RSS Feeds & Email Alerts for Research

About This Tutorial

This tutorial will teach you how to identify and use RSS Feeds and E-Mail Alerts to automatically get up-to-date results from your database searches. Use the links below to jump to a specific section or simply read along.

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What are RSS Feeds and E-Mail Alerts?

The acronym "RSS" stands for "Real Simple Syndication." RSS itself is an XML (internet language) format that enables easy syndication and sharing of information on the Web. An RSS feed is a way to distribute (or syndicate) any type of continuously updated content on the Internet. News, blog posts, podcasts, videos, databases, journals, search results - all can have an RSS Feed. When users subscribe to such a feed, they start receiving up-to-date content immediately and are able to conveniently view it using their RSS Reader/Aggregator. An RSS Reader/Aggregator is specifically designed to receive RSS Feeds and can come in different shapes - either as an online service or as an actual computer program. It lets the user view the title, the summary, and the link for full access to the newly updated content of interest.

E-Mail Alerts and RSS Feeds are in a way similar. E-Mail Alerts are offered by almost all major providers as a quick and convenient way to have new search results automatically emailed to you on a regular basis. You don't need to go to the website and perform the search again, but rather get all the latest results with direct links to full text and sometimes even links for managing citations. You can specify the frequency for the emails and change other options to customize the alerts better. Since e-mail alerts are delivered to any e-mail address you specify, you do not need a separate program or service to view them.

Why should I use RSS Feeds or E-Mail Alerts?

Simply put, RSS Feeds and E-Mail Alerts save you time. Instead of searching for and visiting each site of interest every day, new information from your favorite sites is automatically delivered to you at whatever time interval you specify! In addition to this, because of the small amount of data contained in the actual RSS Feed, you will be able to easily view it on any device compatible with the XML language - iPhones, Blackberrys, Cell Phones, Pagers, Palm Organizers, etc. E-Mail Alerts can also be accessed on any device that you can open your e-mail with.

Feeds and Alerts will help you better utilize the Library's databases by sending you newly published content from: authors of interest, new research on topics you often search for, up-to-date contents of journals, newly posted articles in the area or journal you select, etc.
How do I identify RSS Feeds?

Locating RSS Feeds is not hard. Most of the time, you can quickly notice the presence of an RSS Feed by the various orange (mainly) icons next to title names, search results, the address bar, etc. Some examples of the most commonly used icons can be seen below:

Besides providing icons, most database providers offer a variety of options to subscribe to RSS Feeds.

What are popular RSS Feed Readers/Aggregators?

There are many different RSS Aggregators on the Web. Some are geared towards video feeds, some audio feeds, etc. Even though Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox offer RSS Reading capabilities, they are not the perfect solution if you want your feeds to be accessible anywhere. Since one cannot access personal bookmarks from everywhere many people choose to subscribe to a (free) online RSS Aggregator or download a program. This will allow you to access your RSS Feeds from any computer. The following aggregators are the most widely used and most popular in their fields:

Web-based Aggregators - Bloglines or Google Reader for the people who already use GMail or other Google Services.

Mac OSX - NetNewsWire

Windows - FeedDemon

Linux - Liferea

How do I subscribe to an RSS Feed or set-up an E-Mail Alert?

RSS Feeds can be read/accessed using a program called an RSS Aggregator or RSS Reader (some aggregators are listed here). Because these programs may vary, there isn't a unified way to subscribe/access an RSS Feed. However, when accessing Adelphi's research databases, there are a few steps that will be the same most of the time. For a detailed example, please click here.

There is no general way to subscribe to an E-Mail Alert. Most vendors would require you to first create a free account and then give you the option to create an "alert" once you do a search. Once you get your search results, there would usually be a link on the top of the page for creating the email alert. Upon clicking it, you would be brought to a page where you can enter your personal information and details on the delivery method and timing. Link text varies from "alert" to "notify" to "email". For a more detailed example, click here.

Following are links to the RSS Feeds and E-Mail Alerts Tutorials offered by some of Adelphi's Database Providers. Click on the name of the Database Provider to access it. One provider usually offers several databases, but the guidelines for setting up RSS Feeds or E-mail Alerts are the same for each. To access the RSS Feeds tutorials for the provider you have chosen, click on the RSS button. To access the E-mail Alerts tutorial, click on the envelope button. You can access the database providers both from the links posted here and from the A-Z List of Databases.
How do I find a specific RSS Feed or E-Mail Alert?

If you are trying to locate the RSS Feed for a particular vendor/database/journal, you have two options:

First - access the database from our A to Z List of Databases and look for the familiar RSS icons.

Or second - use a search engine that looks for RSS Feeds. You can use the following links to search - just substitute the word "database" in the search bar with your own search query:

- Bing RSS Feed Search
- Technorati RSS and Blog Search

Unfortunately there is no particular way to locate a specific e-mail alert since it is all custom-generated. You can visit the vendor's website and, after performing a search, look for an "alert" link to set one up.

What is better to use - an RSS Feed or an E-Mail Alert?

It really depends on your personal preferences, including the number of sources/databases you would like to check, and the amount of time you would like to put into checking them. E-mail alerts can usually be customized and tailored to your interests more than RSS Feeds can. In addition they are delivered directly to your e-mail and you need never use another program or website. However, if you subscribe to many sources/databases, it would quickly fill up your mailbox. Therefore, **e-mail alerts are recommended only if you intend to subscribe to three or less sources/databases**. RSS Feeds, on the other hand, are convenient for checking many sites, and the recommended method if you wish to check all your news and research information from one place.