Locating New Books, Using RSS Feeds

Nearly a million new books appear online and on the shelves of booksellers each year. Many of these are self-published titles, but even limiting to mainstream publishers, it's nearly impossible to keep track of what appears in any person's areas of interest. Here are a few things you can do to get a handle on what's new. RSS, short for "Rich Site Summary," can help you collect and narrow the data you seek. RSS consists of an "aggregator" and multiple "feeds." The aggregator is a website that compiles the feeds that interest you, and presents that information in a way you can process. RSS is not as common as it once was, and it wasn't all that popular back then either, though I did write about it here four years ago. It can be tricky to use, but can also serve as a very useful tool to keep one informed of changes and updates.
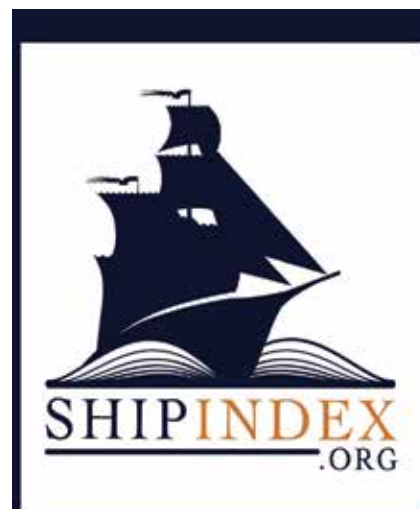
To use RSS, create an account with a free aggregator service, such as **Feedly** (**https://feedly.com**), **Feeder** (**https://feeder.co/**), or **Feedreader** (**https://feedreader.com**). Each one is slightly different, and some have tools for web browsers, iOS devices, Android devices, or some combination thereof. Once you have an account, you can add "feeds." These feeds can be anything: newspaper articles, weather reports, currency exchange rates, traffic reports, sports scores, website updates, or, if we want, lists of new books.

My current employer, **Cornell University Library**, offers a site where anyone can keep track of the new books that it receives, at **http://newbooks.mannlib.cornell.edu/**. A few other libraries offer similar feeds, as do companies, newspapers, and more. **Northeastern University Libraries**' service is at **http://library.northeastern.edu/new-acquisitions-list**, and **UCLA Library** offers an impressively customizable solution at **http://www.library.ucla.edu/search/new-books/customized-feed-wizard**. Each of these services is based on **Library of Congress** (LC) classification, the academic alternative to the Dewey Decimal system.

Why limit a search by LC classification? Even though these feeds only include books acquired by the various universities (which perhaps provides a useful filter on its own), that still leaves a lot of books. By limiting by classification, we can see just the books that are of particular interest. In some fields, this can be very easy: to see all the new books about sculpture, just choose the "NB" section. ("N" is Fine Arts in general, "NA" is Architecture, and "ND" is Painting. "K" is Law, "L" is Education, "M" is Music, etc.; each site displays these categories, so you don't have to memorize the list.) Alas, because maritime history is so interdisciplinary, it can be difficult to figure out just what to follow. "V," for instance, is "Naval Science"—the Library of Congress annoyingly lumps all "maritime" works under the term "naval," for some reason. "American history" is spread out between both "E" and "F," without easily defined divisions. Though you can see the complete breakdown on the Library of Congress pages at **https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/lcco/**, these new tools do not allow you to limit to a numbered range, such as E746 for "Twentieth Century—Naval History." But there's another solution: if you enter a single term, such as "maritime," or "schooner," on the Cornell site, you can create an RSS feed based just on that term, regardless of where the book is assigned. In September 2017, Cornell acquired 52 books with "maritime" somewhere in the title or description, and only five of them were in the "V" classification.

Some online company options exist, as well. **Any New Books?** (**https://anynewbooks.com**) provides free RSS feeds and weekly email updates about new books in broad subject categories. Searching on the site does not seem to do much, and all the books are selected by the site's editors. That's not quite what I'm searching for; I'm trying to find more automated ways of processing larger amounts of information, but this service might be useful to you. If you purchase a book (either in print or electronic) after clicking to it from their website, they will earn a small commission. As the world's largest bookseller, and perhaps the ultimate data management company, **Amazon.com** offers constantly updated information about new and popular books in RSS feeds, as well. For example, if you navigate to **Books → New Releases** (to the right of "Books," below the search box) → **History → Military → Naval**, you'll see the newest titles in that subject area. At the bottom of the page, you'll see "RSS Feeds," next to the orange box that represents "RSS," with a note that reads "**Subscribe to New Releases → Naval Military History**." Copy the URL behind that link, then paste it into your Feedly/Feeder/Feedreader search box, and you'll add that RSS feed to your profile.

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