

Including a RSS feed in Blackboard

Do you want students to be able to read subject targeted information updated on a regular basis through your Blackboard course, for instance, recent discussion papers from the Centre for Economic Policy Research, or headlines from the BBC? If the answer is yes, then you should include an RSS feed in your Blackboard course.

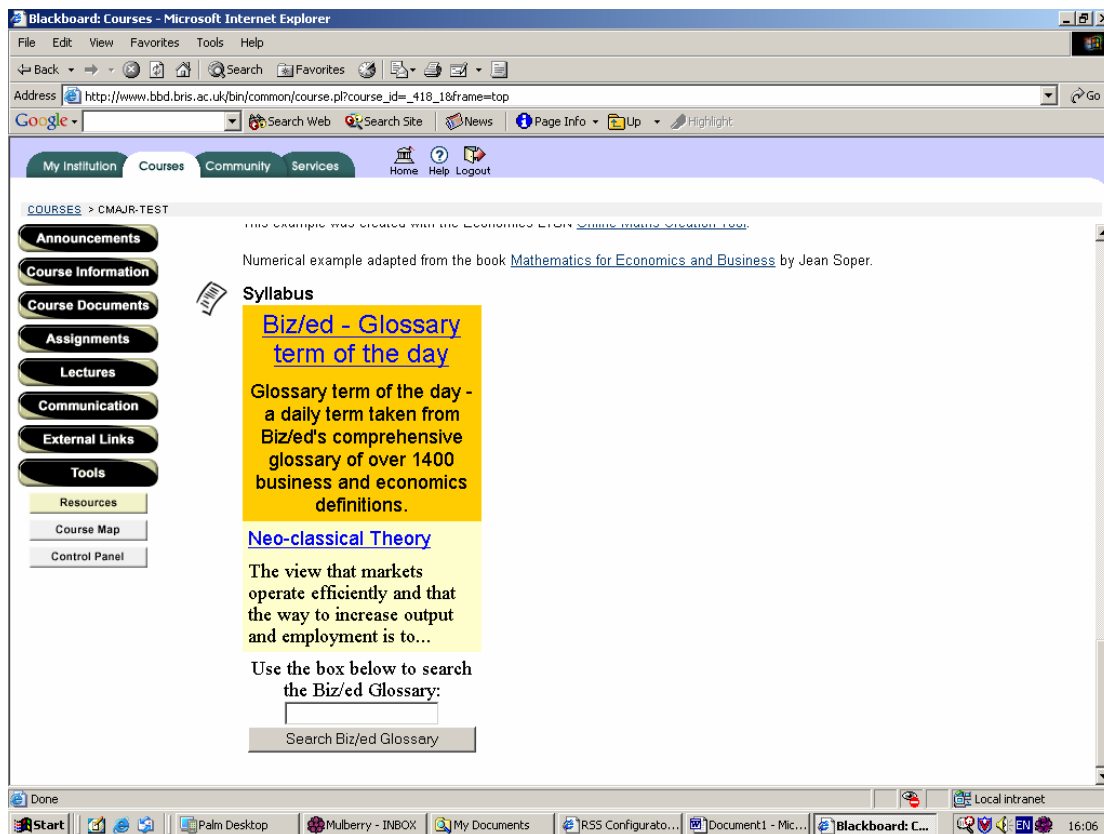
See a working version on the Help Blackboard Instructors Course – under Projects

What is RSS?

RSS stands for Rich Site Summary and is designed for sharing web content. A good method of contextualising the term is to view it as a means of distributing and collecting “what’s new” from different web sites. For instance, you can include daily updates from the BBC.

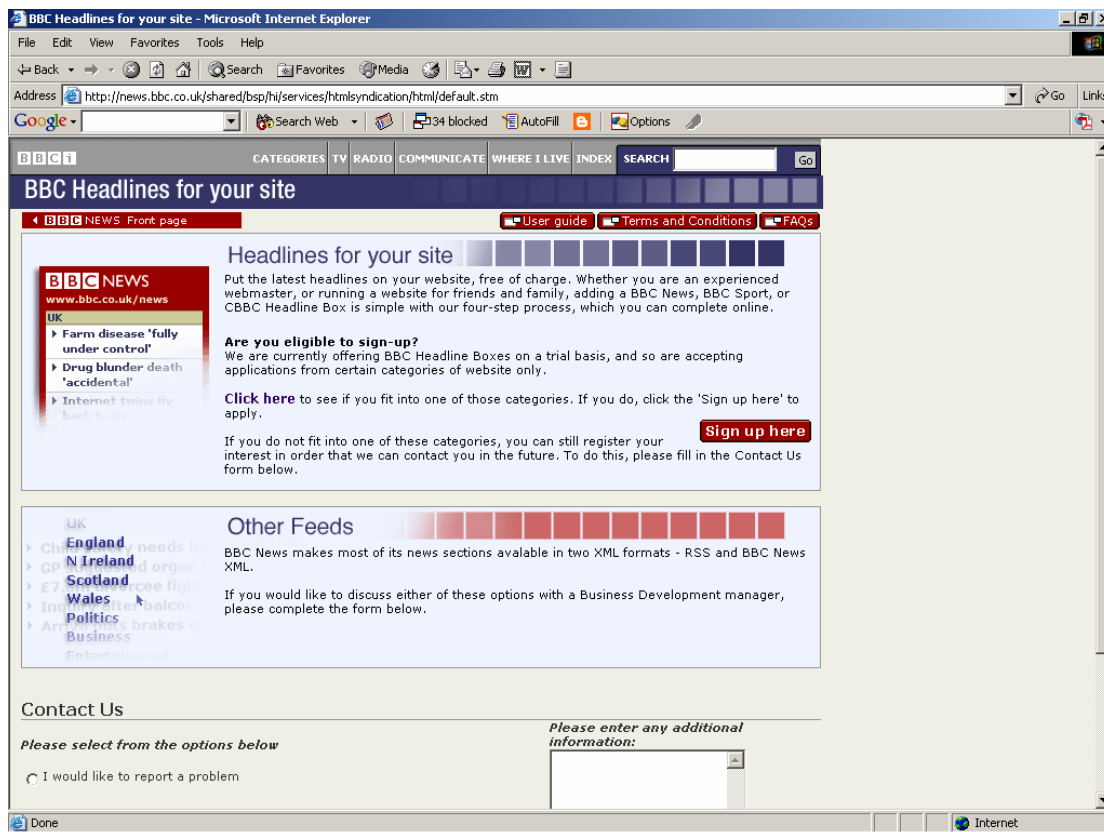
A RSS feed is a good way of offering up to date subject targeted information which will change on a regular basis and can be used as a means of encouraging students to regularly visit the course. A second benefit is that once the RSS feed has been created there is little ongoing maintenance for you.

The following example describes how to include the glossary term of the day from the Biz/ed web site (<http://www.bized.ac.uk>). As illustrated in the screen shot below, the Glossary RSS feed offers a daily term of the day and a means for searching the glossary database. Therefore, the newsfeed can be used to encourage re-visits and also as a stand alone resource.



Where do I get feeds?

Finding suitable news feeds is relatively easy, in many cases Web sites will advertise that they have available RSS news feeds and will also provide addresses, instructions and examples of their use.



In addition you can also use directories of news feeds to find a suitable feed for your course. One excellent source of information on available UK news feeds is the RSSxpress service run by the UK Office for Library and Information Networking (UKOLN – <http://rssxpress.ukoln.ac.uk/>). By following the link you can see the current content of the news feed and also get the URI (uniform resource identifier or address) for the RSS file.

For a wider range on feeds covering all topics and from all over the world a good place to refer to is Syndic8 (<http://www.syndic8.com>). You can search or browse for feeds in particular areas, Syndic8 also gives you a good indication of how regularly the feed is updated and if the feed contains errors. By clicking on the XML button you get the URI for the feed.

How to include a RSS feed in Blackboard

The method of including the RSS feed is two step process;

1. Find the RSS feed URL and use this to generate the appropriate code.
2. Cut and paste this information into Blackboard.

To simplify the process the RSS Configurator is being used. This is developed by the LTSN Philosophical and Religious Subject Centre and is available from the LTSS (to access this area you will need to be on a University of Bristol machine). <http://www.ltss.bris.ac.uk/cgi-bin/rss/rssconfig.pl>

The following steps illustrate the technique

<http://www.ltss.bris.ac.uk>

Including RSS in your Blackboard Course

4th June, 2004

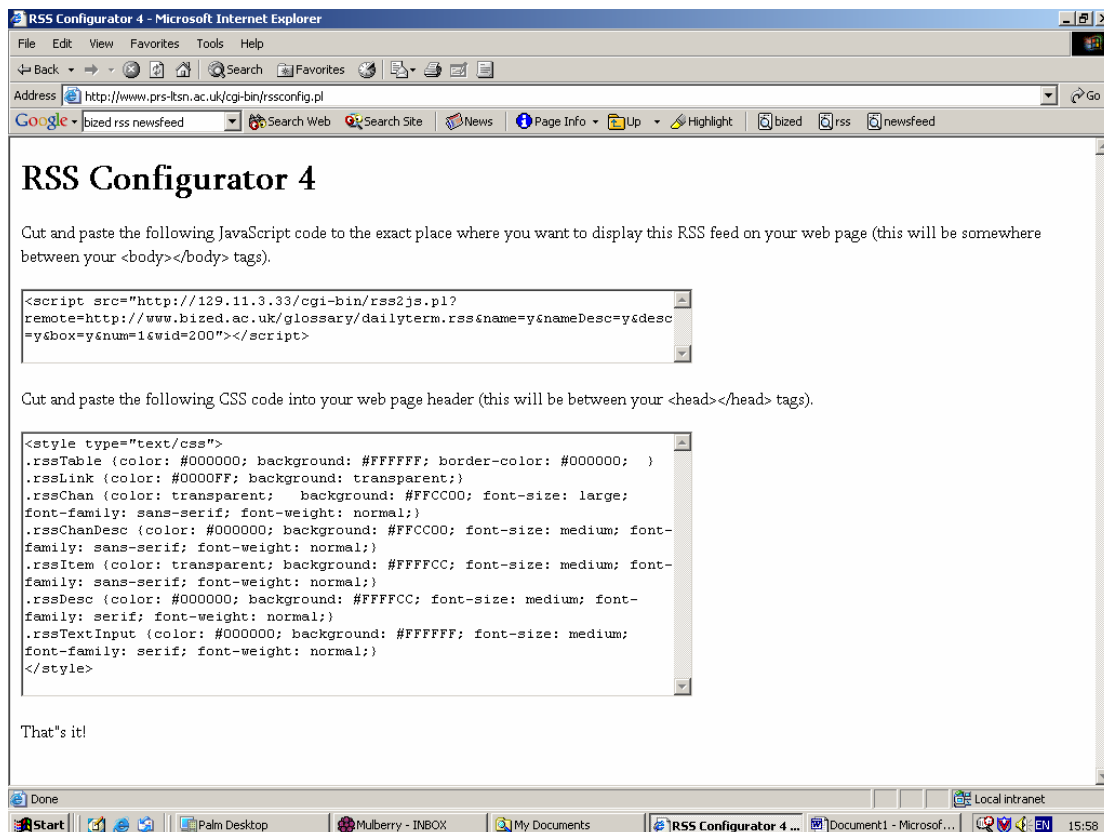
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Step 1 – find the URL of the required RSS newsfeed, the Biz/ed example is <http://www.bized.ac.uk/glossary/dailyterm.rss>

Step 2 – cut and paste the URL into the following web address <http://www.ltss.bris.ac.uk/cgi-bin/rss/rssconfig.pl> and click submit. You will then have a set of options that allow you to change the settings and colours. If you want a search box (assuming one is available) make sure you click Other Items: textinputbox. After making your choices select “Display this feed”. The outcome is illustrated below.



Click “Finished” and the code will be generated (as below)



Step 3 – creating a RSS feed item in Blackboard

To include the RSS feed in Blackboard involves copying and pasting the generated code into the text entry box. However, in order to do this you must first disable the WYSIWYG editor. To do this, go to your home page in Blackboard by clicking on the Home Page tab at the top of the page. Next, click on the Personal Information link, then Set Text Box Editor Options.

1 Enable/Disable Text Box Editor

You can enable or disable the Text Box WYSIWYG Editor for Internet Explorer web browsers.

Enable the WYSIWYG Editor for Internet Explorer web browser: ☐ Enable ☒ Disable

Click Disable to disable the editor, and click submit to finish.

Now it will be easy to add a feed to Blackboard as you will be able to use the <head> and <body> tags. The first step to adding a feed is to select Add Item in Blackboard, then in the text box paste the following code;

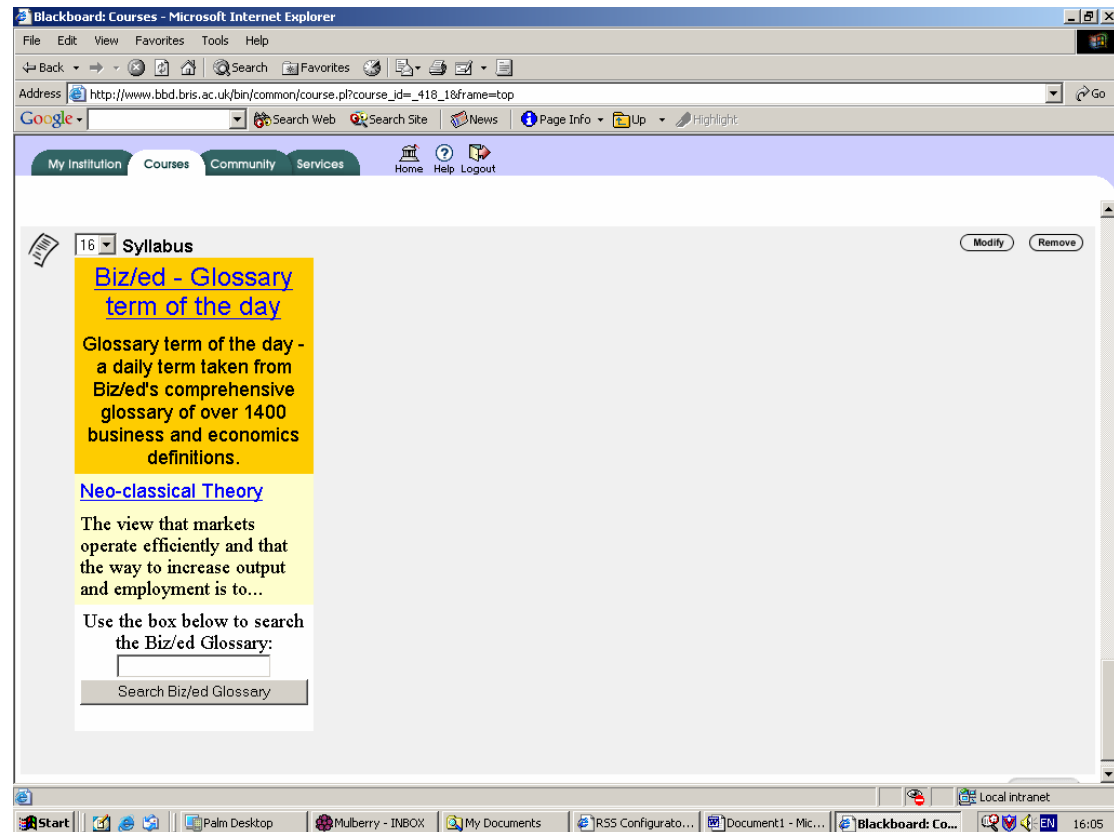
```
<html>
<head>
</head>
<body>
</body>
</html>
```

Between the <head> and </head> paste the text from the bottom box from the RSS Configurator. This text sets up the look and feel of the table and RSS feed.

Between the <body> and </body> paste the text from the top box from the RSS Configurator. This will generate and position the RSS feed.

Finally, select the HTML option.

The outcome will look like



If you need any help with including RSS feeds into your Blackboard course then please email bb-help@bristol.ac.uk