

Introduction to RSS

You may have noticed those little orange RSS buttons on web sites and wondered what they were...

What is RSS?

RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication (or some people say Rich Site Summary). RSS is a format used by web sites to distribute updates, news headlines, deals, and other information to those who “subscribe” to the site’s “feed.” These feeds generally contain article headlines, summaries, and links back to full-text articles on the web. This means that you don’t have to visit each site individually to see what’s new – you simply scan headlines and click on the link to read the full article.

Web pages that have RSS feeds available usually display an orange “RSS” or “XML” icon. (XML stands for Extensible Markup Language, a standard for creating and coding some forms of web content.)

Why use RSS?

RSS is an easy way for you to be alerted when content that interests you appears on your favorite web sites. Instead of visiting a particular web site to browse for new articles and features, RSS automatically shows you when something new is posted online. This allows you to receive the information you choose without having to go out and search for it. If you want more information about a topic in a feed, you can click on its headline and go directly to a web page containing the full article.




Once you try RSS, you may notice that RSS messages are easier to ignore than e-mail messages. That may be a good thing or a bad thing, depending on your personal preferences.

How do I access RSS?

RSS readers

To start using RSS, you need an *RSS reader* (or *RSS aggregator*) that will download and display RSS feeds from web sites you select. There are a number of different programs that you can use. Some web browsers, like Mozilla Firefox and Apple’s Safari, have this functionality already built in, as do some e-mail programs, like Mozilla Thunderbird. There are some online services that offer it to members (e.g., my.yahoo.com, google.com, my.msn.com), and there are also stand-alone programs that you can download. Once you’ve installed an RSS reader, then you subscribe to the RSS feeds you want.




Subscribing to RSS feeds

Not all web sites display their RSS feeds in exactly the same way, but they almost always use the term “RSS” and one of the orange icons/buttons  or  or  (XML is the format in which RSS feeds are delivered). Those icons indicate that the page you’re on has an RSS feed. If you’re using Firefox or Thunderbird, follow the instructions below. If you’re using any other program, you subscribe to the feed by clicking on the orange icon or possibly just a regular-looking link. From there, you need to follow the instructions for your reader or browser. You may see a page full of code – don’t worry. At that point, you usually just copy the URL from your browser and paste it into your RSS reader. Once you subscribe to a feed, your reader will automatically update whenever that feed changes.

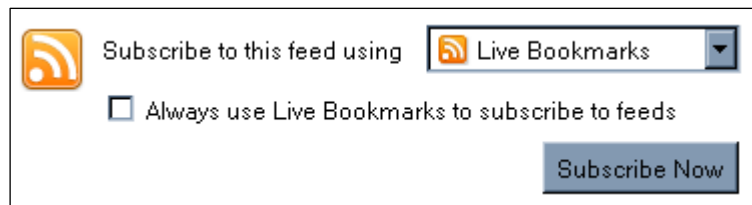
Firefox

Firefox provides the ability to subscribe to and read RSS feeds right in the browser, so you don’t need to install any other programs. Firefox calls this feature “Live Bookmarks.”

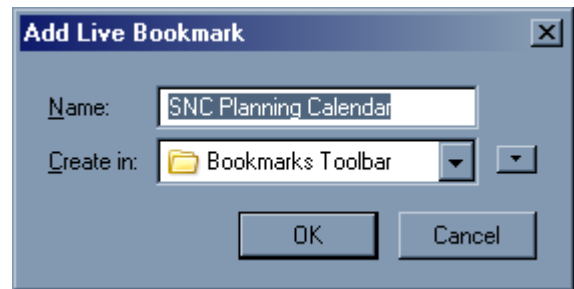
Subscribing to RSS feeds in Firefox

On some web sites, the orange  button will appear on the right side of the address bar. When you click that button (or go to Bookmarks – Subscribe to This Page), you’ll see a list of feeds available. Click on “Subscribe to <name of feed>” to subscribe. On other web sites, you may have to click on an orange  or  button for the feed you want.

You'll then get a page that says at the top "Subscribe to this feed using" with a drop-down menu (shown at right). Choose "Live Bookmarks" (it's normally selected by default) and click the Subscribe Now button.



The "Add Live Bookmark" window will open (shown at right) so you can file the bookmark. Firefox treats bookmarks for RSS feeds just like other bookmarks. You can put the RSS feed bookmark into any folder of your bookmarks. You may want to create a new folder for your RSS feed bookmarks. (Click the small arrow button on the right to see a list of all of your bookmark folders, then click the New Folder button.) You can also rename the RSS feed bookmark if you wish. When finished, click OK.



Reading RSS feeds in Firefox

To read your RSS headlines in Firefox, go to the Bookmarks menu and open the folder in which you filed your RSS feed bookmark(s). You should see a list of the current RSS headlines for that feed. To read the full article, just click on the headline.

Thunderbird

Thunderbird also provides the ability to subscribe to and read RSS feeds right along with your e-mail. Thunderbird calls this feature "RSS News & Blogs."

Creating an RSS account in Thunderbird

1. Go to Tools – Account Settings.
2. Click the Add Account button.
3. Choose "RSS News & Blogs" and click Next.
4. Give the account a name (you can call it whatever you want) and click Next.
5. Click Finish, then click OK.

Subscribing to RSS feeds in Thunderbird

1. In your web browser, locate the feed you want to subscribe to. Right-click on the link to the feed and choose Copy Link Location or Copy Shortcut, or, when you get to the "Subscribe to this feed..." page, copy the URL from the address bar. (Highlight it and press ctrl+c or right-click on it and choose Copy.)
2. In Thunderbird, in the column on the left, click on the RSS News & Blogs account you created earlier.
3. On the right, click on Manage subscriptions.
4. Click the Add button.
5. In the "Feed URL" box, press ctrl+v to paste the address of the RSS feed you copied in step 1.
6. Click OK. When Thunderbird is finished adding the feed (it may take a few seconds), use the X to close the RSS Subscriptions window, or use the Add button to subscribe to more feeds if desired.

Reading RSS feeds in Thunderbird

You read RSS feeds in Thunderbird just like you would read e-mail messages. In your folder list on the left, under the RSS News & Blogs account you created, you'll see the feeds you're subscribed to. Click on one and the headlines will appear in the upper right pane (where your message list normally is). Click on one of those headlines to see the full article in the bottom right pane (where the message body normally is).

Deleting feeds

To delete a feed (unsubscribe), right-click on it and choose Delete (Firefox) or Delete Folder (Thunderbird).

Assistance and Questions

If you have any questions or need more information, please call the Help Desk at (920) 403-HELP (4357), contact us via e-mail at helpdesk@snc.edu, or stop by the Help Desk in Cofrin 101. The Help Desk is for St. Norbert College students and employees only.