# The Ability of Grade X Students of A Senior High School in Identifying and Writing Recounts in English

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Abstract. This paper reports the result of a study aimed at finding out the ability of Senior High School students in identifying and writing recount texts. As such, the objectives of the study are to find out whether the students are able to identify a recount texts and its generic structure (orientation, event(s), and re-orientation) and to find out whether they are able to write a recount text with proper generic structure. Fourty three subjects were given questions concerning recount texts and asked to write a recount text. The result shows that most of the students were able to write a recount text with the proper generic structure showing all the elements of a recount text, but many of them had the difficulty in identifying a recount text and its generic structure.

Keywords: text genre, generic structure, recount, writing

#### Introduction

In the attempt to improve the education system of secondary schools in Indonesia, "Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan" or "KTSP" was introduced by the government in 2007. For the English subject, the syllabus applies the literacy-based approach. The approach is based on the concept of literacy in which reading is of primary importance (Agustien, Helena I. R, 2006). Various text genres, each of which has its own specific generic structure, are then introduced to the students. They are descriptive, procedure, recount, narrative, report, news item, analytical exposition, spoof, hortatory exposition, explanation, review, and discussion. Classroom activities are conducted based on the two cycles: the spoken and written cycles. Each cycle comprises four stages: building knowledge of the field (BKoF), modeling of the text (MoT), joint construction of the text (JoT), and independent construction of the text (ICoT).

In the beginning of the implementation of this curriculum, in the the year of 2008, some senior high schools started to implement it for their new students (Grade X). Based on the writers' observation in a private senior high school, it was found out that the genres being taught were narrative, recount, and procedure. The teaching was done to enable students to identify the genre of a text, to identify elements of the generic structure, and to produce the text in both spoken (monologue) and in written (composition) forms.

Since the literacy-based teaching and learning is a new experience for both the teachers and the students, studies concerning the effectiveness of it should be conducted so that inputs for the betterment of the implementation of the curriculum can be given to the teachers and the schools. For this purpose, the study reported in this paper was conducted focusing on whether the teachers' teaching on the text genres really results in the students' writing ability, especially in writing recount texts.

## Literacy in the English Language Teaching in Indonesia

Allan Luke and Peter Freebody have defined literacy in the Queensland publication *Literate Futures* (2000) as:

The flexible and sustainable mastery of a repertoire of practices with texts of traditional and new communications technologies via spoken language, print and multimedia.

The term 'mastery' implies that literacy is not a single finite thing that can be taught by the teacher in a classroom, but it should be referred as an ongoing process of learning as the learners get themselves more and more immersed in the language.

The fact that the emphasis of the English Language Teaching in Indonesia is the development of English literacy (Agustien, 2006:2) implies that the teaching must foster literacy, not only in terms of the basic reading and writing skills, but also in terms of a broader discourse competence that involves the ability to interpret and critically evaluate a wide variety of written and spoken texts.

One of the distinct features of literacy-based approach that makes it different from the previously implemented approaches is in the role of the learners. The learners' role in the literacy-based approach involves the active engagement in the use of English in communicating with others, reflecting their language usage, and finally revising their language (Kern, 2000:312 as cited in Agustien, 2006:2).

## Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP)

Peraturan Pemerintah no 19 tahun 2005 states that curriculum is a set of plans and settings regarding the goal, content, and learning material. It also covers the technique used as the basis for conveying the teaching-learning activity to achieve the educational goals set by the government. In the attempt to improve the nation's educational system, the Ministry of Education of the Indonesian Government periodically reviews the curriculum applied for all levels of the schools in Indonesia. The result of the latest review is the decision to design and implement Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP).

KTSP is defined as a practical curriculum that is developed by and applied in each educational unit (school level). Hence, each educational unit (each school) has the freedom to customize its own curriculum according to the basic competences and the standard of competences as

developed by *Pusat Kurikulum*, *Balitbang Dekdiknas (2003)*. For the English subject, the Literacy Approach is applied as the means for achieving the basic competences.

# The Level of literacy in KTSP

Every level of education, from the primary level to secondary level, has its own level of literacy which also becomes the target level (Agustien, 2006:2). For the primary school, the literacy target level is the performative level that makes students able to use language to accompany action in the classroom and school contexts. This is meant to prepare students to participate and interact in the English lessons when they are at the junior high level. The literacy target for the junior high school is the functional level which enables students to use the basic survival English to get things done as well as to extract partial information from any kinds of materials students may meet in their daily communication. To accomplish this target, students are introduced to five text genres: procedure, descriptive, recount, narrative, and report. In the senior high school, students are expected to achieve the informational level of literacy. They are supposed to be able to accumulate information from various genres, as well as producing informative discourse in those genres. In addition to the five genres they study in the junior high school, they also learn genres which are more academic: discussion, explanation, exposition, review, and news item.

## The Teaching-Learning Cycle Model

A specific teaching-learning cycle to adopt the literacy-based curriculum is introduced by Hammond (in Agustien, 2006). The emphasis is the students' competence where in the last step they have to produce their own text. There are two cycles for each unit of teaching adapted from the concept of literacy approach by Feez and joice (1998, 28-31); they are the spoken and the written cycles. Each cycle comprises four stages described as follows:

- Building Knowledge of the Field (BKoF)
   This phase serves as the setting or the platform to the language teaching, in which schemata are built and language can be learned in its macro-social purposes rather than the semantic microfunctions of individual words and sentences.
- 2. Modeling of the Text (MoT)
  In this stage students investigate the structural pattern and language features of the model texts, and also compare the model with other examples of the same text-type.
- 3. Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT)
  This stage moves the students into the active construction of the text. By using the concept they have learned and the text model they observe, working in groups, students are guided to construct a

- text which is somewhat like a replica or a copy of the model text given in the previous stage.
- Independent Construction of the Text (ICoT)
   In this stage, students work independently constructing their own texts.

#### **Recount Texts**

Mark and Kathy Anderson (1998) state that 'a recount is a piece of text that retells past events, usually in the order in which they occurred.' Therefore, the purpose of a recount is to list and describe past experiences by retelling events in the order in which they happened (chronologically ordered), either to entertain or inform the audience.

The basic recount consists of three parts: the setting or orientation -background information answering *who? when? where? why?*, events which are identified and described in chronological order, and concluding comments or re-orientation expressing a personal opinion regarding the events described. As a recount retells past events, it is written in the past tense.

# The Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research design. It describes the writers' analysis on the extent of the students' ability in identifying a recount text, the extent of the students' ability in writing recount text in proper generic structure, and the association between the students' abilities in identifying and writing recount.

#### The Subjects

The subjects of this study were the 43 X grade students of a private senior high school in Surabaya of the school year 2007/2008. Since the distribution of the X grade students into classes was intentionally designed to create a balance in academic competence between classes, the writer could assume that each class in all of the X grade classes had a relatively equivalent level of the English mastery, and shared the same distribution range. Thus by randomly selecting one of the classes, the writer assumed that the selection, which then became the subjects of the research, represented all the population of the X grade students in the school.

#### The Data Source

There are two sources of data in this research:

- 1. The students' answers to the writer's questions about a recount reading passage. The questions cover the identification of the text type (or the genre) and the generic structure of the text,
- 2. The students' recount-type compositions

#### The Parameters

The analysis of the data was done based on the components of the generic structure of recount text:

- 1. **Orientation**: the setting or the background information of the text, answering *who? when? where?* and *why?*
- Event(s): the body of the text, consists of one or more event(s)
  that is written in chronological order, either in one paragraph or
  more
- 3. **Re-orientation** (optional): concluding comments, express a personal opinion regarding the events described

# Identification of the text

The parameter to analyze the students' ability in indentifying a recount text represents the generic structure of the text given to the students.

Genre/Text type: Recount

Generic Structure	Identification
Orientation	Paragraph 1
Event 1	Paragraph 2
Event 2	Paragraph 3
Event 3	Paragraph 4
Event 4	Paragraph 5
Re-orientation	Paragraph 6

The students' answers are categorized as follows:

No	Codes	Explanation
1	CCC	Correct genre/text type, correct generic structure, and
		correct identification
2	CCW	Correct genre/text type, correct generic structure, but
		wrong identification
3	CW	Correct genre/text type, wrong generic structure
4	WCC	Wrong genre/text type, but correct generic structure, and
		correct identification
5	WCW	Wrong genre/text type, correct generic structure, but
		wrong identification
6	WW	Wrong genre/text type, wrong generic structure

## Students' Recount Texts

The students' recount-type essays were analyzed to know whether they had the components of the generic structure of a recount (orientation, event(s), and re-orientation) or not. These components act as the parameter of recount, so that when these components were not found in the essays, they were not considered as recounts. The classification of the students essays was done by using the following coding:

No	Codes	Explanation
1	CC	Correct genre, complete generic structure
2	CI	Correct genre, incomplete generic structure
3	W	Wrong genre

## **Findings**

The findings of the students' ability in identifying and in writing a recount text is presented as follows:

Students' Ability in Identifying a Recount

The text entitled "As It Happened" used as an example of a model recount text to be identified by the students was taken from Mark, and Kathy Anderson's *Text Types in English* (Macmillan, 1997). The students were asked to identify (1) the genre of the text, (2) its generic structure, and (3) the components of the structure in the text. This means that if a student had a comprehensive understanding of the concept of a recount text, he/she would be able to respond to the three items correctly. The result is as follows:

Table 1
Identification

Catego ry	Genre Identified	Generic Structure (as recount)	Identification of each paragraph	Number of Students
CCC		correct	correct	12
CCW	correct	correct	wrong	9
CW		wrong	wrong	5
WCC		correct	correct	2
WCW	wrong	correct	wrong	2
WW		wrong	wrong	13
	TOTAL			

#### **Notes:**

CCC : Correct genre, Correct structure, Correct Identification CCW : Correct genre, Correct structure, Wrong Identification

CW : Correct genre, Wrong structure

WCC : Wrong genre, Correct structure, Correct IdentificationWCW : Wrong genre, Correct structure, Wrong Identification

WW : Wrong genre, Wrong structure

There were 26 students who identified the text "As It Happened" as recount text. However, only half of them (12 students) were able to present the correct generic structure and to identify it correctly (CCC category). It means that there were only 12 students who had a comprehensive understanding of recount based on their ability in identifying the text genre, the generic structure, and its components.

The CCW category showed that 9 students had already had the concept of recount and its generic structure; however, they failed to show the parts of the text that corresponded with each component in the generic structure. This might be caused by the students' failure to determine the boundaries or the extent of each component. One example of this kind of mistakes, as made by some, was that they miss-identified 'Event I' in the text as a part of the orientation. Another mistake was that they miss-identified two events as one.

An interesting outcome was shown in **CW** category in which five students identified the text as recount, yet they failed to present the correct generic structure of recount text and to identify the its components in the text. It means that somehow the students knew that they were given a recount text, but they did not know, or forgot, the generic structure of this text. This means that these students did not yet have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of a recount.

Another interesting fact came from WCC category. Two students were unable to identify the text as a recount, yet they were able to present the correct generic structure of recount and also to show the identification of each corresponding component in the text. This means that these two students might not understand what recount text was at all. They identified recount as other kinds of texts: either descriptive, report, or narrative.

The WCW category was almost the same as WCC, but the three students on this category failed to identify the components in the text. The last category, WW, showed that the 13 students in this category did not understand the concept of recount and its generic structure

## The Students' Ability in Writing a Recount-Type Essays

The students were given the 30 minutes to write 150-200 words recount text about their first day at school. The results were then categorized using the category as mentioned above:

Table 2
The Students' Writing Ability

Categor y	Genre / Text Type	Generic Structure	Number of Students	%
CC	aarraat	complete	25	58,14
CI	correct	incomplete	12	27,91
W wrong		6	13,95	
TOTAL			43	100

## **Notes:**

CC : Correct genre, Complete structureCI : Correct genre, Incomplete structure

W : Wrong genre

Concerning the students' writing ability, this analysis was focused on the generic structural level of the essays. The students' essays were analyzed only as whether they have the proper generic structure or not. The result showed that there were 25 students who were successful in writing a correct recount text with a complete generic structure (CC category). There were 12 students who wrote an essay with incomplete generic structure (CI category), but the essays could still be identified as recount. There were 6 students who failed to write recount text (W category).

The common mistake in CI category was the omission of reorientation. Re-orientation in recount is optional; however, since the students were taught to include it in their writing, the absence of reorientation could be considered as mistake.

All students in  $\mathbf{W}$  category wrote not recount texts but the descriptive essays. Instead of telling their experiences on their first day at school in chronological order, they made a description about the school itself. This was almost definitely caused by the lack of understanding about the generic structure of recount.

# The Relationship between the Students' Abilities in Identifying and in Writing Recount

The last part of this research is to find out the relationship between the students' ability in identifying the generic structure of a recount and the students' ability in writing a recount. The question now is whether it is true that those who are able to identify are also able to write. To answer this, the result in Table 2 and Table 3 were combined together as presented in the following table:

Table 3
The Students' Identification and Writing Ability

Identification	Writing	Number of students	Total
	CC	2, 15, 20, 31, 34, 39, 40	
CCC	CI	5, 13, 35	12
	W	1, 36	
	CC	11, 16, 29, 30, 33, 42	
CCW	CI	28, 37	9
	W	38	
	CC	18, 23, 43	
CW	CI	17	5
	W	22	
	CC	-	
WCC	CI	8	2
	W	3	
	CC	24	
WCW	CI	6	2
	W	-	

	CC	4, 7, 10, 12, 21, 25, 27, 41	
WW	CI	9, 14, 26, 32	13
	W	19	
TOTAL			43

# Notes:

CCC : Correct Genre, Correct Structure, Correct Identification CCW : Correct Genre, Correct Structure, Wrong Identification

CW : Correct Genre, Wrong Structure

WCC : Wrong Genre, Correct Structure, Correct Identification WCW : Wrong Genre, Correct Structure, Wrong Identification

WW : Wrong Genre, Wrong Structure
 CC : Correct Genre, Complete Structure
 CI : Correct Genre, Incomplete Structure

W : Wrong Genre

The result showed that on the one hand, not all of those who were able to identify the genre and the generic structure were able to write a proper recount as well. But, on the other hand, it could be seen that some of those who failed to identify the recount were able to write a recount with correct generic structure.

The Relationship of the Students' Abilities in Indentifying and Writing a Recount

It can be seen from the table below that when the students' abilities in identifying the text and writing recount were compared, the results showed that there were wide varieties of outcome. For example, from 12 students of  $\boldsymbol{CCC}$  category, only 7 belonged to  $\boldsymbol{CC}$  category, while 3 belonged to  $\boldsymbol{CI}$ , and 2 belonged to  $\boldsymbol{W.}$ 

Here are the relationships for each category

	<del>-</del>		
Category	Explanation		
CCC			
CCC - CC	This combination shows that these 7 students were		
	successful in both identifying the genre and the structure of		
	recount, and also in writing one with complete structure.		
CCC – CI	The 3 students in this category knew the proper generic		
	structure of the recount, yet they did not produce a recount		
	with complete generic structure. Mostly, they did not		
	include the re-orientation as their closing paragraphs.		
CCC – W	These two students in this combination knew about recount		
	and they showed their understanding of the concept of		
	recount, but they could not write a one. It means that they		
	did not yet reach the productive skill: the writing skill.		
CCW			
CCW - CC	The mastery of the generic structure of recount and its		
	components was already possessed by these 6 students.		
	Their only mistake was in identifying the parts of the		

	paragraphs. It showed that this mistake did not affect their
	ability to write a recount with proper generic structure.
CCW – CI	There were two students of this category. Almost the same
	with the CCW – CC category, this category showed an
	average mastery of recount but with the failure in
	identifying the paragraphs and in the absence of the re-
	orientation.
CCW – W	This combination was almost the same as the CCC – W
	except that this student failed to identify the components of
	the generic structure in each paragraph.
CW	me generie ou decine in each paragraphi
CW -CC	There were three students experiencing this combination.
	These three students knew that the text recount, and they
	were also successful in writing recount text with proper
	generic structure. These students, however, failed to
	present the components of the generic structure of recount.
	It seemed that they did understand the concept of the
	generic structure, but they did not know the names of each
	component.
CW – CI	The student under this category showed little knowledge
	about recount. This student knew that the text was a
	recount, but he/she did not know the correct generic
	structure of recount. As a result, he/she failed to present the
	components of the generic structure and to write a recount
	with complete generic structure.
CW – W	This combination showed that this student only knew how
	to discern recount text in the overall scale. He/she did not
	have both the knowledge of the structure and the skill to
	write. Her competence in recount was only in identifying a
	recount based on its purpose / social function.
WCC	F. F. F. C.
WCC - CI	This combination showed that the student understands the
	components of the generic structure of recount. However,
	he/she did not know that those components of structure
	belong to recount. He/she miss-labeled recount as another
	genre.
WCC – W	Almost the same as WCC – CI, this combination showed
	that this student miss-labeled recount as another genre. It
	was proven later that the student's "recount-type"
	composition was not a recount at all.
WCW	L L
WCW-CC	This category showed that this student had the skill in
	writing a recount, but he/she had the difficulty in
	identifying it.
WCW – CI	Almost the same as WCW – CC, this category showed that
'' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' ' '	this student had some skills in writing a recount, but he/she
	and state in the source same in writing a recount, out ne/she

	1 11:00 1, 11 1:01 1,
	had difficulty in identifying it.
WW	
WW – CC	This category has the highest population of all, 8 students. It seems that these students did not understand the concept of recount since they failed to identify it. However, the fact that they could write a recount with proper and complete generic structure proved the opposite. It means that these students understood the concept of recount and was able to use that concept to write a recount with proper generic structure, but strangely, they failed in identifying the text as a recount.
WW – CI	Students of this category were no other than those of WW – CC category who wrote an incomplete recount. These four students knew the concept, but they failed to identify the text.
WW – W	This category means that the student did not have any knowledge in recount at all, both in identifying a recount and its generic structure. This was strengthened by the fact that this student made a essay that was a descriptive

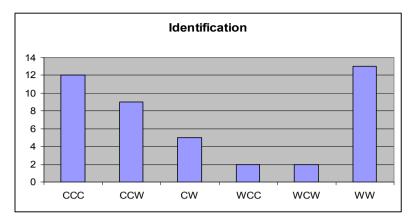
#### Discussion

Answering the questions stated earlier in the problem statements, the writers come with these summaries:

- Twenty-six out of forty-three subjects (60.47%) of grade X students were able to identify the text "As It Happened" as recount text.
- 2. Twenty-five of forty-three subjects (58.14%) of grade X students were able to present the correct generic structure of recount text.
- 3. Fourteen out of forty-three subjects (32.56%) of grade X students were able to present the correct generic structure of recount text and able to identify it in the text "As It Happened"
- 4. Twenty-five out of forty-three subjects (58.14%) of grade X students were able to write a recount text with proper and complete generic structure (orientation, event, and re-orientation).

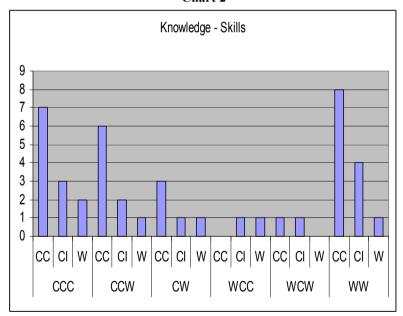
The findings of this study on the students' ability in identifying recount that is shown in Table 1 might not show anything noteworthy except that there was a polarization effect on the results that the two highest populations mass around the two poles: the CCC -the highest categoryand the WW -the lowest-

#### Chart 1



When the students' abilities in identifying and writing recount were compared, the result showed that the two poles (CCC and WW) had similar features. Both of these two categories had the same proportion of skills (CC, CI, and W): 7-3-2 for CCC and 8-4-1 for WW, shown on this chart.

Chart 2



Of course, this finding on the WW category was contrary to the fact that these 13 students were unable to identify the text "As It Happened" as recount and unable to present the correct generic structure of recount. Without the proper knowledge, they were not supposed to be able to write a recount with a proper and complete generic structure. Yet, the number of students who achieve CC in this category was the highest compared

with the other categories. The question then is: why do these students failed to identify a recount while they could write one?

To answer this question, it is important to see the nature of the literacy approach in which this genre was taught to the students. The literacy-based approach used four cycles of learning: Building knowledge of the field, modeling of the text, joint construction of the text, and independent construction of the text. The first two built the students' knowledge, while the later two built the students' skills.

Cycle	Result
Building Knowledge of the Field	Background knowledge
Modeling of the Text	Generic Structure
Joint Construction of the Text	Writing Skill
Independent Construction of the Text	Writing Skill

So that students get a comprehensive understanding of the genre, these four cycles must be delivered the them sequentially in a well-balanced manner. The absence or unbalanced proportion of one of these cycles might result in the students' incomplete comprehension on the genre, for example: some students might only possess the knowledge or the skills.

Background Knowledge	Generic Structure	Ability in Identifying a Recount Text	Writing Ability
Yes	No	Yes	No
No	Yes	No	Yes
Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

To identify a text as a recount, students must activate their background knowledge on recount. Hence, the students who had the proper knowledge and who had seen the kind of text before would be able to identify the genre easily, while those who only knew the generic structure of recount and its components without having been exposed to a model of recount text to be used as their background knowledge, would have the difficulty in identifying the genre.

Concerning the students' writing ability, it can be said that the same condition would have a reversed outcome when it comes to writing. Those who know the nature of recount and who have a model of recount text in their schemata without a comprehensive knowledge of the generic structure of the text and its components would not be able to write a recount with proper generic structure. On the contrary, those who knew only the generic structure of recount might find the difficulty in identifying a recount, but when they were given a specific instruction to write a recount, they were likely to be able to write a recount with a proper generic structure based on their knowledge about the components

of recount text. Of course, those who possessed both the background knowledge and the generic structure were able to identify and to write recount

## Conclusion

This research was conducted to find out the extent of the abilities of the X grade students of a private high school of the school year 2007 – 2008 in identifying and in writing recount texts. After analyzing the data from the students' answer results, the writers concluded that the extent of the students' ability in identifying and in mastering the components of the generic structure varied. There were only small a number of students who were successful in the three aspects: identifying the genre, presenting the correct generic structure, and identifying the components of the structure in each paragraph. Most of them failed in one or more aspects.

A better result came from the students' writing ability. After analyzing the students' essays, the writers concluded that the ability of the students in writing recount was quite good as more than halfof the students were able to write a recount with proper and complete generic structure.

Concerning the relationship between the abilities of the students in identifying and writing recount, the writers came up with these conclusions:

- Not all students who had the ability to identify recount had the ability in writing. On the other hand, not all students who possessed the ability in writing had the ability to identify recount either.
- 2. Most of the students who were able to identify the genre and to present the correct structure of recount could produce recount-type essays with proper and complete generic structure.
- 3. Many students who had the ability to write a recount with proper generic structure had the difficulty in identifying the genre of the text and its generic structure.

## **Suggestion**

After analyzing the data, discussing, and making conclusion on the research, the writers would like to give suggestions that English teachers should allocate more time in modeling recount texts, including giving exercises in identifying recount texts and their parts to the students. In order to build students' background knowledge and overall understanding on recount text, English teachers should introduce as many as possible examples of recount texts to them. And at last, an elaborative and creative writing program should be exercised using various techniques such as writing on diaries, making list, using diagram, or writing based on picture series to stimulate the students' creativity and flow of ideas.

## Appendix

The Recount Text given to the students to be identified:

## As It Happened

One very spooky encounter with the UFO (an unidentified flying object) occurred in May 1974 involving a couple driving from Zimbabwe to South Africa.

As they carefully drove throughout the night they saw flashing blue-white light that was going on and off in a slow, steady rhythm. Shortly after noticing this, the car was covered in a bright circle of light.

Inside the car it suddenly became very cold. The couple wrapped themselves in thick blankets and turned on the heater but they still shivered.

Then their car began to act very strangely. Suddenly the headlights went off, the brakes failed, the steering wheel locked and the fuel gauge showed empty. Next the car began speeding up and raced along the road at 190 kilometres an hour. To one side of the car, the UFO continued to follow

The driver and his passenger lost consciousness. When they awoke they were near the small town of Fort Victoria. The car's odometer showed that only 12 kilometres had been traveled, yet the distance from where they first saw the UFO to Fort Victoria was 290 kilometres.

Although the couple's description of what happened contained plenty of details, many people find it hard to believe that UFO does exist.

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