

CommonSpaces and SUCCESS4ALL primer

Purpose of this primer

This document intends to provide essential information, for all people contributing to the SUCCESS4ALL Project, on the navigation in the “CommonSpaces for SUCCESS4ALL” web site and on the use of the associated functions. In the following we will use the term “SUCCESS4ALL”, for brevity, in referring to both the project and the mini-site

Although it is an in-progress document, anyone can read this GoogleDoc by accessing it directly, with its Internet address, or through this site.

Much more extensive documentation is available from the *Help* menu of the site. This may be excessive, since it covers the entire functionality of CommonSpaces; anyway, we will refer to it here and there.

CommonSpaces and this SUCCESS4ALL site

CommonSpaces (abridged as CS) is a web portal initially developed inside a relatively small EU-funded project of the Erasmus+ Programme, during its three-year lifetime (2014-2017), which was coordinated by Sapienza; subsequently, CS has been used for several other national and European projects.

Initially focused on the cataloging, vetting and reuse of OERs (open educational resources) and on *mentoring*, currently CS is used mostly to host collaborative learning *projects* and to support the building of “learning pathways” by the learners themselves. Projects are grouped in *communities*, which can be entirely virtual, that is they exist only online, or can correspond to real world (already existent) communities.

The SUCCESS4ALL site is a “mini-site” of CommonSpaces

As a generic CS community, SUCCESS4ALL has its address within CS:

<https://www.commonspaces.eu/project/success4all/>.

However, “CommonSpaces for SUCCESS4ALL” is one of the CS communities with the special status of *mini-site*:

- it can be accessed with a dedicated internet address:
[https://success4all.commonspaces.eu](https://success4all.commonspaces.eu;);
- It allows easier navigation and search within its dedicated spaces, due to the fact that contents of the other communities are shielded.

The mini-site status of SUCCESS4ALL makes things easier but could also confound you if you aren't aware of what it means! Please consider, when you use the SUCCESS4ALL mini-site, i.e. when you enter it and log-in at its dedicated address, that:

- content “published” inside it can be viewed by anyone outside it, not only by SUCCESS4ALL members;

- if, during the same navigation session, you happen to open its pages entering from the main “portal” (the CommonSpaces address), your user authentication at SUCCESS4ALL could not be acknowledged.

User account and user profile

To join the SUCCESS4ALL site, first of all you must register at CS, that is create an *account*. As for other sites and web applications, this is perhaps the most intimidating task; it cannot be avoided for a number of reasons that we will not go into here.

Detailed information on registering can be found in the dedicated help-page [Registration and authentication](#). Please note that

- *registration* is a one-time operation, managed only by the CS portal;
- *authentication* (or *login*) is a recurrent operation to be performed in a specific context (SUCCESS4ALL or CS or other); if you intend to act as a member of the SUCCESS4ALL community, you must log-in from the homepage of the SUCCESS4ALL site;
- If you own a Facebook or a LinkedIn account, you can use it to simplify both registration and authentication, with no need to create and remember a new password (see the already mentioned help-page).

However you register, to become a “full” CS member, i.e. to be able to join any community or project, you must fill-in your user profile, at least enter suitable data into the mandatory fields of the online form, including your true *full name* and a very *short presentation*; throughout the site, ‘short presentations’ and ‘short descriptions’ should be appropriate for display in long lists of people or contents. In the user profile form, CS asks you for other data, for example the languages you know; it asks even for your birth-date, but it doesn’t tell others it; in no case CS will disclose your email.

NOTE: the user profile was designed mainly to facilitate meeting and collaboration between people with different backgrounds but with shared learning objectives; in contexts like SUCCESS4ALL, we didn’t deem it appropriate to remove the related functionality just because, in this case, meeting isn’t an issue.

Find more information on the CS help page [Registration and authentication](#).

Find more information on the CS help page [User profile and user dashboard](#).

How to join SUCCESS4ALL

SUCCESS4ALL is a “reserved” community (this is the default status for all CS communities with an associated mini-site); two facts derive from this:

- CS members must join SUCCESS4ALL, i.e. they must become SUCCESS4ALL members, in order to be able to join SUCCESS4ALL sub-communities and projects; it is the responsibility of a SUCCESS4ALL administrator to admit new members: this is not just an administrator privilege, but a real responsibility, since s/he is expected to grant for the new member’s identity and reliability;
- SUCCESS4ALL administrators can add you as a SUCCESS4ALL member on their own initiative, if they know that you are eligible, provided that you are already a full CS member; another way of becoming member of a CS community would be to send a JOIN

request, by means of a dedicated button in the community homepage, and to wait for a community administrator to accept your request.

NOTE: please consider that the term “reserved”, as related to a community, means that membership can be limited in some way; it does not imply that the community is “secret” (like certain Masonry lodges were) or that all its contents are “private”.

Find more information on the CS help page [Communities and projects](#).

The SUCCESS4ALL homepage

When you enter the address of the SUCCESS4ALL mini-site, <https://success4all.commonspaces.eu>, in the URL box of your browser, you are redirected to the homepage of the SUCCESS4ALL community. Like the homepage of any CS community: it can be slightly customized with a dedicated logo and a background image in the title bar. The menu bar is slightly customized too.

The body of the homepage is divided vertically in two areas; the smaller one, on the right, contains information on the membership and possibly, below it, a few “portlets” used to provide fast access to other pages inside or outside SUCCESS4ALL.

The larger area of the body, on the left, contains a short and an extended description of the community objectives, a set of configuration buttons being reserved to the community administrator(s) and a set of function buttons available to all members.

Main community tools

Calendars

The calendar accessible from the homepage, can be used to highlight dates important for the WE-COLLAB project, such as those of common meetings, deadlines and other events.

Calendars for more limited scope can be created in sub-communities and projects therein.

Please, note that currently the calendar is still not working entirely well..

Discussion forums

The *discussion forum* is a basic tool in a community, and SUCCESS4ALL is no exception. The forum is a flexible tool, since it allows members to interact in an asynchronous way: it doesn't require that all contributors be present at the same time. Sub-communities and projects can each have a dedicated forum for communicating and coordinating work at the proper level.

A forum is divided into *topics*; any community or project member can create a topic by choosing its name and writing the first post in it. Other posts can be created in a “linear” way, that is they are sorted by time; if you write a post to comment on another one not directly preceding it, you can cite its text, or a portion of it, by selecting that text with the mouse and clicking on a toolbar button.

Please, avoid burdening a topic with unrelated posts: don't be afraid to create a new topic when the subject of conversation changes!

Administrators can also create *thematic* forums, for discussions on subjects that could be of interest for CS members in other communities/projects, possibly outside the SUCCESS4ALL mini-site.

Document files can be attached to forum posts.

Although the forum is a simple concept, which is implemented in a very basic way by CS, we think that its usefulness shouldn't be overlooked. The presence of new (*unread*) topics or posts in forums associated with communities and projects of which you are a member is signaled by a small number on a red background next to the forums icon, a comics-like cloud at the top right, in the user bar. To exploit this feature, a topic in a community or project forum could be used for announcing events or just the date of the next meeting in a series.

Find more information on the CS help page [Communities and projects](#).

Shared folders and shared documents

Shared folders are another important collaboration tool because they allow for the orderly storage and sharing of documents.

Each community and project can own a shared folder, which may contain documents and, recursively, other folders. Since the hierarchical structure and the naming of folders and subfolders should aid in placing and retrieving work documents, we suggest that folders are created mainly by the administrators.

Documents inside folders are created in the *draft* state; this just means that they are accessible only to members of the local community or project. If and when they are *published*, i.e. placed in the *public* state, they become visible and retrievable also from outsiders.

Besides local documents, which are uploaded to the SUCCESS4ALL's memory and can be downloaded from it, folders can host *virtual* documents, which are references to external, online documents, such as web pages and remote PDFs: CS tries to visualize them when requested. CAUTION. CS and its mini-sites aren't so performant as a storage platform and they put some limitations on the size of the uploaded files; more definitely, they are currently not equipped to do media *streaming*: please use YouTube or similar platforms to serve video and audio contents.

Find more information on the CS help page [Communities and projects](#).

Video meetings

Inside CS and SUCCESS4ALL, video-conferencing is supported by the EduMEET service, which is based on open source software. This is the full-fledged video-conference platform that was integrated into the Up2U digital learning environment as part of the Up2U EU-funded project.

EduMEET is linked to the SUCCESS4ALL mini-site in a very simple way: it isn't necessary to explicitly create meeting rooms. Each community and each project has a dedicated virtual room available; to have a meeting, members of a community or project must click on the *Meeting* button in its homepage; obviously, they need to coordinate in some way their access to the room, by means of a SUCCESS4ALL forum or the email or a messenger like WhatsApp.

Find more information on the CS help page [Communities and projects](#).

Sending personal messages

As a CS member, you can send a *private message*, containing plain text, to any other member. The simplest way of doing that is to search and visualize the *user profile* of the intended recipient, then click on the mail-envelope icon near her/his name; in this case, since the *Recipient* field, in the “Compose Message” form, is already set, you only need to fill the *Subject* and *Body* fields. Please, don't abuse the ‘send message’ function.

The application keeps track of the received and unopened messages, and notifies the recipient with a small number on a red background in the user bar, on a corner of the mail icon.

The community administrator and the project supervisor are able to send copies of the same message to one, many or all members of the associated group from the homepage of the community/project.

Copies of incoming messages are forwarded as emails to the email address that you provided when you registered to CS, if it is so specified in your user preferences. You can inspect and possibly modify user preferences by clicking on your name in the black user bar and following the ‘User preferences’ link.

As you already know, your email address is not disclosed to anyone: emails are sent automatically by CS. An email is sent to the user in order to verify her/his email address at registration time, to ascertain that s/he really has control over that mailbox; also, occasionally the *Community Manager* could send by email a newsletter to all members.

Find more information on the CS help page [Communities and projects](#).

Publishing content as OERs

As mentioned above, one of the main goals of the original CS project was the cataloging, testing, and reuse of OERs (open educational resources). Although contents can be published in CS and its mini-sites in a few different ways, OERs are the more reusable kind of objects: they can host both original and existing content together with quite rich metadata, that is information on the content itself and its possible use.

Besides the title and a short description (1-2 lines), the OER content can consist in:

- a *rich-text* field, whose format is like that of a simple Word or OpenOffice/LibreOffice text document; this is stored directly in an entry of the OERs catalog (a *card*); besides its inherent simplicity, one advantage of this choice is that it allows to keep different language versions inside the same object;
- one or more *attached files*, typically PDF documents; they also are stored in the CS server;
- an HTML page or an *online document*, accessible through a link (an URL); unlike the metadata, the real content is stored elsewhere in the Internet: although its availability cannot be granted by CS, we discourage local duplication to avoid confusion, besides performance and copyright problems;
- an *online content* managed directly by a remote web application; in the general case, knowing the link of the remote content couldn't be enough: the creator of the OER card should specify, in a dedicated field, the *embed code* needed by the remote application to properly display the content inside the CS page; this is the case, for example, of a

GoogleDoc; sometimes, like in the case of a YouTube video or a SlideShare presentation, CS is able to guess a working embed code knowing only the content URL. Please, note that, when a content is provided, CS can show the OER in the *Play* mode; while the normal View mode basically displays the metadata, the Play mode tries to adapt to the content type; however it displays only a content type, if more are present, and only one attachment, if more are present: in this last case, however, each attachment can be downloaded from the normal OER view.

As a rule, only the creator of an OER can modify it, but other project or community members can comment and/or review it. A list of recent OERs is kept in the project's homepage; an advanced search function is available too.

Find more information on the CS help pages [Open resources](#), [Cataloguing educational resources](#) and [Searching the resources](#).

Compiling contents as “learning paths”

The term *learning path* (or *learning pathway*), and the initials *LP*, which we use to refer to a structure made up of content *nodes*, derive from its intended and most common role: suggesting or documenting a possible compilation of related educational materials, useful to learn something. But, in fact, an LP is a more generic object that can be used for different purposes, such as organizing documents or modeling a workflow.

The *nodes* of a LP, i.e. the content chunks that make up the LP, can constitute an unordered *collection*; more often, they form an ordered list, i.e. a *sequence*. An LP can also be structured as a *tree*, where each node can have zero, one or more child nodes.

Like OERs, LPs provide both a simple view, showing the LP metadata and a nodes index, and a Play view, where nodes are displayed in turn according to a prefixed order; the order for sequence LPs is obvious; for an unordered *collection*, the play order depends on the creation date of the nodes; *tree*-structured LPs are visited in ‘first-depth’ order, which appears to be the most intuitive one.

Usually a LP is created inside a project by one of its members; its *creator* can grant other project members the right to add nodes, thus becoming co-authors of that LP.

The nodes of an LP can be of three different types:

- OER nodes; a node of this type is used to virtually include an OER inside the LP, possibly at a certain position; a node *label* can be defined to override the OER *title*;
- TEXT nodes; they were introduced to be able to add some “connective tissue” between OER nodes, to comment them or add contextual information; in fact, the *rich-text* field of a text node is fully equivalent to that of an OER, but you could prefer to use a text node if it includes content not so general and/or reusable in other contexts as an OER is;
- DOCument nodes; a doc node is similar to an OER with an attached file or a virtual remote content; again, you could prefer to use a doc node if you think it isn't worth it to create an OER for that document.

Find more information on the CS help pages [Learning paths](#) and [Searching the resources](#).

Personal tools

The virtual calendar

The VIRTUAL calendar, accessible from an icon in the black user bar, provides an aggregated, read-only, view of the common calendar (the one in the community home) and of calendars possibly existent in other communities or projects of which the user is member.

Producing draft PDF documents from learning paths

Authorized users can generate and download, for their own use, a PDF version of an LP. This is useful, as an example, to take a snapshot of an LP, the result of an assignment, and then discuss it privately with a colleague or professor.

Exporting an LP as a PDF can be considered a reasonable way of producing a faithful and distributable booklet only in specific cases, such as when the LP

- is made up only of TEXT nodes and DOC nodes; this ensures that no problems will be encountered in retrieving and converting to PDF the content of the LP nodes;
- Includes only original copyright-free content, this relates to the lawfulness of distributing the resulting PDF, both in itself and in printed form;
- has limited size; retrieving and converting to PDF a large number of LP nodes and/or bulky nodes, may not only result in long response times, but also consume excessive computing resources, thus penalizing other users and possibly even blocking the web application; to guess the size of a node, you should consider not only local content but also online documents and web pages including heavy images.

While the sequencing of the pages of the PDF document mirrors that of the nodes in the *play* view of the LP, their content can be very different, especially for OER nodes referring to online resources. If the LP export function terminates without errors, the resulting PDF will include at least one page per node, with some of its metadata, such as title, author and date; the remaining content, on the other hand, may be partly or completely missing for a number of reasons such as:

- the remote content cannot be retrieved either because it is subject to some kind of access protection or because it is temporarily inaccessible over the network;
- the type of the remote content, say a YouTube video, is not suitable for conversion to PDF;
- a *range* field has been specified for an OER node that points to a web page; this doesn't affect the way it is visualized in the play view, but purposely limits the number of PDF pages in its conversion.

The user dashboard

You access the *user dashboard* by clicking on your name in the black *user bar* at the top of any page. It gathers in one place links to your *user profile* and to your *user preferences* and a number of boxes summarizing your roles, pending tasks, recent activity and work results, such as:

- communities and projects you are a member of;
- communities and projects to which you have applied;

- recently contributed OERs (cataloged or created);
- contributed learning paths.

Community administrators and project supervisors find in the user dashboard also reminds of

- applications by other members that they are expected to acknowledge;
- OERs and LPs submitted for publication and waiting for their approval.

Finally, the user dashboard constitutes a private user space in which the user

- can develop LPs outside specific projects; at any time, s/he can share them by moving them inside a project;
- finds a box with a list of *personal bookmarks*: see details below.

Find more information on the CS help page [User profile and user dashboard](#).

Creating personal bookmarks for delayed processing

If you are an authenticated CS user, without installing any external software, you can simply extend a web browser like Mozilla FireFox or Google Chrome to support you in creating personal bookmarks, that is in taking note of web content that you find interesting, while navigating the web.

These notes are similar to the ordinary *bookmarks* of FireFox and Chrome, in that they include at least an URL and a title, and you can take them without interrupting your browsing; however, they constitute rough objects ('stubs') that, later on, you could enrich with metadata, to make them into full-fledged OERs, and move inside some project, to share and publish them.

On the CS help page [Learning Analytics with xAPI in CommonSpaces](#), section *Creating and using the CS Bookmarklet*, you will find instructions for extending your browser, by defining a "CS bookmarklet", and for using this to create personal bookmarks inside your private space.

Experimental multilingual analysis tool

SUCCESS4ALL, like the other CS mini-sites, inherits from CS a couple of experimental tools for content analysis: each exposes to the user a 'dashboard', that is, a composite page providing a number of related panels. Both tools

- rest on an advanced, open, software library for natural language processing (NLP);
- have so far been experimented only on English and Italian texts, but their modular architecture should allow their application to be extended to many other languages;
- are considered experimental, in that they have not been extensively tested, also because of the limited computing and development resources available to date; moreover, only authorized users can access them: please contact the community administrator or the CS manager to get information and help.

The text analysis dashboard

This tool aims to allow the analysis of web pages and documents that include mainly text.

By using the *text-analysis dashboard* (TAD), the content creators will get an evaluation of the readability of the text, based on indicators of *syntactic complexity* and *lexicon level*.

A teacher could use those indicators to assess the writing skill of a student in terms of lexicon richness and syntax mastery; any user could enjoy a synthetic picture of the text, provided by

some genre or topic categorization and possibly by a short summary.; teachers and other educators could be interested in evaluating educational material in order to assess the suitability of a text for a target audience or an educational goal.

Current outputs include:

- a series of numerical values representing counts of characters, tokens (words), unique word forms and sentences, and statistical values related to the text structure and the frequency of terms occurrences;
- frequency of lemmas, where a lemma is the normalized form of a word, used as entry for lookup in dictionaries; each lemma is annotated with the count of occurrences in the text and with a *lexical level*, if known; lexical levels correspond in some way to the levels of proficiency in the learning of a language as L2 (second language), as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR);
- lexical categorization, syntactic structure and named entities (NER): the biggest panel in the dashboard merges in a graph the representations of three types of analysis results.

Find more information on the CS help page [Content evaluation](#).

The content analysis dashboard

The *content analysis dashboard* (CAD) aims to facilitate the application of TAD functions to content sets in the same language. The basic version of this tool is intended for an individual user; it takes into consideration mainly contents authored or cataloged by her/him.

CAD supports the definition of content collections and their consolidation in a kind of *corpora*.

The individual items to be included in a collection can be selected among CS content objects, such as OERs, LPs and documents in *project folders*, or taken from outside: web pages, online documents, documents local to the user device. In this context, a *corpus* is a collection of contents that has undergone a natural language (NL) *preprocessing* phase, whose result has been saved to disk; a corpus includes a few summary data and allows you to spare some computation when more specific processing will be done subsequently.

Find more information on the CS help page [Content evaluation](#).