all 46 sites are right there in one place. Each post has a link so I can go to the site if I want to leave a comment. But if I'm just reading, I read, delete, and move on to the next one. A HUGE time saver!

## Why not just sign up for updates by email?

How much spam do you get every day? How many times do you NOT get emails you want, because your spam filter ate them? Does your email provider have a limit to how much mail you can have in your inbox? Does the website you're interested in send email updates?

A RSS Reader is a program that tracks the RSS feeds you tell it you want to read. When there is a new post on any of those feeds, it collects as much of the post as the author allows, and brings it to you. Downloaded to the program on your computer. Ready for you to read when you have the time.

When you have an RSS Reader, it goes out on the web and checks to see which blogs have new content. It will collect all the new posts and bring them to you. You can read updates from dozens of websites, all in one place. Also, your Reader will hold the posts until you get the chance to read them. With most Readers, you can also read while offline.

## How do I get a Reader?

Most Readers are a free download. Look them over and choose the one that appeals to you the most.

RSS Readers:

Information on a variety of readers <http://blogspace.com/rss/readers>

rssreader <http://www.rssreader.com/> (the one I use)

[www.feedreader.com/](http://www.feedreader.com/)

[www.google.com/reader/](http://www.google.com/reader/)

[www.pluck.com/](http://www.pluck.com/)

[www.bloglines.com/](http://www.bloglines.com/) (web-based reader, so you don't have to download and install a program)

[www.reader.rocketinfo.com/](http://www.reader.rocketinfo.com/)

Some Yahoo Groups now have RSS feeds available. You can get the new posts by RSS feed, instead of by email. Only public groups have this ability though.

For help with Yahoo Groups RSS feeds:  
<http://help.yahoo.com/help/us/groups/rss/index.html>

So there you go. Get a Reader and program it with the feeds you want. Keep up with things without wasting your precious time!

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