

Lesson 2 - Social networking: RSS and aggregation

Objectives:

1. Overview of social networking
2. RSS and aggregation
3. Discovering blogs
4. Subscribing to RSS feeds

2.1 Overview of social networking

Social networking is not a new concept, but the ability to connect with friends and colleagues has been greatly facilitated by people forming social networks over computer networks.

Watch the video *Social Networking in Plain English* to see that social networking is connections between people – computers help make these connections *visible*!
<http://commoncraft.com/video-social-networking>

Computers help us realize the benefits of using social networking tools not only for

- maintaining friendships (for example, Facebook)
- enriching professional contacts (Linked In, Plaxo)
- shopping online and benefiting from others' opinions (Amazon, eBay)
- but also to LEARN and COLLABORATE in school and business through
 - sharing and filtering information
 - streamlining communications
 - restructuring work environments
 - new ways to manage projects

In these lessons we'll explore these basic concepts of social networking:

TAGGING

Tags are words people make up to help them describe and remember what something on the Web is about. You can apply any number of tags to an object to describe it. You can then use networked computers to pull out all objects on the network that you (or anyone) has described with the same tag.

AGGREGATION

Aggregation means pulling together into one space all the objects of a requested type that the network can find. The network might find these objects according to their tags, or it might find them from their RSS feeds.

RSS

RSS stands for "Really Simple Syndication."

Syndication is a means for sharing content

through subscription. On the internet, users might want to know when content at a particular site is updated. If the site provides an RSS "feed" then by subscribing to that feed, users can see whenever the site is updated.

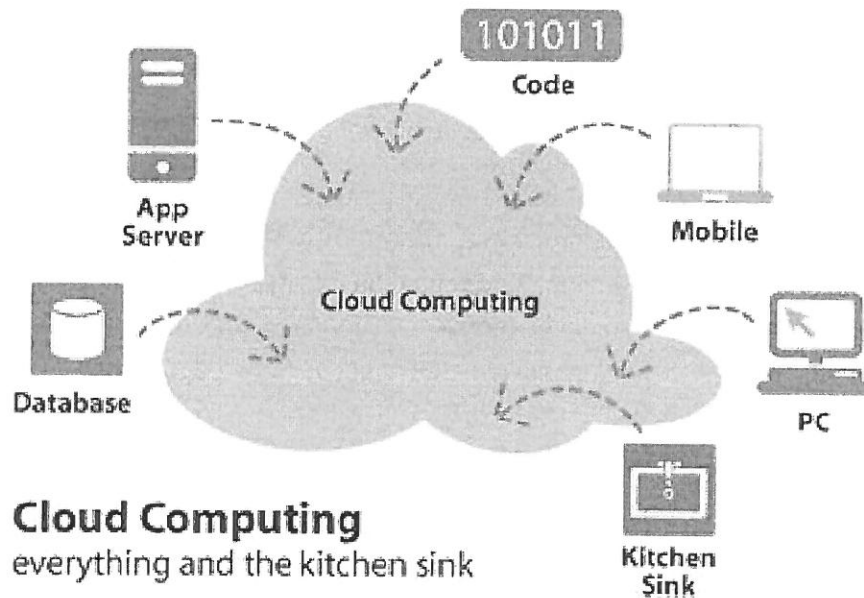
This is important!

In these lessons you will learn more about social networking by

1. Using search tools to find blogs and other sites with RSS feeds containing information useful to you
2. Subscribing to blogs and other RSS feeds in your Google Reader
3. Tagging one or more postings from such sites in your Delicious account
Delicious keeps your bookmarks in the "cloud" (not just on one PC), and shares them with your social network

You will need a minimum of two tools

1. A **Google** account (in order to use **Google Reader**)
2. A **Delicious** account (in order to create social bookmarks in the cloud)



From George Siemens:

http://www.masternewmedia.org/media-literacy-making-sense-of-new-technologies-and-media_2009_08_22/

2.2 RSS and RSS Aggregators

Here are some ways that RSS works in practice:

1. You know some good blogs whose authors write critically and sensibly on topics you are interested in. But it would take a lot of time to have to go and look for new content in all the blogs you follow. If you subscribe to the RSS feeds then your "feed reader" will let you know when the blogs you follow have been updated.
2. You know some sites that let you download recordings you like to listen to on your mp3 player. You can subscribe to their RSS feeds in your "podcatcher" and any new recordings will be downloaded to your computer as they become available, or directly to your mp3 device.
3. You manage a wiki (a website that many people can write to). Productivity is high when many people collaborate on one document, but you need to monitor that all changes are appropriate and that no mistakes are made by accident. You can monitor an RSS feed that alerts you whenever changes are made. If you notice something you need to change, you can set the wiki back to a previous good version while you fix the problem.
4. You get so much email at school and work, you can easily miss an important one. So for important projects you form workgroups where co-workers post to spaces with RSS feeds (like <http://ning.com>). You set up your RSS feed reader to monitor your workgroup activity.
5. You want to make a website that shows what people in your workgroup or class at school have accomplished. You can set up a webpage in Pageflakes or Netvibes or Protopage that will pull in RSS feeds from everyone in your group (from their blogs for example, or from RSS feeds from other aggregators of content)

Now you try it:

Addict-o-matic is a site that automatically creates a portal as in the last example.

Try the URLs below and discuss in class how you think the site works:

<http://addictomatic.com/topic/ADNOC>

<http://addictomatic.com/topic/OPEC>

Discuss: Which of these feeds are taken from tags and which from RSS?

Try some other search terms. Share your best results with the class.

2.3 Discovering blogs

Academics, engineers, and scientists develop their ideas by writing them out and getting feedback from respected colleagues. People blog for different reasons but professionals who blog seriously discuss and develop their most current thinking in the “blogosphere.” Those wishing to keep up with latest developments in their field find it useful to follow the best blogs on their topic.

Blogs are social networking tools because they almost always

- have an **RSS feed**, to alert subscribers to new postings
- allow people to **comment** on posts, so **conversations** take place on blogs
Sometimes the comments have their own RSS feeds
- allow authors to **tag** their posts, so they can be found when searching on tags to find postings on a given topic

Blogs will usually appear in standard search results. Also you can use:

- <http://blogsearch.google.com/> (Google search on just blogs)
- <http://technorati.com/> (searches on **tags** in blog posts)

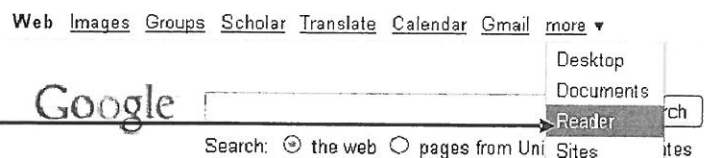
Now you do it

Look up a few blogs on any topic that interests you, (for example ...)

Search term in Google Blogsearch	Sample blog
Maths	http://adifference.blogspot.com/
Physics	http://falconphysics.blogspot.com/ http://www.sixtysymbols.com/
Chemistry	http://www.periodicvideos.com/
Educational technology	http://larryferlazzo.edublogs.org/ http://nikpeachey.blogspot.com/

Any of the above blogs should have useful information for students at the PI.

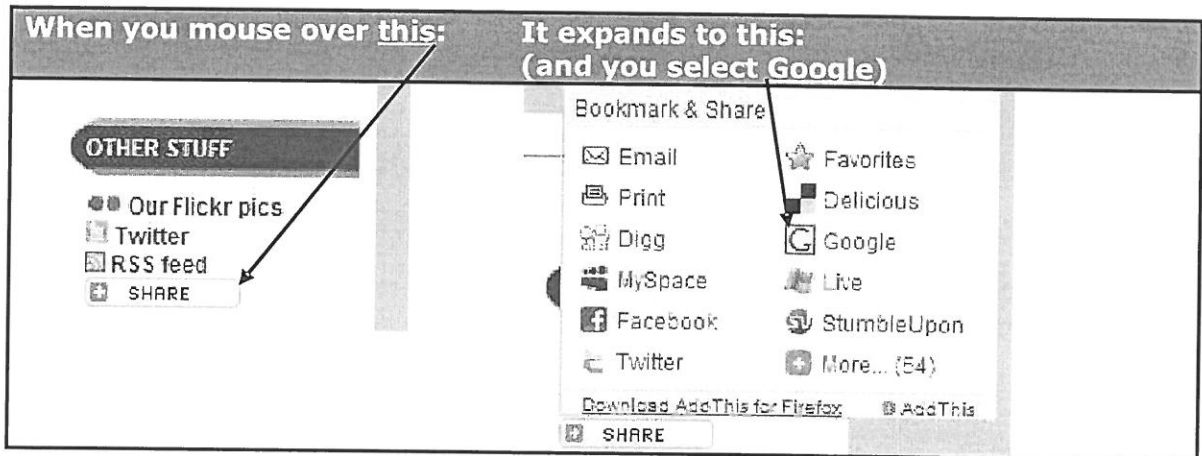
Let’s track any that are interesting to you using Google Reader. You can reach Google Reader by clicking on Reader at the top of any Google screen or by visiting <http://www.google.com/reader/>



LESSON 2 - SOCIAL NETWORKING: RSS AND AGGREGATION

2.4 Subscribing to RSS Feeds (automatically)

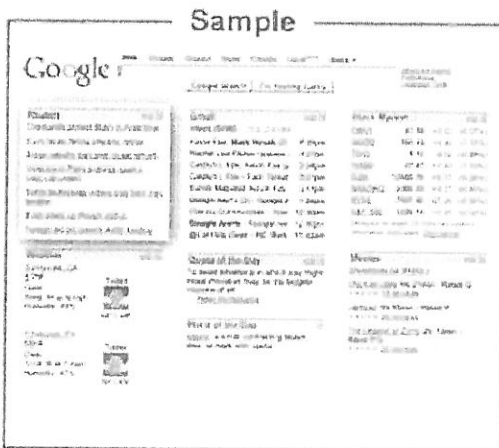
Sometimes this is automated. For example, at <http://www.periodicvideos.com/>



Google sometimes offers you a choice. Here, we'll use Google Reader.

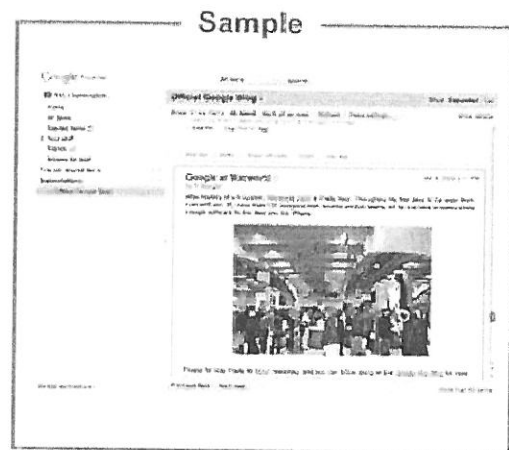
Your Google homepage brings together Google functionality and content from across the web, on a single page.

Add to Google homepage



or

Add to Google Reader

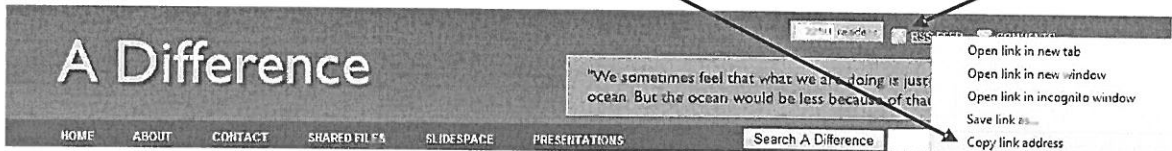


2.5 *Subscribing to RSS Feeds (manually)*

If this process is not icon-automated, you can GET the feed address manually and ADD it to Google Reader; for example, at <http://adifference.blogspot.com/>

Icon picture credit: <http://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/7v84X6ox9P3D74HhMiuqNw>

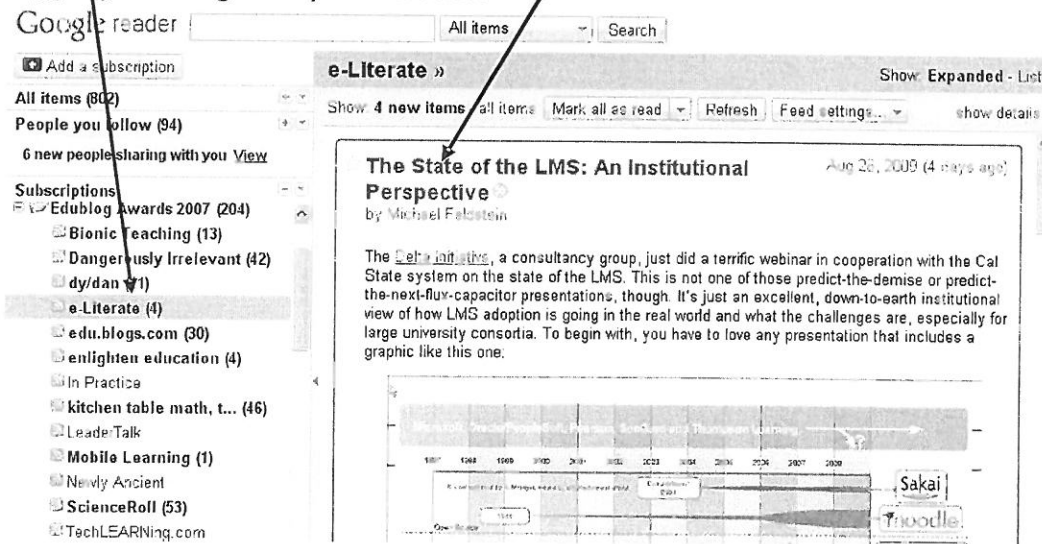
Right click on the orange **RSS icon** and select **Copy Link Location** to grab the feed address:



then **ADD** the feed by pasting it here:



When you have some feeds in your Google Reader, you can read the latest postings from those blogs right in your feed reader. You no longer have to browse on the Internet to see if the sites you follow have been updated. New content is always "aggregated" right to your Reader.

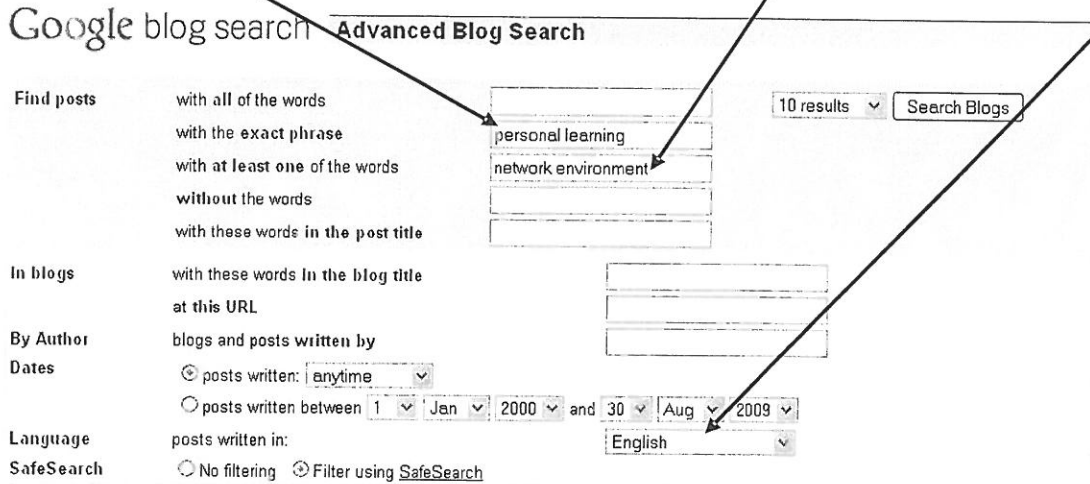


<http://mfeldstein.com/the-state-of-the-lms-an-institutional-perspective/>

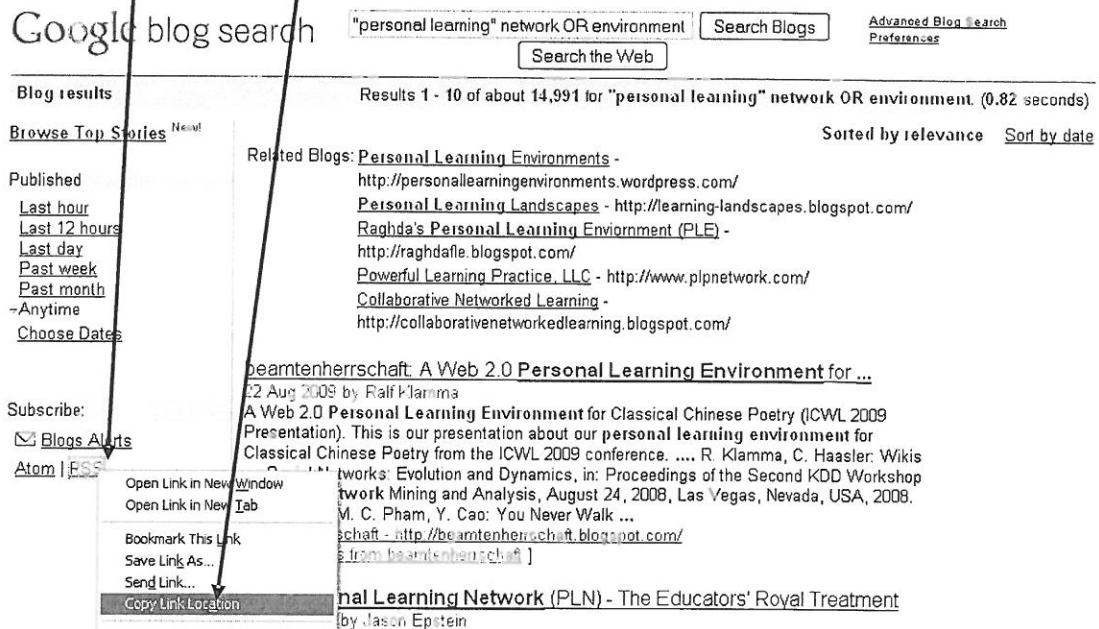
2.6 Subscribing to Internet Searches (manually)

This works for **any site with an RSS feed**. For example, **search results** sometimes have an RSS feed. If you keep search results in your RSS reader, then you can see whenever there is new content online that matches that search.

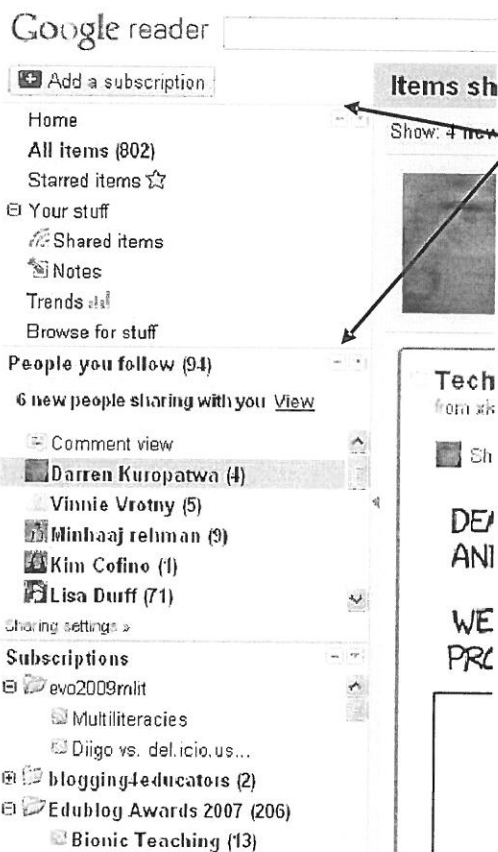
For example, in this Google Blog Search we want only posts containing the exact phrase "personal learning" and then either "network" or "environment" (in English).



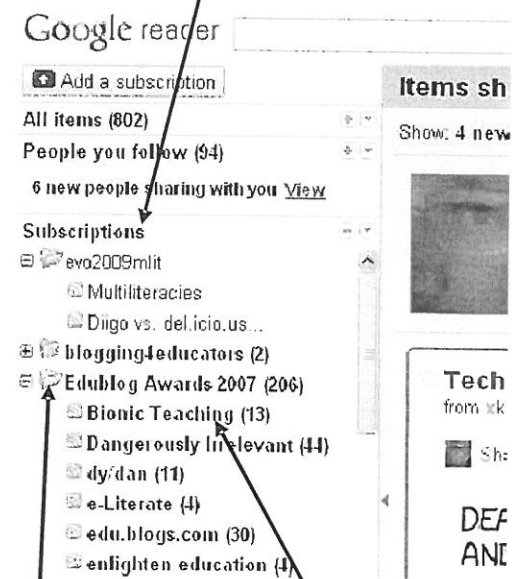
Rather than keying these parameters in each time we want to conduct this search, we can subscribe to the RSS feed of the search. Then Google Reader will show us when the search has been updated with more results (when new content appears on the Internet matching these search results). To do this we manually subscribe to the underlying link here:



2.7 Exploring Google Reader



Google Reader displays the information you ask it to in the left side panel. You can minimize some blocks here by clicking on the minus signs. This gives you a better folder view, like this.



Note that items in **bold** are the **new** ones you haven't read yet.

2.8 Google Reader Settings

As with Windows explorer, you can organize your feeds into folders. Once you have set up some folders, you can drag and drop feed items into those folders.

You access your Settings by clicking on "Manage Subscriptions" just below the Subscription block in the left-hand side panel.

The most important tab here is the **Subscriptions** one, and we'll look at that in some detail below.



Return to the main Google Reader view [here](#)



There are many things you can do here:

- **Create folders:** When you pull down Change folders or Add to a folder, you can add the item to an existing folder or **create a New Folder**
- **Change folders:** You can place any items in any existing or new folder here (or you can drag and drop items in the Subscriptions view on the side panel.)
- **Rename Subscription items:** Click on Rename to change how your subscriptions appear in the Subscriptions list.
- You can filter items shown here to show only certain folders, etc

Now you do it

1. Conduct an Internet search that produces an RSS feed
2. ADD the search feed to your Google Reader
3. Set up some folders in your Google Reader; for example, 'Engineering', 'Science', 'Computing', 'Searches' (as you feel are appropriate)
4. Organize your feeds by dragging them to appropriate folders
5. Show your teacher (or if requested, make a screen shot and submit it as homework in the way your teacher asks for it)

Addict-o-matic, Google Homepage, **Pageflakes**, Netvibes, and Protopage are all services that allow you to put RSS feeds in "blocks" that display on one web page. If you have the results of different searches on such a page, then you can see the results of all your searches on a single web page.

This concept provides a different way of looking at organizing information flow. Previously almost all information was "pushed" to you. For example, anyone (even spammers) can send you an email and unless you set up filters in your inbox you have little control over what reaches you there. RSS provides a way for us to "pull" in only information that we think will be useful.

In modern offices workers are sometimes overwhelmed with information that comes to them through the standard "push" technologies. Therefore, successful project managers try to devise ways for workgroups to "pull" in needed information, powered by RSS.

Now you do it (Optional work for excellent students)

Create your own page in Pageflakes similar to Addict-o-matic

1. Open an account at <http://pageflakes.com>.
2. Individually or in groups, set up a page that will display RSS feeds of members of the group, and any other feeds you think appropriate.
3. Make your page as attractive, as interesting, and as *informative* as possible.
4. Tag your page appropriately (in Pageflakes, and in Delicious)
5. See if other students can find it by searching on your tags
6. Maintain this page over time

Checkpoint 2

Name at least three characteristics of social networking sites.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What social networking sites do you use (or would you like to use)?

What characteristics do these sites have that make these sites social networking sites?

Name at least three characteristics of blogs.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Name at least three ways that you can search for information in blogs.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What is Google Reader? Explain how it works.

What other sites can you use to aggregate content via RSS feeds.
Choose one and explain how it works.