Adding a RSS Feed Custom Widget to your Homepage

The first, and often hardest, task is to decide which blog or news source you wish to bring into your Avenue course. Once you have selected a blog or news source look to see if they have a link to a "feed" or an icon like this:
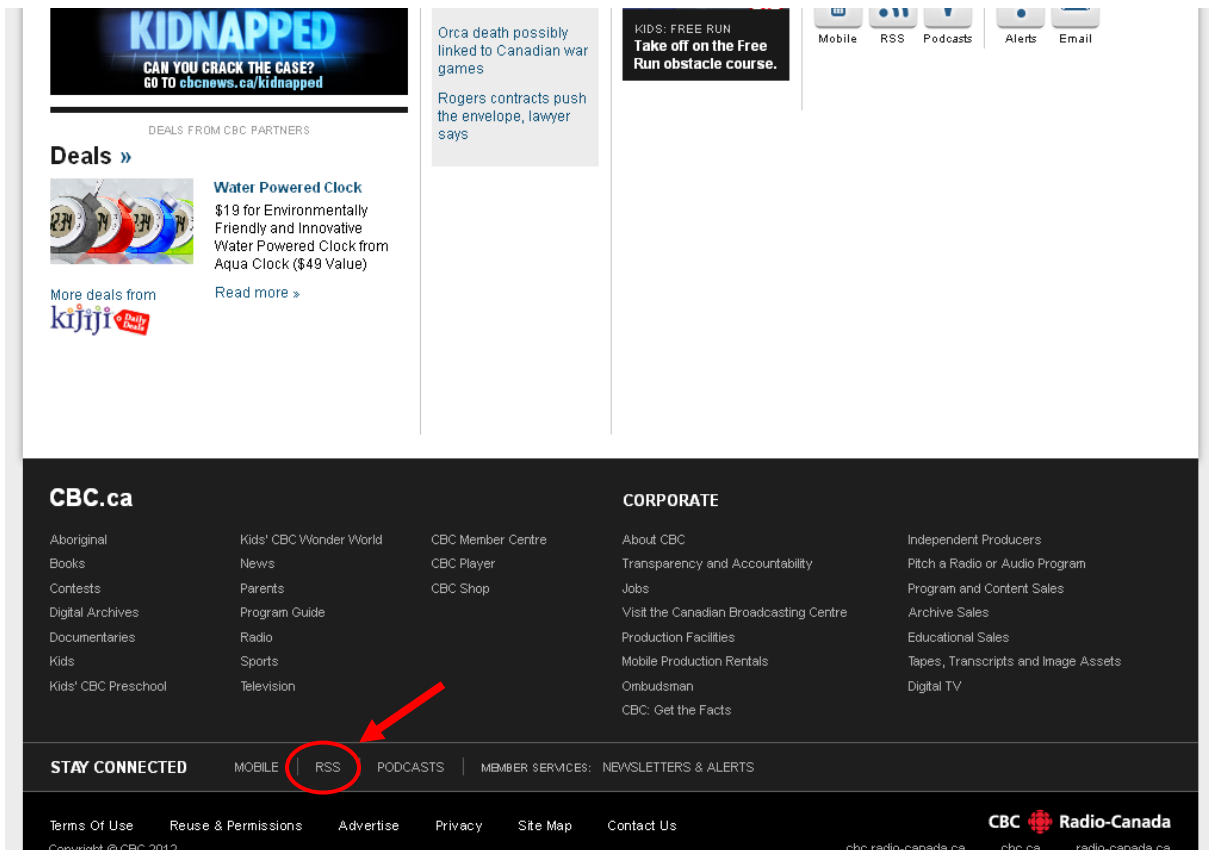
This icon indicates that that the information contained on this page is essentially being broadcast. Typically, one uses Microsoft Outlook, Google Reader, Feed.ly, Netvibes or any number of other feed readers to allow the websites you visit regularly to be consolidated in one place to be read by you.

> **For more information about RSS Feeds, please see this page:**
> **http://www.commoncraft.com/video/rss**

For this example, we will be using CBC as a source of information. CBC does not display the RSS icon on their webpage, however, you can find a link to the RSS feeds at the bottom of their website.

Click on that link to access CBC's news feed for different topics. On this page you will see the RSS icon and a web link listed next to the icon. Highlight the link, and copy it by pressing Ctrl-C, or right clicking the link and selecting copy. If you click on the link you will see the raw feed in XML.

To get the feed into an Avenue course, you will need to use some code to get this to work. Thankfully, the website http://www.feed2js.org will convert RSS feeds to something we can put in a widget on your Avenue homepage. On the Feed2Js website, you can read more about RSS feeds, but we'll want to convert RSS to a piece of Javascript, which we can embed into a widget. To do that, click the tab to "Build".

Begin to build the Javascript by pasting (Ctrl-V or right click and select paste) in the box labelled URL.

Build a Feed!

The tool below will help you format a feed's display with the information you want to use on your web site. All you need to enter is the **URL for the RSS source**, and select the desired options below.

First, be sure to use the **preview** button to verify the content and format. Once the content is displayed how you like, just use the **generate javascript** button to get your code. Could it be an easier? The last step is exploring your options for **stylizing your displayed feed**.

URL Enter the web address of the RSS Feed (must be in http:// format, not feed://)

`http://rss.cbc.ca/lineup/arts.xml`

Note: Please verify the URL of your feed (make sure it presents raw RSS) and **check that it is valid** before using this form.

Show channel? (yes/no/title) Display information about the publisher of the feed (yes=show the title and description; title= display title only, no=do not display anything)
◉ yes ○ title ○ no

Show n' Tell!
Preview Feed
Generate JavaScript

Number of items to display. Enter the number of items to be displayed (enter 0 to show all available)
`0`

Show/hide item descriptions? How much? (0=no descriptions; 1=show full description text; n>1 = display first n characters of description; n=-1 do not link item title, just display item contents)
`1`

Show item author? (yes/no) Display the name of an item's author (yes=show the title and description; no=do not display anything)
○ yes ◉ no

Use HTML in item display? ("yes" = use HTML from feed and the full item descriptions will be used, ignoring any character limit set above; "no" = output is text-only formatted by CSS; "paragraphs" = no HTML but convert all RETURN/linefeeds to <br> to preserve paragraph breaks)
○ yes ◉ no ○ preserve paragraphs only

Show item posting date? (yes/no) Display the time and date for each item.
○ yes ◉ no

Time Zone Offset (+n/-n/'feed') Date and timer are converted to GMT time; to have display in local time, you must enter an offset from your current local time to **Mon, 09 Apr 2012 13:31:00 +0000 (GMT)**. If your local time is 5 hours before GMT, enter -5. If your local time is 8 hours past GMT, enter +8. Fractional offsets such as +10:30 must be entered as decimal +10.5. If you prefer to just display the date is recorded in the RSS, use a value = `feed`
`feed`

Target links in the new window? (n="no, links open the same page", y="yes, open links in a new window", "xxxx" = open links in a frame named 'xxxx', 'popup' = use a **JavaScript function** popupfeed() to open in new window)
`n`

UTF-8 Character Encoding
Required for many non-western language web pages and also may help if you see strange characters replacing quotes in your output (see **help pages** for more information).
☑ use UTF-8 character encoding

As long as you have the correct address for the feed, you can press the button to Preview Feed. You can change the parameters and experiment how the widget will be displayed to your students. In this example, I will change the following settings:

- Use HTML in Item Display? Set to Yes.
- Show Item Posting Date? Set to Yes.
- Show/hide item descriptions? How much? Set to 1, which will show the full description.
- Target links in the new window? Set to Y, which will open any linked articles outside of Avenue's window.

When you are happy with the way the feed looks, click the button to Generate JavaScript.

You will want to copy all of the Javascript generated, select and copy the entire text.

Now move over to Avenue and go to the course where you want to display this feed. Once in the course, click Edit Course. Click on the Widgets link.

Click on New Widget.

Give the widget a new name. For this example I'll name it "CBC Feed", you could give it a name more specific to the course.

Click on the Content tab. In the bottom of the editor window (where you would type text or insert pictures) look for a icon with a page and a small world: [icon] This is the Edit HTML icon. Click it and a window will pop open, paste the Javascript you got from Feed2JS.
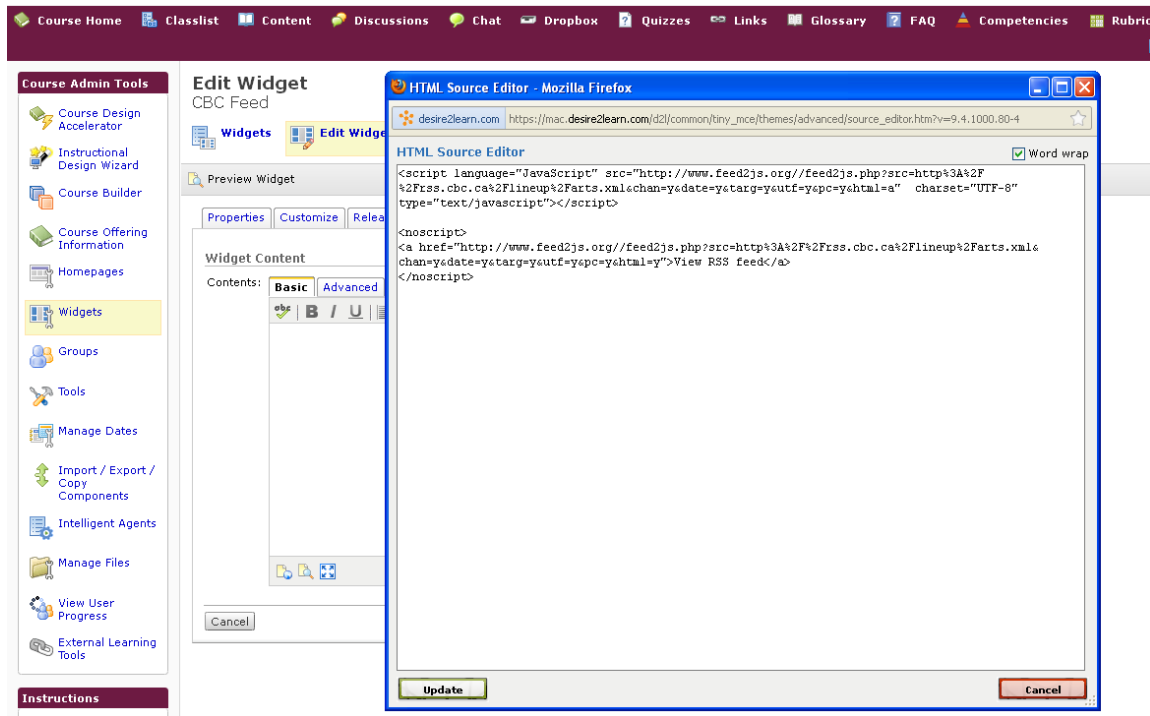

Click Update and the window will close, you'll notice that your Widget editor window has not changed. Click Save to save your work. You're done creating the widget.

To make this widget appear on your homepage, and visible to your students, there's a couple more steps to take.

First we have to make a copy of your homepage, and then add this new widget to the homepage you copied. If you have customized your homepage previously, you will not need to create a new homepage; you can skip these steps and add the widget to your homepage.

If you are back at your course homepage, click Edit Course, then Homepages. If you are on the Course Admin Tools page, you can get to Homepages by clicking Homepages in the left hand sidebar.
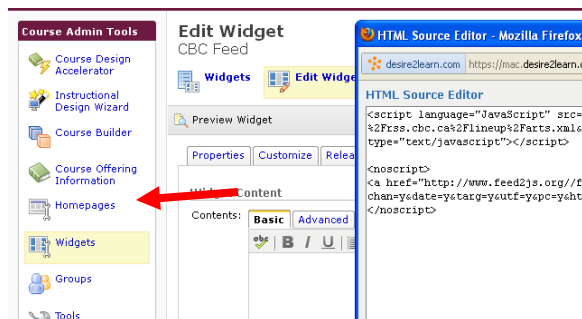
if you have only the Course Default, I would copy that by clicking the icon that looks like two pages. Complete the process by confirming you wish to copy, by clicking "Copy". If you already have another homepage you would like to use, skip this step, and proceed to edit the homepage.

You should now see "Copy of Course Default", click on the blue underlined link for this homepage to edit it.

- I would rename the homepage to be something like "Fall 2012 Homepage", then click on the Content/Layout tab.
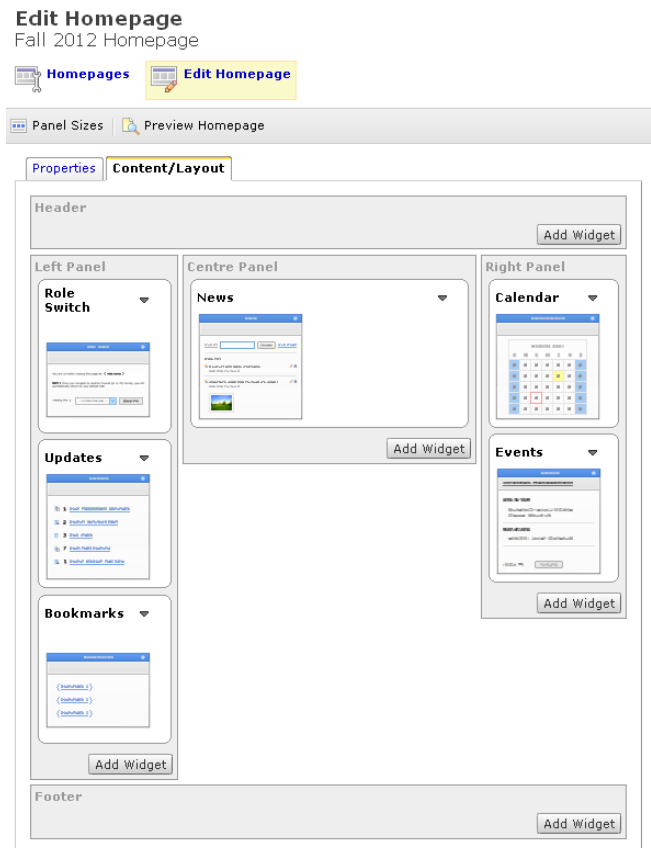
Decide which column you wish to display the RSS feed in by clicking "Add Widget" at the bottom of the column. I would suggest staying away from the Header or Footer area as they display across the width of the screen and make reading difficult. I will place the example feed in the Centre Panel. From the popup box, select the widget by clicking the checkbox next to it's name and click "Save". Widgets are displayed alphabetically, so the widget you are looking for may appear on page 2 of the listings.
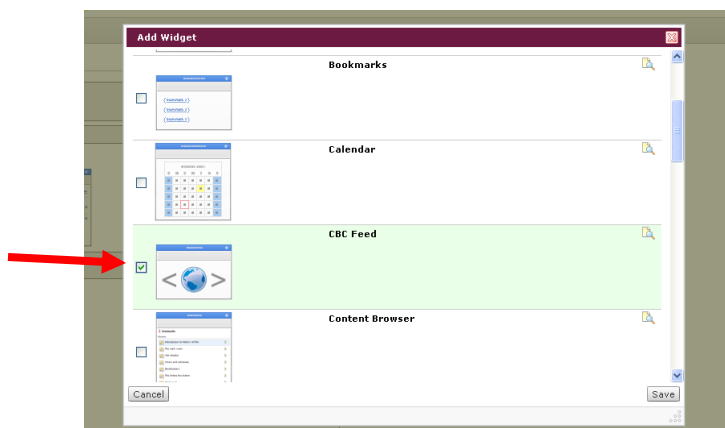
If you do not like the location of the widget, you can choose to move it by clicking the small down arrow next to the widget name. When finished, click Homepages (either in the sidebar on the left hand side of the screen, or near the top of the page) and set your new homepage as active - this replaces the default homepage with your new homepage.
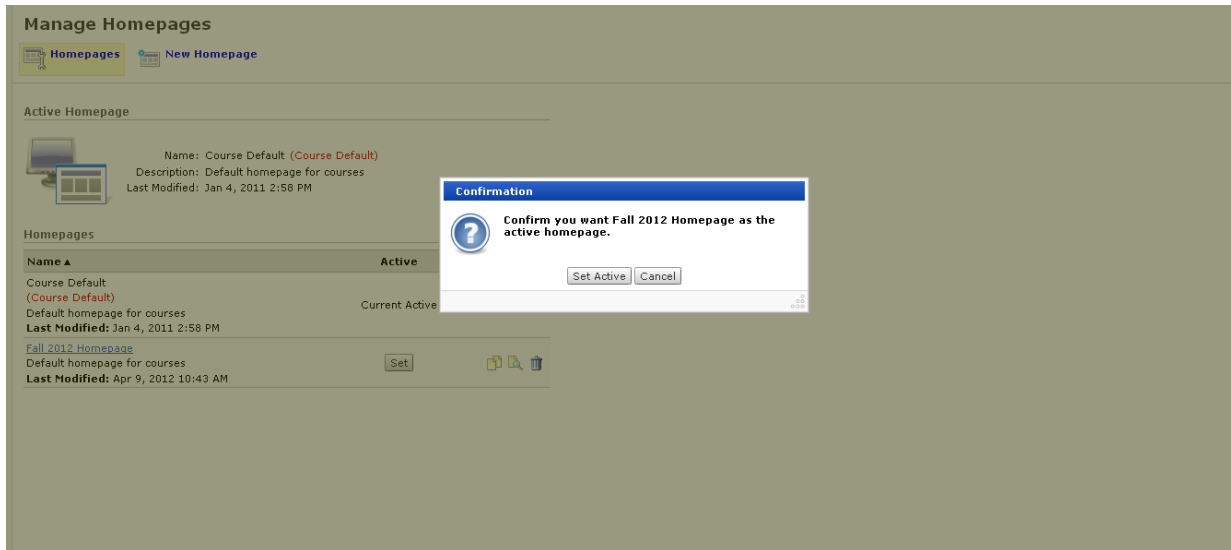
Finally, click on Course Home to see your new homepage in action.