



Online Connection

A publication for members of the Outreach and Technical Assistance Network
www.otan.us

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OTAN Adds RSS News Feed

Do you want to read the latest news or the latest blog from a particular Web site? You can have updates sent to you directly by using an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed. OTAN has just added an RSS feed of our news articles.

What is RSS?

You can subscribe to news sites, blogs, and podcasts, among others, by clicking on a button. Generally, Web sites that provide RSS feeds are sites that change content frequently. The California Department of Education (CDE) provides an RSS feed of home page news items. Other familiar Web sites providing RSS feeds include: CNN, the BBC, NY Times, and the LA Times.

Why would I want to use RSS?

RSS provides an easy way to keep up on news and events that are important to you. You decide what news you want to hear, and how often you want to hear it. It's as if you were programming your own evening news broadcast, or editing your own newspaper!

RSS feeds come to you. You don't have to visit an entire list of sites every day. You'll just visit your reader and the news you want comes to you. For example, let's say you have a Google account and you add OTAN News RSS feed to your Google home page. The next time you go to Google, you will see links to the latest OTAN news stories below the search box. More good news: most RSS subscriptions are free!

You can't read an RSS feed directly, you'll need specialized software to read it for you. That's where your RSS reader comes in. RSS readers are sometimes called RSS "aggregators," because they aggregate all the RSS feeds you have subscribed to.

What is an RSS reader?

It's up to you to decide what kind of reader to use. RSS readers are available to use with your web browser, as a stand-alone desktop application, or in your email system.

Browser-based: these readers will work with any browser and any operating system. My Yahoo, Personal Google, and Protopage are three popular examples. If you use the Firefox browser, it's built-in: you can download and display RSS feeds as bookmark folders.

Desktop applications: you can also download and display RSS feeds using Desktop applications. FeedDemon (Win), FeedReader (Win), and NetNewsWire (Mac) are good examples of Desktop-based readers.

Email-based readers: If you use Microsoft Outlook, there are several add-ons available to download. NewsGator and Attensa are two examples.

How do I use an RSS reader?

Once you have selected and downloaded an RSS reader, follow the instructions included with your reader to set it up. For most readers, you'll just need the URL of the RSS feed. Enter the URL into your reader, and your news will be downloaded immediately. The reader will take care of getting updates. You can relax and let the world come to you. Have fun!

Read More....

O'Reilly.com: "A Brief Note on RSS Aggregators" (<http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/wlg/4070>)

Google: "Explore Google Reader" (<http://www.google.com/reader/things/tour>)

Wikipedia: "What is RSS?" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rss>)

About.com: "Net for Beginners" (<http://netforbeginners.about.com/>)



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RSS Feeds for Teachers

I attended an interesting workshop at the Computer Using Educators (CUE) conference recently. The speaker, Alan November, contended that blogging and RSS feeds have changed his teaching and his students' learning more than any other new technology. The reason is that learners can share their written work and information with each other as well as with the instructor. He gave an example of a high school calculus teacher in Canada who assigns a student to take notes each day and post them on the class blog. If the student doesn't have the notes up by the next day, there is peer pressure to get them done, and collaboration in making sure they are accurate. This blog is at <http://pc40s.blogspot.com/>. You will see the orange XML and Subscribe buttons that allow students, and anyone else, to get new posts to this blog sent to their news reader.

What if one of your students were assigned to post a daily description of the class, or a list of topics studied, or the answers to a worksheet, and other students could read it the next day? That student is taking responsibility for their learning, and the responsibility is passed around. If you had an RSS feed on your class blog, new posts would be automatically sent to your news reader, and to your students if they subscribed. Subscribing to the class blog or Web site could be part of staying connected if a student were absent for a period of time.

What other RSS feeds might be interesting?

How about the New York Times? Go to www.nytimes.com/services/xml/rss/ and check out all the possibilities.

You can subscribe to Middle East news, nutrition science, or wedding fashions. If not the New York Times, almost every news source has an RSS feed now. On the Web site look for the little orange button.

Free-esl.com has a collection of RSS feeds for English learners at free-esl.com/channels/rss/default.asp, including the blog of an ESL teacher living and teaching in Japan.

Go to www.braser.com/spanword.php to receive a Spanish word of the day. You can find this type of feed for almost any language.

Some RSS "lingo"

An RSS subscription is usually called an "RSS feed," "RSS stream," or "RSS channel."

RSS means "Really Simple Syndication"

On web pages, RSS feed links are usually linked using one of the following graphics:



Ask the Techies

Q. I have heard that OTAN is offering an RSS feed. What program can I use with the RSS feed? - Matthew Batkin

A. Wow, Matthew, you really are on top of the news when it comes to OTAN. We just recently added the feature of RSS feeds to our Web site. For those unfamiliar with RSS feeds, take a look at the article on the front page explaining RSS.

To use an RSS feed, whether it is from OTAN, BBC, CNET, CNN or many other organizations, you need to either install a piece of software called a RSS reader or use an RSS reader Web site. In either case, the reader looks for the RSS feeds from those Web sites you subscribe to and displays the top new items. One RSS reader can display the top news articles from several different Web sites at the same time. It's that simple to scan all of the top news articles from around the Internet on one screen.

To start getting the news, you'll need to choose an RSS reader. If you prefer a Web page based readers, open your browser to either the Google RSS Reader (<http://reader.google.com>) or the News Is Free Reader (<http://www.news-isfree.com>). You will need to create a login account to use either site. However, if you are a GMail user, your GMail login will grant you access to the Google Reader Web site.

If you use a PC, you can download the reader software from the following companies:

- NewsGator (www.newsgator.com)
- SharpReader (www.sharpreader.net)

If you use a Mac, you can download the reader software from the following companies:

- Apple Safari RSS (www.apple.com/macosx/features/safari/)
- NetNewsWire (ranchero.com/netnewswire/)

Once you've downloaded the program, just follow the installation steps listed and you will be scanning RSS feeds in no time at all!

If you have a question for the OTAN Techies, please send an email to support@otan.us.

Application for TIMAC Now Available

OTAN's Technology Integration Mentor Academy (TIMAC) is now accepting applications for 2006-08. Participants in TIMAC make a two year commitment, and work with colleagues at their sites to support the effective use of technology, as well as networking with other technology mentors around the state and participating in statewide conferences.

Applications are due May 26, 2006. An information packet, the application, and a list of current participants are all available on the OTAN site at <http://www.otan.us/index.cfm?fuseaction=fullstory&id=9905>, or go to www.otan.com and look for the news item on TIMAC. Now is the time to consider applying, or recommending a teacher from your program. Contact Marian Thacher, mthacher@otan.us or (916) 228-2597 for more information.

Adult Ed Teacher Spotlight

This month we would like to put the spotlight on a teacher who has been using OTAN as a resource since the early 90's. Gwendalina Carrera, better known as Fernanda, graduated from San Francisco State University with a BA in foreign languages (Italian and French), a BS in physiology and an MA in Adult Education. She also has a certificate in French from the Sorbonne in Paris.

She began working at the South San Francisco Adult School right out of college in 1984. Since joining the staff she has taught ESL, Italian, French, Biology, Computer Literacy in Spanish and GED. For the past six years, Fernanda has served as the ESL Computer Lab Coordinator. Her assignment allows her to look for and/or create Web based activities for the 13 ESL classes that rotate through the computer lab. She also provides teaching and staff development materials for the school staff and does much of the testing. One of her primary sources for locating sites and materials is OTAN.



Fernanda Carrera

When asked how she first discovered OTAN she said "I think LeRoy Tolbert, our curriculum and technology coordinator told me about it. It was like finding a gold mine because right in front of me there were dozens and dozens of activities that teachers had posted. I felt like a kid in a candy store! I was so hooked on it that by the end of summer school, I was asked by the principal to stop for a while as I had worked up the school phone bill to an astronomical figure." (This was back in the days before we had easy Internet access and OTAN provided dial-up access to these documents.)

Now that the Internet is easier to access, Fernanda can use the OTAN sites as much as she wants. She looks under the ESL section in "Sites to Use with Students" on the Adult Ed Teachers' (www.adultedteachers.org) Web site to find websites to use with her students in the lab. She's also found

useful sites in the "Other Stuff" category, which is where we place non-program specific resources that could be useful to any adult educator. She likes the information she has found on the topics of Classroom Management, Characteristics of the Adult Learner, and General Internet, too. Right now, she's trying our new Lesson Plan Builder to develop lesson plans.

A number of years ago, Fernanda found Quia (a Web site that allows you to create online activities) using the Adult Ed Teacher's site. Since then, she and a fellow co-worker, Chris Rango, have created approximately 500 exercises, quizzes and games for ESL students. They needed clipart to build some of these activities, so once again, she went to the www.adultedteachers.org site under ESL > Media to find links to clipart sites.

Even though her main focus is ESL, she says she occasionally looks at the other program areas and finds interesting things there also.

Come see OTAN at the following Spring conferences:

CATESOL State Conference

April 5-8, 2006
Bill Graham Auditorium
San Francisco, CA

CCAE State Conference

May 4-6, 2006
Radisson Hotel
Sacramento, CA

CASAS Summer Institute

June 13-15, 2006
Town and Country Hotel
San Diego, CA

Exciting New Materials from the VESL/Workplace Clearinghouse

"Individual and Team Projects & Presentations for VESL" by Kristy Reyes of MiraCosta Community Learning Center build business experience, computer skills, and teamwork, presentation competence and English skills. Hard copy #589 \$15; CD #588 \$20.

"Career Awareness Project" from Palomar College (Marty Furch et. al.) guides three levels of non-credit ESL students to consider career and life goals plus explore opportunities for subsequent education within the college. Level 1 #590 \$18. Level 2 #591 \$18. Level 3 #592 \$19.

For more information contact: Jeanine Eberhardt VESL/Workplace Clearinghouse Educational Cultural Center, SDCCD, 4343 Ocean View Blvd. Bldg. F San Diego, CA 92113 Phone: (619) 388-4941 Fax: (619) 388-4989 Email: veslwkl@otan.us

Executive Director's Message

by John Fleischman

Mitchell Kapor, founder of Lotus Development Corporation, once stated, "Getting information off the Internet is like taking a drink from a fire hydrant." At one time or another we've probably all experienced that sensation of the Web being an information fire hydrant. I suppose that's one reason why a company like Google has a current market value of more than 100 billion dollars. Google was one of the first "search engine" companies to implement an effective algorithm (PageRank) to deliver links to Internet-based information.

As the Internet continues to evolve, commercial companies and educators are exploring new ways to deliver information. One of the greatest transitions over the next few years will be how video is delivered. The entertainment industry is busy figuring out the business model for delivering video to cell phones, PDAs, iPods and other assorted devices. Education video companies are struggling to determine the best and most efficient ways for using the Internet to deliver instructional video to schools.

Other new Internet-based communication technologies are evolving and some of those are beginning to take hold on a broad scale. A few short years ago, words like blog, wikipedia, and podcast didn't exist. Today each of those terms is the subject of much discussion in educational technology circles and in our broader society.

One of the relatively new tools that helps focus the delivery of information via the Internet is Really Simple Syndication (RSS). OTAN is now using that technology to deliver information directly to your computer desktop. Learn all about RSS in this issue of Online Connection.

In adult education, a continuing barrier to increased technology use is effective technology integration. Integration can be improved in a variety of ways, but at OTAN we believe mentoring plays a significant role. OTAN's Technology Integration Mentor Academy (TIMAC) is now accepting applications for the next 2 year cadre.



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