RSS Feeds in Education

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Music Introduction

Connie Ozmer, Instructor
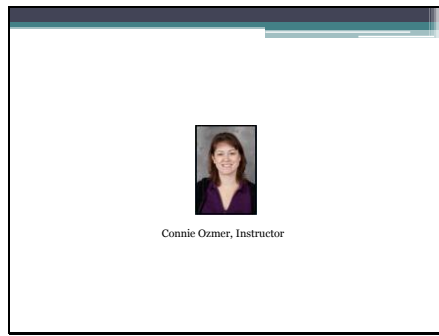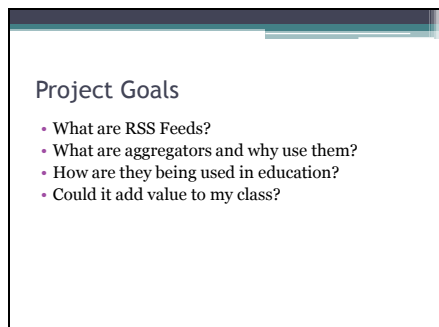
Hi my name is Connie Ozmer and I teach Web Development at Interface College in Spokane, Washington.

Project Goals

- What are RSS Feeds?
- What are aggregators and why use them?
- How are they being used in education?
- Could it add value to my class?

The purpose of this project was to answer questions regarding RSS feeds and to see if it would be useful to add it to my class. The questions I wanted to answer were what are RSS Feeds. How do aggregators work and why do you need one when using an RSS Feed. How are RSS feeds currently being used in education and would they add value to a web design and development class?
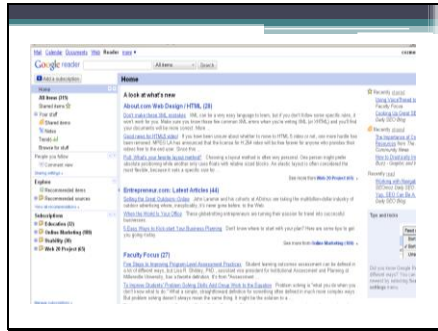
This is the interface for Google Reader when you enter the home page. This is designed to give you a snap shot of what is new for your subscriptions. Notice on the lower left-hand box I have created folders with a general description to keep my subscriptions organized. Under each folder you will see the actual web sites I have subscribed to.
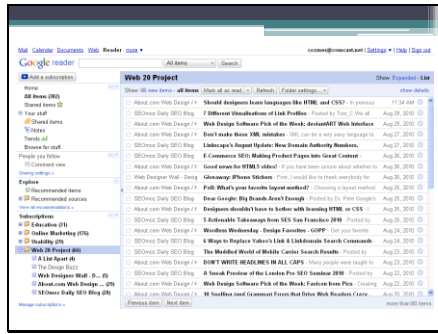

List View – I liked this view of my feeds the best because I could quickly scan titles to see what articles I would want to read. It is a great way to see a topic that you may be talking about in class. Notice I have the folder "Web 20 Project" highlighted and all articles in that folder appear in my list view.
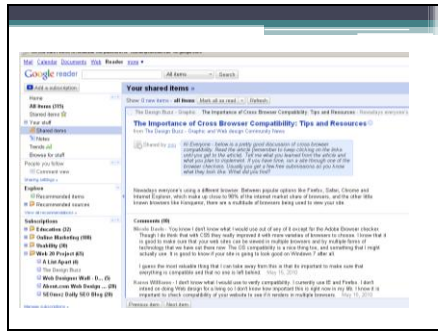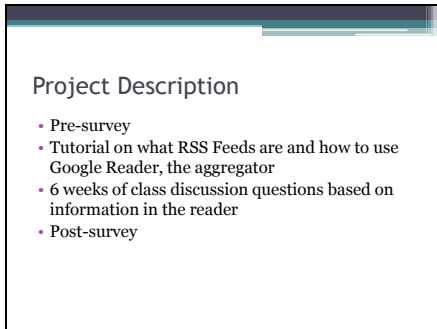

This is an example of the DQ – notice my question is in the light blue area that is in italics. In the Comments section – those are the students' responses. Note is says who the student is and gives a time/date stamp as to when they posted their comment. Comments are listed one after the other so if you were responding to a specific response you had to be clear about it.
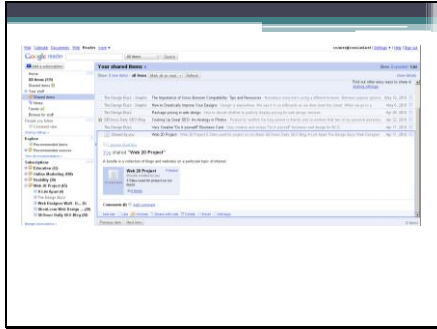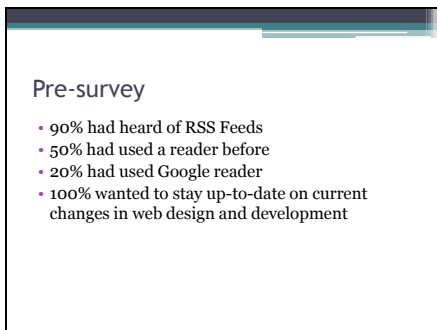
I created the Web 20 Project bundle with 5 sites in it. I then put it in my shared area. My students were able to subscribe to this bundle. I found this the easiest way for my students to keep track of what we were all looking at as there are so many sites to subscribe to.

Project Description

- Pre-survey
- Tutorial on what RSS Feeds are and how to use Google Reader, the aggregator
- 6 weeks of class discussion questions based on information in the reader
- Post-survey

To start the project, I wanted to get an idea of what students knew of RSS Feeds so I asked each student participating in the study to fill out a survey. I then provided a tutorial on what an RSS feed was, how to use Google Reader, and then a description of how we would be using it in class. For six weeks using Google Reader, I would post an online discussion question twice a week and they would use the comment view of the reader to respond to each other. Finally I gave out a post-survey to see what they thought of the tool and it's usefulness.

Pre-survey

- 90% had heard of RSS Feeds
- 50% had used a reader before
- 20% had used Google reader
- 100% wanted to stay up-to-date on current changes in web design and development

The survey asked many questions to gauge their level of current knowledge of RSS Feeds and exposure to Google Reader. Most had heard about it, but only a few were using the technology. Most all students were excited about using RSS Feeds. In general, 90% had heard of RSS Feeds, 50% had used a reader before, 20% had used Google reader, and 100% wanted to stay up-to-date on current changes in web design and development.

Tutorial

- RSS Feeds – a way to know what has changed on the internet
- Google Reader – an aggregator
- How to use Google Reader
- Explanation of how use for project

The tutorial covered what RSS Feeds are and how you can use them. The next topic was setting up Google Reader and how to use it. The last step was explaining how we would be using Google Reader. At the completion of the tutorial I gave them time to ask questions. All students were successful in completing the tutorial and setting it up.

Process

- 6 weeks
- 2 DQ a week
- Required participation

For each bi-weekly discussion question, I would read articles and post a DQ as a comment in Google Reader. The student would visit my comment and then respond after they had read the articles. They were then required to respond to two classmates. Discussion questions are already a required part of my class, so all students participated.

Post-Survey

- 83% liked Google Reader
- 83% thought RSS Feeds were useful
- 50% said they would continue to use Google Reader after class, 33% Maybe, 16% No

In general, most students really enjoyed Google Reader. 83% liked Google Reader, 83% thought RSS Feeds were useful, 50% said they would continue to use Google Reader after class, 33% Maybe, 16% No

Post-Student Comments

- "Excellent way to keep informed of certain topics and relate with others with feedback."
- "I like being able to share useful websites and information w/ friends."
- "Easy to use after setup. Nice way to keep abreast of current fads or technologies!!!"
- "It was fairly easy. I liked the discussions that went on."

In general, most comments were favorable as you can see by some of the student comments.

Lessons Learned

- Current Topics
- Comment area too small
- Some setup time, but most thought it was fine
- Easy Setup
- Use tool from the beginning

Students loved discussing the most current topics on our subject. The biggest complaint was the comment area for DQ's – too small for large responses. As an Instructor, it was easy to see what I wanted to discuss as I could see a lot of topics in list view easily, then it was a matter of reading the article.

Most of my students' negative feedback came from them comparing it to how we currently complete DQ's. If I had started with this format from the beginning, I think a lot of comments would not have been an issue.

Summary

- Valuable Tool
- Other capabilities
- Easy to use and setup
- Free

Overall, the tool is really valuable to use. I have always struggled finding the most current information out there on my topic and this tool made it easy. I used it for DQ's, but I can also see how it has other uses such as research. For example, if I gave my students a topic to research, they could create a folder in Google Reader on the topic, and then subscribe to different feeds collecting research.

I found the tool easy to use and easy to help students with and the tool is free. I will continue to use this tool in my other classes and recommend it.

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