

# Anthropology News



EVOLUTIONARY ANTHROPOLOGY SOCIETY

## Keeping Up with the Literature, Part I

Kathrine Starkweather

*One of my goals as contributing editor is to use the EAS monthly column to provide a series of primers on practical topics of general interest to evolutionary anthropologists. The goals of these primers are three-fold: (1) to keep abreast of changing technologies affecting how we do research; (2) to explore the career trajectories of evolutionary anthropologists; and (3) to provide a forum and basis for wider discussions of EA best practices.*

*This month's column represents the first installment in a series of "how-tos". Kathrine Starkweather (U Missouri) provides advice on a topic that is fundamental to good research, but evolving rapidly enough to befuddle scholars struggling to keep abreast of recent changes.*

One major challenge faced by anthropologists is keeping up with the academic literature. Whereas one might formerly have waited for paper copies of journals to arrive in the mail or office lunchroom, mailing now represents a significant delay between initial publication of a manuscript and its reception by interested readers. Moreover, paper copies are increasingly defunct as many journals move to exclusive or emphatic online publication. As universities offer electronic access to many journals for affiliated students and faculty, it is both necessary and efficient that scholars become facile with electronic means of keeping abreast of the relevant literature.

The first step in transitioning to electronic management of academic literature involves managing notifications of new journal articles and issues. Email subscriptions to tables-of-contents (TOCs) will send notifications to your inbox as new issues are published. TOCs provide an excellent means of skimming titles in periodicals like *Science*, *PNAS*, or *PLoS ONE*, whose topical coverage may be too broad to warrant a more thorough investigation of associated abstracts. One obvious downside to exclusive use of TOCs is lack of centralization as, without specific interventions into your email filing system, relevant issues will be scattered throughout your inbox.

Using an RSS feed consolidator, like Google Reader, is one way to keep updates organized together in a single location. Any electronic journal can be accessed via RSS feed. Every time a journal is updated, the RSS feed will update itself automatically with separate entries for each new article. Indeed, RSS feeds are general-purpose mechanisms of keeping up with updates to any websites of interest with supported technology (e.g., the AAA, job Wikis). RSS feeds facilitate literature surveys by consolidating titles, authors, abstracts, and links to the full text of associated articles. Some feed consolidators allow users to share what they're reading with individuals in their social network. It is often possible to

connect a reader to one's home library via web proxy, allowing direct access to full articles. The biggest potential pitfall in using an RSS reader to manage new literature is that it must be checked regularly lest it become overwhelming.

One must also strategize about which periodicals are worthy of regular reading. For general items of interest to evolutionary anthropologists, we recommend, in addition to the big players listed above, *Human Nature*, *Evolution and Human Behavior*, *Evolutionary Anthropology*, *American Journal of Human Biology*, *Journal of Human Evolution*, *Biology Letters*, and *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*.

Staying abreast of new books, chapters, and articles of specific interest that may not be included in your regularly checked periodicals requires more initiative. In my experience, social networking (via Facebook, Twitter, or direct communication) is key. One can also flag key terms or articles within library or related search engines (e.g. Google Scholar) to be alerted when articles are cited by others or when a relevant manuscript is published.

In reality, most academics probably use a combination of all of these methods. RSS feed consolidators may provide the most efficient means of keeping up with diverse bodies of literature, but they are best used in conjunction with more targeted methods.

Stay tuned for my next installment, where I discuss the programs available to manage references compiled through the means discussed above.

*Kathrine Starkweather is the EAS student representative and is a PhD student at the University of Missouri studying marriage and parental investment in small-scale societies.*

*Comments on and contributions to this column are welcome. Please send to Siobhán Mattison ([sm.mattison@auckland.ac.nz](mailto:sm.mattison@auckland.ac.nz)). Columns are archived at [www.evanthsoc.org](http://www.evanthsoc.org).*



This entry was posted in [May](#), [Section News](#) and tagged [Evolutionary Anthropology Society](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#). [Post a comment](#) or leave a [trackback](#): [Trackback URL](#).

© 2011 American Anthropological Association • 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600 • Arlington, VA • 22201 • TEL (703) 528-1902  
• FAX (703) 528-3546