OBJECTIVE

During this class, we will teach about Really Simple Syndication (RSS), an internet technology that lets you keep up-to-date on your favorite news, blogs, and other websites. You’ll sign up for an account using the online feed reader Bloglines <http://www.bloglines.com/>. After signing up for an account, you will learn how you can add websites and blogs to your Bloglines account. After you add websites, you’ll be able to come back to your account later and read new stories and posts. We will also demonstrate how you can edit your website subscriptions to make them more convenient to read. You will need to have a valid email address to take this class.

OUTLINE

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Do you have websites that you go to all of the time? Maybe you like to check out a newspaper website, perhaps a friend’s blog, or maybe just a site with useful cooking tips? It can get tedious having to go to each of those individual websites every time you want to check for updates. Fortunately, there’s a solution to this problem: Really Simple Syndication (RSS). In this class, we’re going to learn a bit about what RSS is and how you can use a site called Bloglines to take advantage of all RSS has to offer.

**Background on RSS**

Before we get into the intricacies of using RSS to connect to your favorite websites, let’s learn a bit more about the concept.

1. **What is RSS?**
   
   RSS stands for “Really Simple Syndication.” It’s like a subscription service that allows you to keep up with articles and new content from favorite websites. Before RSS, you used to actually have to go to a website to find out if they added new information: new blog posts, news stories, updated information, etc. If you read a lot of websites, this could become very time consuming. Also, sometimes you might have wasted time by going to a website that hadn’t been updated. RSS is a solution to these problems.

   You might think of RSS like subscribing to magazines. Rather than having to, say, go to a library or bookstore to read the magazines, you can subscribe to magazines and have them sent directly to you. Similarly, RSS allows you to “subscribe” to websites, and the new articles will be sent to you via your RSS feed reader, which we’ll discuss shortly.

   When you subscribe to RSS, you are subscribing to a “feed” of a website, a similar concept to a news feed or wire such as the Associated Press. Subscribing means you will be notified when that website adds new stories, content, etc. to its feed. This allows you to keep up with what’s new on your favorite websites, even if there is no way of knowing when they are going to add new content. You can view multiple RSS subscriptions in one place – generally in a program or website called a “feed aggregator” or “feed reader” - eliminating the need to check all those individual websites. In a very real sense, RSS lets the web come to you rather than requiring you to go out to the internet to see what’s up.

2. **How do I know which websites allow me to subscribe to an RSS Feed?**
   
   There are a few ways you can find out if your favorite websites have RSS feeds. One is through an RSS subscription service, which we will show you today. Many websites will also have a link or icon you can click to subscribe. Several websites use the RSS symbol (which is usually orange), shown at right, to indicate that you can subscribe. If you see this symbol on a website, that means it has an RSS feed to which you can subscribe. This icon is a relatively universal, so you may see it on many sites. Other ways you might know you can subscribe
to a website are if it has a link that says “RSS,” “Atom” (a similar technology to RSS), “Subscribe,” or other related terms.

RSS feeds are like webpages in that they have a web address (also known as a URL), visible in the address bar of your web browser. When you click the RSS icon or other link to an RSS feed, it takes you to that address. You can then place this address into your RSS reader to subscribe to the website.

3. How do you use RSS?
You can subscribe to RSS feeds by using what is called a “feed reader” or “aggregator.” Feed readers are like the Grand Central Station for your RSS feeds: all of the new stories and content from the feeds will be delivered to your feed reader, no matter from what website the content comes. You might think of them like mailboxes where you receive all of your magazines, newspapers, mailings, or emails. Different feed readers work differently, but they all do pretty much the same thing.

Many people also read RSS feeds on internet browsers, such as Internet Explorer 7 or Firefox, or email programs, such as Outlook or Thunderbird. While we will not discuss these options in this class, you may want to explore them as you become more familiar with RSS.

To access all of the wonderful things that RSS feeds can bring you, we are going to use a website called Bloglines <http://www.bloglines.com>. Google Reader <http://www.google.com/reader> and My Yahoo <http://my.yahoo.com> are other popular feed readers. Basically, Bloglines enables you access a number of different blogs, news feeds, and such by only going to a single website. You can access Bloglines from any computer with access to the internet.

Setting up your Bloglines account

Bloglines is similar to web-based email (like Hotmail) or online shopping sites (like Amazon) in that it requires you to set up an account, with a username and password. You will need a valid email in order to do so.

1. Begin by opening up any web browser, such as Internet Explorer or Firefox. In the address bar, type the following: http://www.bloglines.com/. Press “Enter.”

2. Doing this will bring you to the Bloglines home page, displayed on the next page. To sign up for an account, click the “Sign up now” link in the middle of the page. Also, note the “Log in” link in the top right corner. Once you set up your account, you can click this link to access your account when you come back to Bloglines later.

3. The “Sign up now” link will bring you to a screen that may be familiar, if you’ve set up an online email account: a registration page. Fill in your email address and select a password.
When selecting a password, make sure that you choose one that you’ll remember! Then, select your preferred Time Zone and Language and click “Register.”

4. Tah dah! You now have your very own Bloglines account.

After you sign up for your account, Bloglines will send a message to your email account asking you to confirm your account. This is just Bloglines’ way of making sure that you’re an actual human being and not some sort of computer trying to trick it. Click on the link provided in the email to confirm your account. Until you confirm it, your account will show the following message.

Your account has not been confirmed yet, please reply to the email verification message that was sent by Bloglines. **Click here** to have another verification email sent to you, or **click here** to change your profile.

Until your account is confirmed, Bloglines may limit you from doing some things (e.g. emailing stories to friends). Once you confirm, though, you will have access to all Bloglines has to offer. For the purposes of this class, we’re going to skip confirming our account for a while and just forge ahead to learn about Bloglines!
Your Bloglines home page

When you first login to your Bloglines account, you’ll see a screen like the one below. We’ll go over each of the important aspects of the website.

1. **Feed list:**
   This area lists all of the websites and feeds to which you’ve subscribed. Since our account is new, we only have one feed subscription: Bloglines News. We’ll add more soon enough.

2. **Feed options:**
   Here’s where we can actually add some websites and feeds! You can also change the order of your list of feeds, alter how they appear, etc. We’ll discuss the options here in detail later in the class.

3. **Viewing area:**
   The viewing area is what you’re really interested in seeing. It’s where you see the entries for the blog or website feed that you’re reading.

4. **Saving & viewing options:**
   These tabs offer different options for saving your feeds, commenting on them, combining them, or even creating your own blog. We will not discuss these options during this class.

5. **Log Out**
5. Log Out

When you’re finished reading your feeds for the day, this link is what you click to log out.

Of course, our Bloglines account is pretty boring without anything to read on it. Let’s start adding some feeds!

Adding blogs and website feeds

The process of adding a blog or other RSS feed to your Bloglines account (or any other RSS reader) is frequently called “subscribing.” In this way, you might think of it as being similar to subscribing to a magazine. When you decide to get a magazine, you will receive new copies of that magazine periodically. RSS feeds are the same way: when you subscribe, you’ll be able to see future posts, headlines, etc. from that website.

Of course, to add blogs and RSS feeds, you first need to find them. Bloglines does have an option to search for feeds (in the top right corner of the home page), but often you can find them simply by looking around on your favorite websites. Websites will often include links that say something like “RSS feeds,” “Atom,” “Subscribe to our blog,” or something similar. As we noted in the first section, there is also the universal icon for RSS that you can click to gain access to a website’s feeds. Clicking on those icons or links will take us to address for the feed, which we can then use to subscribe to that feed in Bloglines.

Now, let’s add our first feed to our Bloglines accounts. Let’s say that you want to add a feed for national news. We’ll start off using the NPR website to see if it has any RSS feeds to which we can subscribe.

1. Begin by going to the web page http://www.npr.org. Try not to close the window with your Bloglines account when you do this! You can avoid having to close it by opening a new tab or window in your web browser.

2. You should now be on a screen that looks similar to the one above (though with different news). Do you see anywhere you can click to get to an RSS feed on NPR’s home page?

3. On the left side of the screen, you’ll see a little RSS icon
with the words “News Feeds.” Clicking on this will take you to a page listing the various feeds NPR has to offer (Top Stories, Arts & Culture, etc.), represented by small RSS icons with the title of the feed next to them. Select any category you want and click on its name. We’re going to select “Top Stories.” Clicking the title will take you to a pretty sparse looking page that looks like the one shown on the previous page. These are the stories that will appear when you subscribe to this RSS feed. However, what we’re really interested in from this page is the web address. This address is the “subscription” for the NPR’s Top Stories RSS feed. Copy the URL from the address bar.

4. Next, go back to your Bloglines account. On the top left side of your screen, you’ll see a link that says “Add.” Clicking this link enables you to subscribe to a feed.

5. When you click the link, it will open up a screen in the Viewing area like the one above. Now, paste the URL you copied into the box provided and click “Subscribe.” This takes us to the subscribe screen, shown below. Before you move on to step 7, check out the picture to learn a bit more about all of your options when subscribing to feeds.

### Subscribing to a blog in Bloglines

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<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Folder</strong></td>
<td>Allows you to organize your feeds in different folders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Display preferences</strong></td>
<td>Tell Bloglines whether you’d like to see the entire news story, a summary, or just the title.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Notes</strong></td>
<td>Write yourself helpful notes, such as a brief description, whether it’s for work or pleasure, etc.</td>
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6. Click “Subscribe” to add your feed to your Bloglines account. The lefthand side of your screen should now show that you’ve subscribed to NPR News, as shown at left.

Your turn: Now that you’ve learned how to add a blog or website feed to your Bloglines account, practice a bit more by adding the feeds for Arbor Update (http://www.arborupdate.com), the Ann Arbor News (http://www.mlive.com/annarbornews/) and AADL’s books blog (http://www.aadl.org/catalog). After you’re finished, the upper left of your screen should look similar to the image at right.

Hint: Sometimes, websites don’t always make it obvious how to subscribe to feeds. For instance, Arbor Update only has a small link on the right side of the screen that says “RSS & Atom feeds.” AADL’s link is at the very bottom of the page. Unfortunately, you may have to do some searching to find the link to subscribe to some websites’ feeds!
Of course, the real reason why you spent all this time adding these feeds is to check out the interesting news stories and blog posts. You can view a website’s feed by clicking on its name on the left side of your screen. The bolded number in parentheses is the number of new stories that you haven’t seen.

So let’s take Bloglines for a spin by looking at some blog posts! Click on the entry for “Ann Arbor District Library Catalog,” and we can see what’s up at AADL. Clicking on a feed title will bring you to the viewing screen, shown below. The viewing screen lists all of the new stories (as well as the stories you’ve saved) for the feed you’ve selected. We detail what the different parts of the viewing screen are underneath the picture.

1. **Feed title**
   The Feed title tells you which blog or news feed you’re currently reading. Clicking the title will take you to the website’s main page or the page relevant to the feed (e.g. the Arts & Culture page for the arts & culture feed from NPR).

2. **Story title**
   The story title is the title for the individual blog post or news story you’re reading. Clicking on its title will take you to the story on the website itself (rather than keeping you in Bloglines). This is often beneficial, as sometimes the whole blog post is not available in
Bloglines. You might also be able to see special content like videos only if you’re on the website.

3. Content
The content is what you’re really here for: it’s the meat of the news story, blog post, etc. It typically includes text, however, it may also include pictures, videos, and internet links. Clicking on the blue underlined links will take you to other resources that the author thought worth pointing out to you. Please note that some website feeds do not display all of their content through feed readers like Bloglines. Sometimes you’ll see only summaries, the first few sentences, or only the text content (e.g. no videos or pictures). You can see the whole post by clicking the story title, though. You can also view comments on the post by clicking the “Comments” link.

4. Email This
Sometimes you may find a story that may interest one of your friends or colleagues. Clicking this link will allow you to quickly email a link to the post to others. Don’t worry, though: Bloglines won’t give out your friends’ email addresses to spammers! Bloglines will not give you access to this feature until you confirm your account.

5. Keep New
You may also find a post so interesting that you want to save it to read later. Clicking the box next to “Keep New” will do this. The post will stay in Bloglines as long as you keep the box checked. Typically, saved posts will be at the bottom of the list of stories, since they were published earlier. Bloglines will tell you how many posts you’ve saved in a feed by putting a second grey number in parentheses after the number of new posts.

One important consideration when you click on a feed is that it will mark all of the stories in that feed as “read.” Keep this in mind when you’re going through the feeds to read them. Also, another consideration is that you don’t have to read every post, just like you don’t have to read all of your emails. Sometimes, you may find it simpler to skip over reading some stories or just glance at the headlines to get a feeling for going on.

Other options when you’re reading your blogs
While you’re viewing a blog, Bloglines also gives you access to a few options to help you manage your blog subscription and even find new blogs. There are two places to access these additional options: on the top right-hand side of your screen and at the very bottom of your list of content. Let’s talk about the top options first.

Related feeds
This is perhaps the most interesting option offered here. It allows you to find RSS feeds that may be similar to the one that you’re reading. These similar feeds are based on what other
people who read that feed also read. For instance, when you click “related feeds” for the Ann Arbor District Library Catalog, you get the following results:

Mark all new
Sometimes, you may be reading a blog but not have time to finish reading all of the stories. Unfortunately, once you click on a blog in Bloglines to read it, it will assume you’ve read all of the posts. This option lets you get around this problem. Clicking “Mark all new” will leave all of the posts new so that you can come back later to read them.

Unsubscribe
Sometimes, you may find that a news feed or blog isn’t as good as you expected. That’s okay! By clicking this link, you can remove the website from your Bloglines account and unclutter it a bit.

Edit subscription
Clicking “edit subscription” will take you back to the subscription screen for your news feed. You may remember seeing this screen when we were adding blogs to our account. If you’d like a refresher on it, turn back to page 7

Viewing old blog posts
Now that we’ve checked out options displayed at the top of the viewing screen, let’s check out the one option at the bottom: viewing previous blog posts, as shown on the left.

Down at the bottom of the viewing area, you will find the option to show items from the last few hours, days, or weeks. Sometimes, you may have already read the blog posts for a particular site, but you’d like to go back and review them again. No problem for Bloglines! Just click the arrow next to where it says “24 Hours” and select how far back you’d like to view. Given how quickly and prolifically some sites, like newspapers, update their RSS feeds, this is a welcomed option.
**Editing your blog subscriptions**

Now that you’ve learned how to read and save your blog posts, you might want to make them a bit easier to read by organizing them. You might even decide that you want to unsubscribe from a few blogs, if you find they’re not as interesting as you thought. Good news: Bloglines lets you do all of those things. To edit your various subscriptions in Bloglines, click the “Edit” button in the upper left corner of the screen.

Clicking “Edit” will change the left side of your screen to look like the picture to the right. This screen gives you access to a number of options including creating new folders, deleting feeds, sorting them, and changing the order of your feeds.

**Creating folders and moving feeds into them**

Let’s begin by organizing our feeds a bit. We seem to have a lot of feeds about Ann Arbor. Maybe we should make an Ann Arbor folder!

1. Begin by clicking the “New Folder Link.” This will open the New Folder prompt shown below.

2. Type “Ann Arbor news” and click “OK.” You should now see a new folder appear in your list of blogs, as shown below.
3. Moving feeds into your newly minted folder is easy! All you have to do is click and hold your left mouse button and drag them into the folder. Try this now by dragging your subscriptions for Arbor Update and MLive into the Ann Arbor news folder.

**Hint:** Wondering where your feeds went now that you drag them into the folder? Click on the + icon to the left of the folder to “expand” it and show what’s inside.

**Deleting feeds**
After reading a few posts for a news feed to which you’ve subscribed, you may find that it’s not as interesting as you’d hoped. No problem! While you’re on the edit screen, you can delete feeds easily. All you have to do is click and hold your left mouse button on the feed you’d like to delete and drag it into the trash. Try this now with your entry for Bloglines News.

**Sorting feeds**
Before we finish up with editing our feeds, let’s discuss sorting your feeds. Bloglines automatically sorts your list of feeds alphabetically, but you have plenty of other options. If you click the arrow to the right of “Choose Operation,” you can also sort your feeds by the number of new entries or the ones with the newest or oldest stories. These options are shown on the right side of this handout.

Of course, you may not like any of those options. Fortunately, you can organize your feeds however you want. All you have to do is left-click and hold on a feed title and drag that title to where you want it to be. It’s that simple!

Are you done with editing your blogs and news feeds? To go back to view your feeds, just click on “(Finished)” near the top of the screen.

**Feed options**
Before we turn you loose to find yet more blogs and news feeds, let’s look at some other options you can change in Bloglines to improve your reading experience. To get to the feed options, just click the “Options” link on the upper left of your screen. This will open the page below, and all of the great options that come with it.
1. Open Links In
This option tells Bloglines what you’d like it to do when you click one of the blue links in a story. Generally, “Open in New Window” is the best option because it opens a new window (or tab) rather than taking your web browser away from Bloglines. If you open links in the same window, you may have to click the Back button to find Bloglines again.

2. Feed Folders
Remember that folder that we created earlier? This option tells Bloglines whether you want to always see the feeds in that folder or not. If you select “Keep folders open,” you will always see them. If you select the second option, you’ll have to click the + button every time you want to see the feeds in folders.

3. Sort Order
Sort order determines in what order blog posts appear when you’re reading content from websites: newest first or oldest first. Think about how you prefer to read your email: do you read the old ones first or the new ones? Your email habits may be a good reflection of how you’d like to read your blog posts and news feeds.

4. Posting Length
Some websites summarize the information in their blog posts and news stories, and all of them include headlines for the entries. If you’d rather only see headlines or summaries instead of the whole story, these options are for you. Remember, you can always click the title link to read the entire story on the feed’s website.

Now that you’ve learned the ins and outs of Bloglines, you’re ready to start exploring your own blogs, newspapers, and websites for things that interest you. We hope that we’ve taught you some valuable techniques to read blog and news content that interests you. Have fun searching for more interesting news feeds.

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