

Steps in Setting Up a Learning Community Based Upon RSS

Preliminary Work

- Decide what software you want to use for syndication and aggregation. Syndication software (used to create and maintain feeds) can be web-based or client-based. The advantage to web-based syndication is that no web server or web space is required. Aggregation software is best used as client-based if students have their own computers or web-based if they do not.
- If you are going to use a blog as part of your RSS community, make sure the blog is set up, students have accounts, and that an RSS feed is connected to the blog.
- If you are going to use a wiki as part of your RSS community, make sure that you set up the wiki so that an RSS feed is connected to it. Also, if you are going to limit access to only your students, make sure that you set up the appropriate user accounts and permissions.
- Set up your own RSS feed and add a few introductory items. Note the url of your feed so that it can be publicized when the course begins.
- Put introductory entries on the class blog (if you are using a blog)
- Put some introductory material into the class wiki (if you are using a wiki)

Student Instructions

- Let the students know which aggregator(s) you want to use and give them instructions for setting up their reader (aggregator)
- Have them subscribe initially to the following:
 - Your RSS feed
 - The RSS feed for your class blog (if you are using one)
 - The RSS feed for your class wiki (if you are using one)
- Instruct the students on how to create their feed and add items to it.
- Instruct students to email you with the url to their feed, once it is established
- As you receive feed url information from students, each url should be publicized on your feed as an item. If students are subscribed to your feed, they will receive this information via your feed and can then subscribe to each url you give them.
- Give students a deadline for establishing their feed so that all students, ultimately, will be subscribed to the feeds of all of the other students in the class by a particular date.

Once all students have subscribed to all other student feeds, they are ready to collaborate. I have found that this generally only takes a week or two to accomplish. The rest of the semester is used for collaboration. Once students have gone through this initial process, there is nothing else technical to do and they can concentrate on content.