

# What Is RSS and How Do I Use It?

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RSS is a way for you to keep up with what is new on a website or blog without actually going to the site every day and hunting around. RSS comes to you, so to speak, and tells you what's new on the site. Depending on who you are listening to, RSS stands for Really Simple Syndication, Rich Site Summary, or RDF Site Summary. But it really doesn't matter. What matters is that RSS has been around since about 1999 but most people still don't know how to use it.

## So, how do you use RSS?

To use RSS, you need what is variously called a feed reader, aggregator, or new reader. Some cost money, but some are free and are perfectly adequate for most users. For simplicity, I'll only mention a couple. If you want more, just Google "RSS readers" and you will find plenty.

There are two basic kinds of RSS readers: 1) Those that are software that you download to your computer, and 2) Those that are web-based—that is, you view them as a web page through your browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.). In the first category, the one I use is newsgator's [FeedDemon](http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon/default.aspx) (<http://www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon/default.aspx>). It is free, and it works just fine. If you are using a Mac, a good, free reader is [NetNewsWire](http://www.newsgator.com/Individuals/NetNewsWire/#lite) (<http://www.newsgator.com/Individuals/NetNewsWire/#lite>). You can also read RSS feeds through the free email program, [Thunderbird](http://www.mozillamessaging.com/en-US/thunderbird/) (<http://www.mozillamessaging.com/en-US/thunderbird/>).

The second way you can subscribe to an RSS feed is with a web-based feed reader. One of the most popular and simple to use of these is [Bloglines](http://www.bloglines.com/) (<http://www.bloglines.com/>). Two other popular web-based readers are [My Yahoo](http://my.yahoo.com/) (<http://my.yahoo.com/>) and [Google Reader](https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?hl=en&nui=1&service=reader&continue=http://www.google.com/reader/view/) (<https://www.google.com/accounts/ServiceLogin?hl=en&nui=1&service=reader&continue=http://www.google.com/reader/view/>).

Once you have either downloaded your feed reader software or signed up for an account with a web-based reader, you will need to actually subscribe to the feeds you want. Exactly how you do this varies with the reader, but I will give you the basic process.

Suppose you want to subscribe to the RSS feed for [wordofhisgrace.org](http://wordofhisgrace.org) (I hope you do). On the right side of almost every page on our site,

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you will see "RSS Feed" and this button  under it. Click on the button you see on the webpage. This will bring you to a page that shows you our RSS feed and, in a box in the upper right, shows you half a dozen or more readers you can subscribe to our RSS feed with. If one of these is the one you have, click it and follow the instructions. If not, inside that same box in the upper right, go to where you see "Choose Your Reader" and click the drop down arrow. If you see your reader there, highlight it and click. Follow the instructions.

If you still don't see your reader and you have a reader downloaded on your computer (not web-based—see the next paragraph for web-based readers), click in the box in the upper right of the page where it says, "View Feed XML." This will bring you to another view of our feed. At the top of this page is another drop down box. Click the drop down arrow. If you see your reader, highlight it and click. If you don't see your reader, highlight "Choose Application" and click it. This will bring up a little window in which you can browse through your computer until you find your reader (it will almost certainly be in the "program files" folder). Open up the reader's folder, and then double click the reader's icon. The reader should now be in the drop down box. Hit the "Subscribe Now" button and follow any further instructions.

If you are unable to find your web-based reader, go to the address bar at the top of the page you are on, highlight the address (it is <http://feeds.feedburner.com/wordofhisgrace> ), and hit Ctrl+C on your keyboard (or, highlight the address, right click your mouse, and left click "copy"). Then log into your web-based reader, find the link for adding feeds, click it, paste the address into the space provided for it, and click whatever button you need to add it. For example, as the Bloglines sight is presently laid out, the "add" link is in the upper left of the page. Click it. On the page that comes up, paste the address where it says, "Blog or Feed URL:" and click "Subscribe."

On many readers, after subscribing, you will be brought to a page or see an option for setting certain preferences. For now, I would suggest just leaving these as they are set. On Bloglines, just hit the "Subscribe" button on the bottom of the page. You will then be subscribed. The link to the feed will be in the upper left part of your screen. When you click it, you will see the feed. This may bring you to a page that says, "Display items within the last" with a drop down menu. If you want to see all of the items in the feed, highlight "all items" and click "display." Click on any of the links in the titles, and they will bring you to the article on [wordofhisgrace.org](http://wordofhisgrace.org).

This may seem like a lot to go through. But once you have done it, you can subscribe to all of your favorite sites and see what is new on those sites from one place. Keeping up with what's new is easy. Whenever you bring up your feed reader or go to your online reader and click on the link to our feed or any other feed, the latest articles and audio files will be displayed on top. The feed reader will automatically keep everything up-to-date.

I hope this article is helpful and takes the mystery out of RSS. I know that it's a bit of a hurdle at first, but once you are over it, you will find that it is really a great way to keep up with what is going on and will likely become an essential part of modern communication.