CREATING A MULTIMEDIA NARRATIVE WITH "1001VOICES"

Preschool, primary school, junior high and high school

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CREATING A MULTIMEDIA NARRATIVE WITH "1001Voices" USER MANUAL

SUMMARY

PART I: Creating the content

Preliminary remarks: this document explains how to create a multimedia narrative using 1001voices, an authoring tool for digital storytelling developed by HOC-LAB of Politecnico di Milano as an evolution over a previous tool, 1001stories, within the frame of the European project "TALES". The scenario is a collaborative creation in the context of formal education, i.e. at school. Nevertheless, also individuals wanting to create a story by themselves can follow – *mutatis mutandis* – these instructions.

1. Choosing a narrative format
Estimated time: 1 hour

An interactive multimedia narrative is made of different content items, among which the user may navigate freely. Each item combines **images or a video, audio and texts.** It is interactive because end users may freely choose which content items to access, at the time and in the sequence they prefer. Different narrative formats are possible:
- **"Short" stories:** a story lasting no more than 5 minutes.
- **"Compact" stories:** a linear sequence of content items, no more than 10-15 minutes long.
- **"Full" stories:** more complex narratives, with elements and sub-elements, 15 to 25 minutes long. This format requires more work than the others and can be used to deal with a complex issue in depth.

2. Choosing a topic
Estimated time: 1 hour of discussion with the students

Choosing a topic is an important step, as much of the students' involvement depends on it. Schools may decide to "narrate" an activity, an experience, a trip, a research project, or even a topic from the curriculum. In general, we recommend the following:
- learn more about the topic you chose, looking for hidden elements and curiosities;
- choose apparently minor issues, which however are potentially of general interest;
- if available, try to involve experts, possibly interviewing them personally;

For **Preschools**, we suggest narrating an experience or an activity performed in the classroom, in order to get all the children involved and use materials created by them: scanned pictures, photos taken during the activity or performance, artefacts produced during workshops, etc.

3. The editorial plan
Estimated time: 2 hours, teachers and students

The editorial plan is the outline of the narrative; it is structured according to the format selected: either a **tree structure** of main elements branching out in sub-elements (if you chose a Full Narrative), or a **linear sequence** of elements (for Compact Narratives and Short Narratives).

In general,

- In a **full narrative,** each **element** is a **summary** of its sub-elements, rather than an introduction; each sub-element is a "chapter", an in-depth view on a particular aspect of the main element.
  - The reason is that a user may choose to simply look at the sequence of main elements, ignoring all the sub-elements: it is therefore important for the main elements to form a meaningful sequence.
- In a **compact narrative** or a **short narrative**, each element illustrates one aspect of the theme.
  - The reason is that a user may choose to explore a short or compact narrative without following the sequence proposed by the authors. Each item must therefore possess a certain degree of autonomy.

The results of the work on the editorial plan should be:

- a **TITLE** for the whole narrative
- for a **full narrative**, a plan for a set of **ELEMENTS** and related **SUB-ELEMENTS,** each lasting approximately 1 minute / 1 minute and 30 seconds
- for a **compact or short narrative,** a series of **ELEMENTS,** each lasting approximately 1 minute / 1 minute and 30 seconds.

In order to complete the narrative, authors can include additional, non multimedia pages, like:

- an **ABSTRACT** (max. 100 words) summing up the work done
- a description of the **EDUCATIONAL PROJECT** behind the narrative.
- **CREDITS**, mentioning the name of the school, class, teachers and (optional) students who took part in the activity, etc.

TIPS:

- Please be wary of excessively ambitious editorial plans: a full narrative needs only about 4 or 5 main elements, each articulated into approximately 4 (no more than 6) sub-elements. A compact narrative may have around 7 or 8 items. For a short narrative, 4 or 5 items are enough.
- **The ideal duration of each item (whether a main element or a sub-element) is 1 minute/1 minute and 30 seconds**.
- In a full narrative, it is not necessary to have the same number of sub-elements for each main element: some items may have 3 sub-elements, others may have 4, and so on. It is important however to be balanced.

4. Content creation

Estimated time: 2-4 hours for each group (if the class is split into groups and each group is in charge of one element and sub-elements)

Once the editorial plan has been defined, it is time to create the content. We recommend starting from **verbal communication**: the tool 1001Voices is more suitable for telling a story supported by images than for showing images accompanied by comments.

To create a slideshow (i.e. an item formed by a sequence of still images and a separate audio file), the most typical method is to first prepare the TEXTS, then read them aloud and record them to create the AUDIO files.

Note: writing the texts and then reading them is the most common procedure; however, it is not the only option. Over the years, participants have made different choices: some students perform as actors in a play, recording dialogues and using the text section in the tool to insert comments, rather than the transcripts.

However you prepare your texts, please remember that the final result should flow easily like a dialogue or a conversation, rather than a written text, because it is meant to be listened to. It is therefore important to keep the **style as close to oral communication as possible**, for example trying to avoid syntactically complex, convoluted sentences.

The ideal text length for each item, element or sub-element, is between **90 and 120 words**: it corresponds to approximately **1 minute / 1 minute and 30 seconds of audio** recording.

TECHNICAL NOTE: you may use **any word processing software** (e.g. MS Word or Note Pad) to prepare your texts. Format features such as bold type and underlining will be kept when you copy and paste your texts into 1001Voices.

To create a video, it is important to keep in mind that:

- the ideal **length** of a video is **1 minute/1 minute and 30 seconds**
- creating a video of students performing like in a short play (whether improvised or memorized and rehearsed) has a strong emotional impact. However, it is not easy to do. It requires much more time than creating a slideshow.
- If you are using an existing video, try to select an excerpt that is meaningful by itself and does not convey the impression of having been suddenly cut off.
- All videos must be in **MP4 format.**

STYLE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Please keep each text between 90 and 120 words long.
- Avoid explicit reference to other points in the narrative (e.g. "as mentioned before"): you do not know whether your user has already seen them.

5. Visual communication

Estimated time: 2 – 4 hours

For a slideshow, **each item** (element or sub-element) lasting **1 minute** needs **6/8 images** on average. The time each image is shown depends on the length of the audio: the 1001Voices tool divides the total audio time by the number of images, so each image is shown for an equal number of seconds. For example, if a 1-minute audio is accompanied by 4 images, each image will be shown for 15 seconds.

Each image will go with a **caption**, which should be short, informative, and autonomous, i.e. include all that is needed in order to understand the image.

For a video, two options are possible: **a video with its own audio** (see section 4), or **a "silent" video**, without an audio track. In this second case, the author needs to insert a separate audio file (for example, an audio commentary – see all the recommendations concerning the preparation of texts). The audio must be as long as the video. If the length is different, the tool will ask what should prevail: whether the audio or the video.

For both slideshow and video, there are **RECOMMENDATIONS**:

- **images/ videos** do not have to strictly illustrate the content of the text/audio: they may be simply **evocative**. They may evoke a place, an atmosphere, a historical period, an object, etc.
- useful **sources** of images/videos are Google-Images, YouTube, your own digital camera, scanned artwork, PowerPoint slides turned into images, and so on.

TECHNICAL NOTES:

- **Images** need to be in **JPG/JPEG or PNG format**; the ideal resolution is **800x600**
- Never mix up JPG/JPEG images with PNG images.
- Save each image in a folder corresponding to the item, element or sub-element, where it will be shown: it makes it easier to retrieve and upload images.
- Whenever possible, choose (horizontal) images in **landscape layout**; it is nonetheless possible to also insert (vertical) images, in portrait layout.
- try to avoid images that are too small: the effect on the screen is poor and it is hard to see the details.
- All videos must be in **MP4 format,** max 2 minutes, 25MB, 800x600.

PART II: Creating audio files

The narrating voice is one of the most engaging elements in a narrative. It is therefore important to pay much attention to the creation of audio content.

First of all, you need to decide who will read the texts:

- **all the students** (each one reads a bit);
- **a few selected students;**
- **only one student**.

The ideal reader has a *strong, clear* voice. However, there is a remarkable added value in involving all students, including those with some difficulties, to bring out the enthusiasm and commitment of each single participant.

Recording the texts

Recording all the texts of a narrative of average size takes approximately one hour and a half. The time may vary greatly depending on the number of readers and the school level.

➔IMPORTANT!

- Audio files need to be in **MP3 format** and may not be larger than **5 Mb**;
- A **separate audio file** must be saved for each item, element or sub-element.

TIP:

- We recommend that you listen again to the audio recorded, to assess the technical **quality** (rustling, background noises, adequate balance of words and music, etc.) and the communication quality (effective wording, clear reading). After quality check, the audio files are ready to be inserted in 1001Voices.

PART III: Inserting content into the 1001Voices tool

1. How to start

- To access 1001Voices, go to: http://hoc3.elet.polimi.it/1001Voices and insert your user name and password.
- After logging in, you can create your narrative and access the 1001Voices authoring tool (click on "open").
 **NOTE**: You do not need to insert all the final content of your narrative in one session; you may access, **review, add, modify and refine your work a number of times**, until you reach the desired result. You can have as many work sessions as you need.

  IMPORTANT: we strongly recommend that you use the **Preview** function for each item while working on it: it is the best way to notice whatever may need improvement.

- Please remember that **you may interrupt a work session at any time**, by clicking on **"Exit"**. This function saves whatever has been done that far and takes the user back to the homepage of the tool 1001Voices.

2. Inserting and modifying the editorial plan

The first thing to do is to **insert your EDITORIAL PLAN** for the narrative.
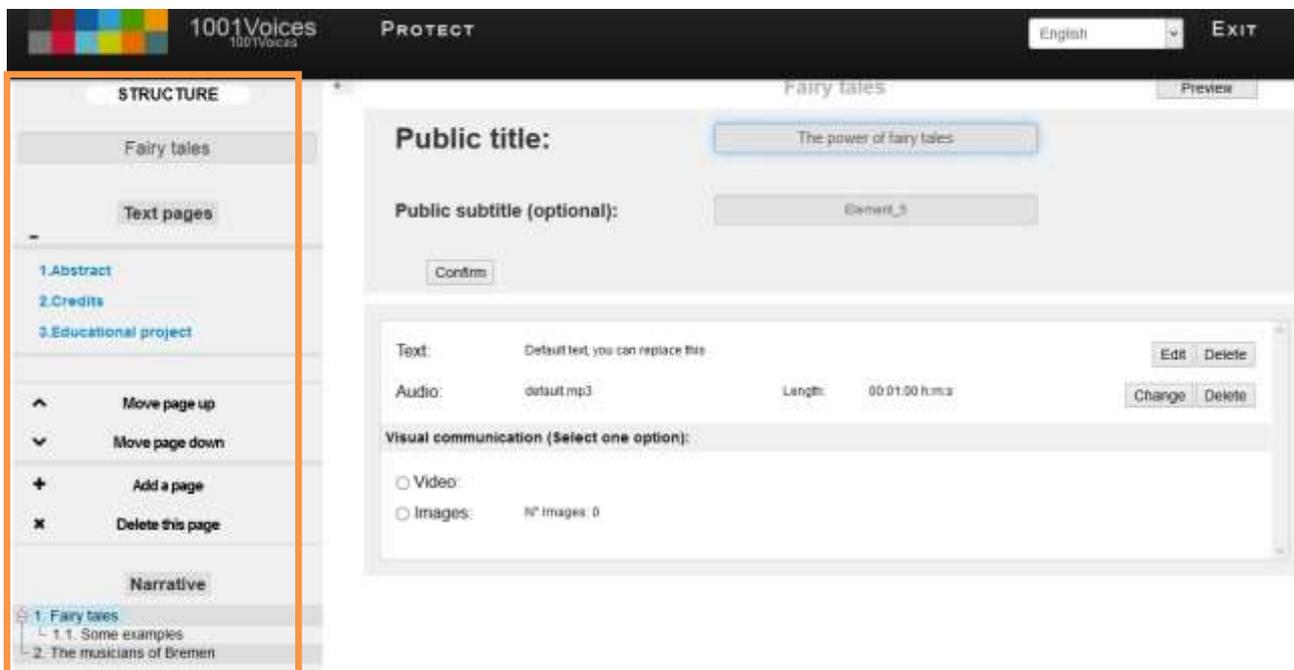
The **editorial plan**, i.e. the series of elements (and possibly sub-elements), is always visible on the **left column (in the lower part: "Narrative")**. It is a tree structure for full narratives and a linear structure for short or compact narratives. Also on the left, below the editorial plan, you will find the operations that allow modifying the editorial plan, i.e. the structure of your narrative.

You can:

Add an Element…
- Click on "**Add an element**".

…and a Sub-element
- Click on "**Add a sub-element**".

Modify the sequence of items…
- Click on the item (element or sub-element) you wish to move, then click on "**Move up**" or "**Move down**".

Turn an Element into a Sub-element...
- Click on the Element that you wish to downgrade to Sub-element, then click "**Downgrade level**".

…and turn a Sub-element into an Element
- Click on the Sub-element you wish to upgrade to Element level, then click on "**Upgrade level**".

Delete an Element... and a sub-element
- Click on "**Delete item**".
  ATTENTION: when you delete an Element, you will also automatically delete all its Sub-elements, if any.

Modify the name of an element
➔ Please note the difference between WORK NAMES and PUBLIC TITLES.

The NAME of an element is a working name, which is shown in the editorial plan only (left column); the end user will never see it. The PUBLIC TITLE, on the other hand, appears in the central section of the work screen and is shown in the Preview and in the final narrative. Therefore, for a NAME you may use a **keyword** that is easy to visualize on the editorial plan, whereas the TITLE may be a little more wordy: the complete title of the Element or Sub-Element you are working on.

To modify the **NAME**
- Select the item you wish to rename (**Element** or **Sub-element**) by clicking on it in the left column, then right-click on it and select "**Rename element name**". Insert the desired new NAME.

To modify the **PUBLIC TITLE**
- Click on the item you wish to rename (**Element** or **Sub-element**) in the left column, then move to the central section of the screen. Insert the desired PUBLIC TITLE in the dedicated text field. Press "**Enter**" or click on "**Confirm**" to make the change effective.
  IMPORTANT: it is possible to add an optional PUBLIC SUBTITLE to an item (Element or Sub-element). The procedure to insert or modify it is the same.

The **TEXT PAGES**

On the left-hand side column, text-only pages are available. You can customize them (with your own title and text) by clicking on them. You can also change their order, delete them or add a new page. Examples are: abstract, credits, educational project…

3. Inserting and reviewing content

In order to insert content into your narrative, you need to select in the editorial plan (left column) the item you wish to act upon. You may insert or modify texts, audio files, images and video in the central section of the screen.

To add/modify a TEXT:

- Click on "**Edit**". A window will open, where you may write or paste your text. Some basic formatting options are also available.
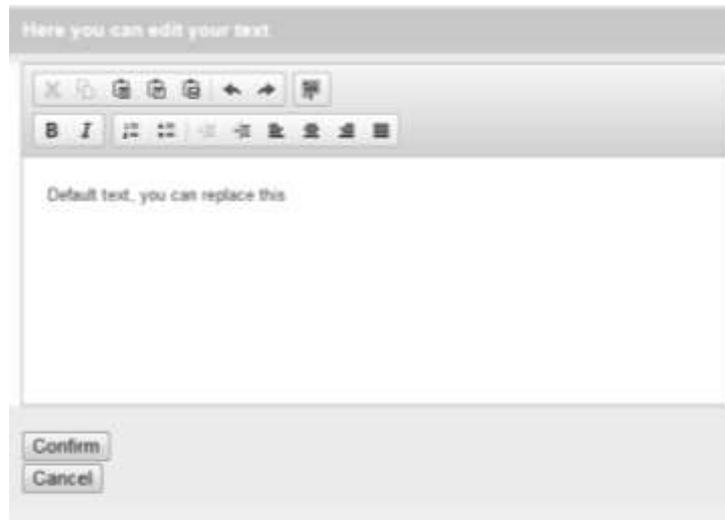
Every time you insert content or make a change, please click on "**Confirm**" to save the change or on "**Cancel**" to undo the changes you made.

To add/modify an AUDIO file:

- Click on "**Change**"[1]. A window will open, with a "**Choose file**" button that will allow you to select and upload the desired audio file.
  TOP: it is better to create and upload the audio files when the work is at an advanced stage and texts are in their final version.

Every time you insert content or make a change, please click on "**Confirm**" to save the change or on "**Cancel**" to undo the changes you made.

As for visual communication, it is possible to insert either a video or a series of images in every item (Element or Sub-element).

To add/modify a VIDEO

- Select the "**Video**" option and click on "**insert**". A window will open, with a "**Choose file**" button that will allow you to select and upload the desired video file (.mp4 – max 25MB – 800x600).

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[1] This function is called "Change" because, you will find a default audio file already uploaded in the tool. You can "modify" it by replacing it with your own.

VISUAL COMUNICATION (Select one option):

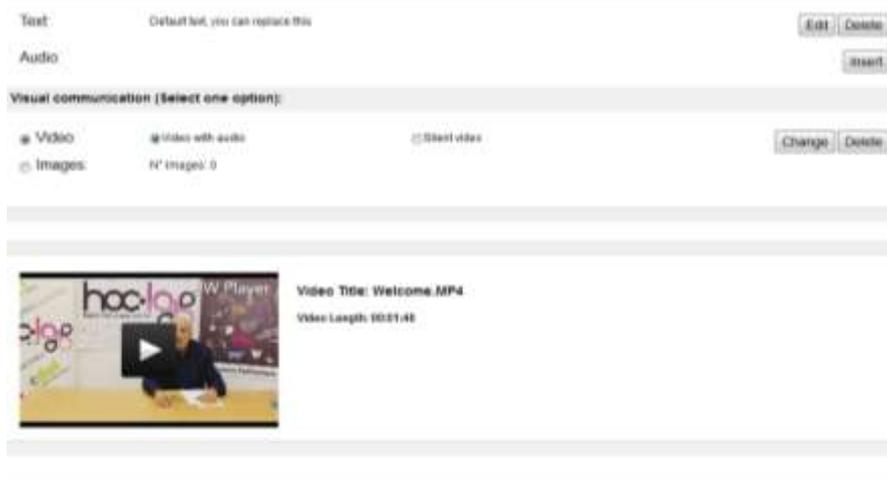○ Video: [insert]

○ Images: N° Images: 0

Here you can insert your video file

Choose file | No file chosen   [file]

[Confirm]

[Cancel]

After uploading the video, which will be shown in the lower part of the screen, you may select one of the following **options:**

- *Video with audio*: the video will keep its own audio track.
- *Silent video*: the video's original audio track will be muted.

IMPORTANT: When you select the "**Video with audio**" option, if a previously uploaded separate audio file is already there, the tool will ask you to eliminate that file before moving on.

Text   Default text, you can replace this   [Edit] [Delete]

Audio   [Insert]

Visual communication (Select one option):

○ Video   ○ Video with audio   ○ Silent video   [Change] [Delete]

○ Images   N° Images: 0

Video Title: Welcome.MP4

Video Length: 00:01:48

To add/modify an IMAGE

- Select the "**IMAGES**" option and click on "**Add an image**". A window will open, with a "**Browse"** button that will allow you to select and upload the desired image (*.jpg, .jpeg, .png*). You may also insert a caption for each image. Never mix up JPG/JPEG images with PNG images.

Visual communication (Select one option):

○ Video:

● Images: N° Images: 0   [Add an image]
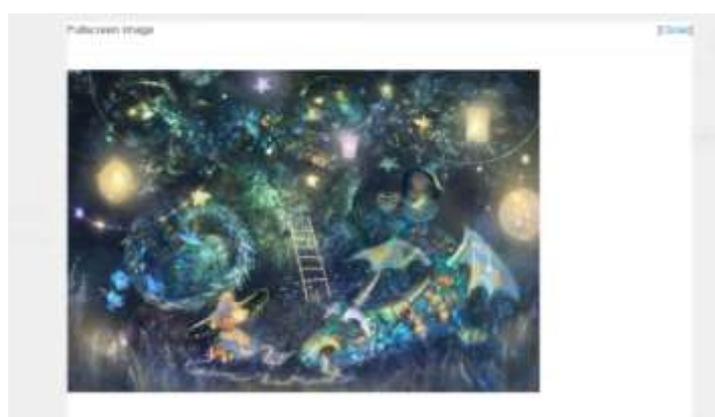
All images uploaded for an item (Element or Sub-Element) will be shown in the lower part of the screen. It is possible to act on:

- each caption, to modify the text directly in the text field under the image, then clicking on "Confirm" to save the change.
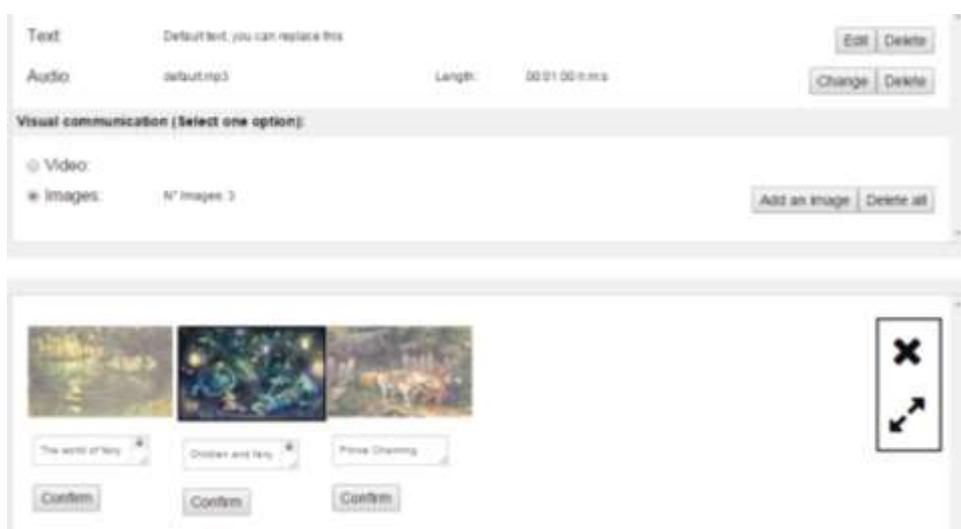
- On each image, after selecting it, to delete it or to visualize it in "**Full screen**" mode.

Finally, it is possible to **change the sequence** of images (the order in which they are shown), simply by dragging an image and dropping it in the desired position.

The "**Preview**" button shows you the result of your work on each item (Element or Sub-Element). It is important to **constantly check how the narrative will appear to final users**. By listening to/watching the work, you will be able to perform the necessary quality assessment (Is anything missing? Are the images appropriate? Does the audio goes well with the images? Is the message convincing?) and make adjustments.

4. Finishing the work

After checking all items (Elements and Sub-Elements, if any) with the Preview function, and after making the necessary adjustments, your work is complete.

Click on "**Protect**" (on the top part of the screen) to seal the narrative in a final way. No further changes will be allowed.