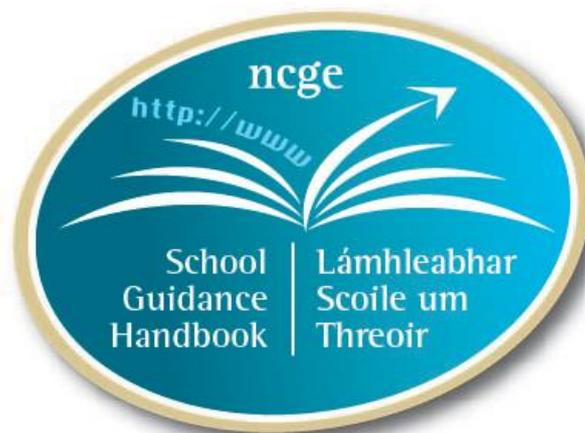


Dyslexia: How the Guidance Counsellor can support the student with dyslexia

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Summary

This article looks at how the guidance counsellor can support the student with dyslexia in Irish post-primary schools. It discusses the different ways in which dyslexia may affect the student and suggests screening if a student presents with difficulties. A diagnosis of dyslexia is made through a psycho-educational assessment. Supports such as Reasonable Accommodations in Certificate Examinations (RACE), Disability Route to Education (DARE) and language exemptions are discussed. The guidance counsellor has a key role in helping the student with dyslexia make key decisions such as subject and course choice. These decisions are crucial in helping the student cope and succeed. The article also discusses several dyslexia-friendly whole school policies such as easy-to-read style guide for notes and other documentation, the readability of textbooks, use of assistive technology and study skills advice for parents and students.

Key words

Dyslexia, psycho-educational assessment, reasonable accommodation in State examinations, disability route to education, language exemptions, dyslexia friendly whole-school policies, key guidance interventions for dyslexia.

Introduction

The Rose Report (2009) *Identifying and Teaching Children and Young People with Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties* describes dyslexia as a learning difficulty that primarily affects the skills involved in accurate and fluent word reading. Characteristic features are difficulties in phonological awareness, verbal memory and verbal processing speed. It occurs across a range of intellectual abilities and is best thought of as a continuum, not a distinct category. Co-occurring difficulties may be seen in aspects of language, motor co-ordination, mental calculations, concentration and personal organisation, but these are not, by themselves, markers of dyslexia. Dyslexia International (www.dyslexia-international.org) states that the prevalence of dyslexia can be estimated to be between 5% to 15% of the population. This figure would indicate that there are many thousands of students with dyslexia in Irish post-primary schools.

A psycho-educational assessment (discussed later in this article) is carried out by an educational psychologist and is needed for a definitive diagnosis of dyslexia.

Additional teaching support for students with learning difficulties are provided either through resource hours granted by the SENO (Special Educational Needs Organiser) or by learning support. Since 2012 a general allocation of resource hours is granted to schools for students whose disability is considered to be of high incidence. Dyslexia is included in this category. Learning support targets students whose literacy or numeracy is below the 10th percentile on a standardised test, regardless of whether the student has an assessment or not. Many students with dyslexia do not meet these criteria and rely on mainstream teachers and guidance counsellors for support.

Key points on dyslexia

The key points on dyslexia include the following:

- Research has identified genetic components in dyslexia.
- Dyslexia occurs across a range of intellectual abilities.
- Dyslexia occurs along a continuum. One student's dyslexia may be very severe while another's may be quite mild. No two students are likely to have the same profile.
- Dyslexic difficulties do not affect all tasks. An individual may be very poor at reading but may excel at engineering, maths or art. Not all aspects of reading and writing will be equally weak.
- Dyslexia may co-occur with other specific learning difficulties such as dyspraxia, dyscalculia, attention deficit disorder, Asperger's syndrome or speech and language impairment.

Students at post-primary may experience difficulties in some of the following:

- Rote learning such as learning poetry, Maths tables and formulae.
- Copying from the board or taking notes from dictation.
- Spelling.
- Visual discomfort (stress) when reading. Words may blur and appear to move.
- Reading inaccurately, losing place on the page, stress when reading aloud.
- Understanding complex instructions.
- Planning and writing essays.

- Written answers are too short and points are underdeveloped.
- Handwriting may be disjointed, illegible at times or have many cross-outs.
- Finishing work on time.
- Confusion about places, times and dates leading to problems of organization.
- Wide discrepancy between oral and written work.

With appropriate interventions the effects can be mitigated and individuals can learn to develop strategies to enable them cope most of the time. These interventions (some which are addressed later in this article) can make the difference between success and failure at post-primary level.

Screening and Identification

Concerns about a student may arise from the results of standardised tests or from observations and/or concerns from parents, teachers or the students themselves.

The results of standardised tests such as the Cognitive Abilities Test (CAT) or Differential Aptitude Tests (DATs) may show an uneven profile of ability. A significantly lower result in verbal reasoning in relation to other scores such as numeric or non-verbal reasoning should prompt further investigation. It is good practice to analyse tests results such as CAT or DATs to check if such anomalies are present.

As a first step the teacher or guidance counsellor investigating such concerns could use the list of indicators published by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in *the Report of Task Force on Dyslexia* (Appendix 1). Further investigation could include the use of dyslexia screening tests. Two tests appropriate for use at post-primary level are *Lass Secondary (Lucid Assessment System for Secondary Schools 4th Ed 2010)* and the *Dyslexia Screening Test – Secondary*. Both tests, including supplier details, are listed in Circular 0034/2015. https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/Active-Circulars/cl0034_2015.pdf The screening test and/or the checklist might strengthen the suspicion that the student may have dyslexia and also help when discussing with parents' possible referral to an educational psychologist for a psycho-educational assessment. A diagnosis of dyslexia can only be made by such an assessment.

The Psycho-educational Assessment

A psycho-educational assessment consists of a test of cognitive ability such as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC-IV) and tests of attainments in literacy and numeracy. Scores used in the assessment may be given as standard scores, percentiles or scaled scores.

The report contains background information, observations of how a student approaches a task during assessment, tests results, descriptions of what the tests mean and where the scores place the student in relation to other students of similar age. The findings are summarised, a conclusion is stated and recommendations for future action are given.

After the diagnosis the next stage is planning interventions. For the student diagnosed with dyslexia there will be a pattern of strengths and weaknesses on both the cognitive and the

attainment tests and these provide the foundation for strategies for teaching, learning and educational choices.

TABLE 1: The standard score range, percentiles, scaled scores, the percentage of the population who would achieve such scores and the descriptive categories relating to these scores.

Standard Score	Percentile	Scaled Score	% of population	Descriptive range
130 and above	98 -99	16 – 19	2%	Exceptionally high, very superior
120-129	91 – 97	15	7%	High, superior
110-119	75 – 90	13 -14	16%	High Average, above average
90-109	25 – 74	8 – 12	50%	Average
80-89	9 – 24	6 – 7	16%	Low Average
70-79	3 – 8	4 – 5	7%	Low
Below 70	1 – 2	1 – 3	2%	Exceptionally low

In 2015 the Dyslexia Association of Ireland changed (DAI) its policy on assessment content. The DAI assessment now covers a range of literacy skills including reading of single words (both word and non-words), phonological awareness, reading fluency/speed, reading accuracy, comprehension and spelling. Related cognitive skills including memory, rapid naming and other language skills are also investigated. The DAI will only conduct a full IQ test with a client if the educational psychologist deems it necessary and is in the best interest of the client.

In 2016 a current assessment report (not less than 3 years old) is needed for applications for DARE (Disability Route to Education). This will not be the case from 2017 onwards as the student will be able to use a report that they have received at any time during their education.

For applications for RACE (Reasonable Accommodations in Examinations) in the Leaving Certificate either a copy of assessment report or CAT III or IV results are needed.

Reasonable Accommodation in Certificate Examinations

RACE describes the various supports provided for students in the Junior and Leaving Certificate exams. These include:

- Reading assistance.
- Use of tape recorder.
- Use of a computer/word processor.
- A scribe. When applying for a scribe, reasons must be provided why the student cannot use a computer or tape.

- A waiver from the spelling and grammar elements of the exam in language subjects.

Applications for RACE in the Leaving Certificate are made in May of 5th year. There is a detailed application form to be filled in by the school. It should be accompanied by a psycho-educational assessment report or CAT III or IV test results and three examples of the student's work. Students should be encouraged to keep 5th year Christmas exam scripts. If the application is turned down, there is an appeals process. Applications for RACE in the Junior Certificate are made in the October/November prior to the exam.

The school may be required to carry out additional testing as the State Examinations Commission www.examinations.ie sets out criteria for each accommodation. These are scores in specified standardised testing on handwriting speed, reading speed or spelling.

If the student qualifies for accommodations in State examinations, it follows that similar accommodations should be available in-house exams from first year as they may make a significant difference to student achievement.

Guidance for students with dyslexia

Guidance has an important role to play in supporting the student with dyslexia as they progress through post-primary school. Such support as outlined below can be vital in ensuring the student can cope and make progress.

Disability Route to Education (DARE)

DARE (www.accesscollege.ie) is a supplementary admissions scheme for school-leavers with disabilities. Students may be admitted on their course of choice with lower points than those set by the CAO.

To be eligible for **DARE in 2016**, the student with dyslexia must meet **both** of the following:

- DARE Evidence of Disability Criteria
- DARE Educational Impact Criteria.

1. DARE Evidence of Disability Criteria

A full psycho-educational assessment as described in the *DARE 2016 Acceptable Content Sheet* is required. A completed psycho-educational assessment summary sheet 2016 may also be completed and attached. All tests used must be current, valid and age appropriate. Performance should be reported as standard scores and percentile points. Age equivalent scores are not acceptable. Score ranges and descriptive ranges alone are not sufficient. Psychologists should refer to the DARE 2016 Suitable Tests for Assessment of SPLD List. The report must be less than three years old on February 1st 2016.

An applicant will be considered to be eligible where satisfactory documents have been submitted to DARE which confirm:

- A. General ability falls at or above a standard score of 90
- B. Attainment at or below the 10th percentile/SS 81 in two literacy areas from
 - Single word reading/identification

- Reading accuracy
- Reading comprehension
- Reading speed/fluency
- Pseudoword decoding
- Spelling
- Writing speed.

2. Meeting DARE's Educational Impact Criteria

In order to meet DARE's educational impact criteria, **applicants must meet the correct combination of two of the following indicators of educational impact.**

<http://accesscollege.ie/dare/>

1. Learning and Exam Results
2. Attendance and Disruption
3. School Experience and Well-being
4. Intervention and Supports
5. Time Issues
6. Other Educational Impact
7. Specific Learning Difficulty Attainment Scores

Applicants with a Specific Learning Difficulty must meet indicator 7 plus one other indicator to meet the DARE educational impact criteria.

Important changes are happening to DARE from 2017 onwards. There will be a new DARE Educational Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS is made up of two parts: the School Statement which is completed by appropriate staff in school and the Applicant Statement, which is completed by the applicant. **From 2017 onwards DARE will no longer require a full psycho-educational report dated within the previous three years for students applying on the basis on a specific learning difficulty.** Details of the new DARE requirements for students with specific learning difficulties such as Dyslexia will be circulated in early 2016.

Many students will not qualify for DARE. Even so, they are still eligible for the supports in college and should apply to the disability services in their chosen college.

1. Irish Language Exemption

Students, who have a diagnosed Specific Learning Difficulty (SLD) including dyslexia, may be granted an exemption from the study of Irish, subject to specific criteria. The psycho-educational assessment should show that student has average or above average cognitive ability (a standard score of 90 or 25th percentile upwards) and is achieving at or below the 10th percentile on a standardised test of literacy. The parents make a written application to the school with a copy of the psycho-educational assessment (less than two years old) which recommends the student should be exempt because the criteria have been met. The school issues the certificate of exemption and informs the Department of Education and Skills (DES). An exemption granted for student at primary school is recognised at post-primary level and for the entry to the National University of Ireland (NUI) colleges.

2. National University of Ireland (NUI) third language requirement

Students with the Irish exemption are eligible for an exemption from the 3rd language requirement. In the case where a student is not exempt from Irish, NUI will consider applications for exemption from the 3rd language requirement. The student needs a psycho-educational assessment certifying that there is a specific learning difficulty present. This should be no more than 3 years old. The criteria for the granting of the exemption state that literacy attainment should be at or below the 10th percentile (standard score 81) in two literacy abilities and are significantly lower than might be expected from the student's cognitive ability. Application forms are available from www.nui.ie

3. Trinity College and University of Limerick second language requirement

Both these colleges have a two language entry requirement. Students with dyslexia can apply for an exemption from this requirement by making a direct application to the college.

4. Subject choice

Subject choice is of critical importance for students with dyslexia both at junior and senior cycle. Dyslexic students, due to their uneven profile of ability, may do exceptionally well in some subjects and may find others very difficult and face failure in them. The guidance counsellor has an important role in advising on subject choice. Guidance on subject choice should not only take account of the subjects representing a possible challenge for the student but should also include discussion of the student's educational /career intentions in so far as the student has considered these.

Key issues include:

- Many face similar difficulties in the study of languages (as per English). Phonics, spelling, sequencing of words and learning vocabulary all pose problems. If obliged to take the language they may drop to ordinary level whereas they would take higher level in another subject. This affects their points. However due to stringent criteria in place for the granting of the 3rd language exemption, many students may not qualify for an exemption. Would it be strategic for a student to study the 3rd language outside school at ordinary level and take a different subject at higher level in school?
- Subjects that require answers containing factual information may be easier than subjects in which answers are in essay type format. Therefore geography, business, or physics may be easier to achieve in than English or history.
- Subjects that require a large amount of rote learning or the learning of many unfamiliar words can pose problems. For example home economics or accounting could prove to be easier than biology. Subjects with some form of continuous assessment can help.

5. Class Placement and Standardised Testing

The Department of Education and Science (2007) *Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs, Post-Primary Guidelines* state:

'standardised tests are often unsuitable for use with student with SEN, because the language register inherent in many tests makes them inaccessibletherefore caution should be exercised in using and interpreting the results.'

Guidance counsellors need to be aware that standardised tests may not give accurate results for students with dyslexia. A delay in the speed of processing or poor reading skills means it takes students longer to understand text and complete a test. In a test of numeracy where questions are in a verbal format, it may become a test of their English and not their maths abilities. The scores in the psycho-educational assessment are more valid.

The Post-primary Guidelines on the Inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs discusses how students are placed in class. It quotes the NCCA publication *Moving Up (2004)* which concludes that mixed ability grouping is desirable as streaming leads to lower achievement in bottom streams and increased transition difficulties for those in higher streams due to academic pressure.

In a streamed situation the student with dyslexia, who has average to above average ability but who might perform poorly on entrance assessment due to weaker verbal skills may be particularly affected. They may have the ability to achieve very well but not through traditional methods of assessment.

6. Choices after Post-Primary

Students with dyslexia may not do well in the broad-based Leaving Certificate where they may be taking subjects they find difficult to achieve in. Yet, when at college when they can specialise in courses that suit their strengths, they can make good progress.

Continuous assessment, semesters and project/practical elements in the course help the student to achieve when in college.

7. Student Support Team

The student support team is part of the student support system in a school. That system encompasses a range of supports that cater for the learning, social, emotional and behavioural needs of students. The guidance counsellor is a core member of this team. Part of the remit of the team is to enable students with support needs to continue to access a full education. This includes students with learning difficulties including dyslexia. More information can be accessed on support teams in the 2014 NEPS publication *Student Support Team in Post-Primary Schools*.

Dyslexia friendly whole school policies

There are a number of dyslexia friendly whole-school policies which are easy to implement.

- For students with dyslexia, the ability to read and understand text can be affected by the way the text has been written and produced. The font style, type of paper and layout of the page can affect how easy it is to read handouts and exam papers. Dyslexia Courses Ireland has updated the *Factsheets on Dyslexia for Second Level Schools (2015)* and these are available for download at www.dyslexiacourses.ie. Factsheet 14 gives guidelines on how to improve readability of text and could become the basis for a whole-school policy on the style of documents, notes and test papers.
- Subject departments should consider readability levels when deciding on texts. An analysis of some commonly used texts books for the Junior Certificate using internationally recognised readability tests showed some with reading age equivalents of fifteen or sixteen. There is a good briefing on readability tests at the following link:

http://www.snip-newsletter.co.uk/pdfs/downloads/readability_briefing.pdf

Microsoft Word Version 2010 and later versions have a readability function which could be used to check the readability of handouts or of textbooks by typing in a selection of text from a book. How to access this feature:

Go To File, to Options, to Proofing. Tick the Readability Statistics.

Then take the document, do a spellcheck on it and when it completes the spell check, it will provide readability statistics. It provides a Flesch Reading Ease Score and a Flesch-Kincaid Grade level.

Flesch Reading Ease Score

A score between 90 and 100 would be easily read by eleven year olds

A score between 60 and 70 would be easily read by thirteen to fifteen year olds

A score between 0 and 30 would be easily read by university graduates.

Flesch Kincaid Grade Level This test gives the grade level in USA schools. The SNIP newsletter suggests the following instruction to interpret this. *Add 5 to the F-K grade and you have an approximate UK readability level. Remember that this is a simplistic method but provides a starting place when evaluating text.*

- The *Report of the Task Force on Dyslexia* and the *Guidelines on Inclusion* state that mainstream teachers have the key role for the progress of students in their class with learning support and resource teachers assuming supporting roles. The mainstream teachers need to know the pattern of the student's strengths and weaknesses and the implications of this profile for teaching and learning strategies. Whose role is it in the school to pass on such information particularly in the case of a student who does not come within the remit of learning support or resource? Such information is highly confidential and there should be policy and procedures for keeping it safe.
- Has in-service training being provided for the whole staff on the topic of learning difficulties including dyslexia? The Special Education Support Service (www.sess.ie) and the Dyslexia Association of Ireland (DAI www.dyslexia.ie) offer courses.
- Students may find it difficult to communicate with teachers about the difficulties they face in class and doing homework and what might help them. The Department of Education and Skills' DVD *Understanding Dyslexia* includes an *Asking for Help* form (Appendix 2).
- There are specific study techniques which help the student with dyslexia. Factsheet 17 gives study tips to students. Factsheet 16 gives advice to parents on how they can support the student at post-primary level. Both could be circulated to students and/or parents. There is also a handout on *Study Skills for the Junior Certificate student with Dyslexia* on the website www.dyslexiacourses.ie and in January 2016 there will be a handout for Leaving Certificate students who find Paper 1 in English particularly difficult and will outline possible strategies to cope.
- Developments in computers and assistive technology provide essential and significant help to students with dyslexia. The Department of Education and Skills Circular Letter 0010/2013 outlines a scheme of grants towards the purchase of essential assistive technology equipment for pupils with physical or communication difficulties who could not access the curriculum without such support. An application is made to the NCSE and

should be accompanied by professional reports such as a psycho-educational assessment which states how the equipment will be used.

Circular 0010/2013 outlines a staged approach to the provision of assistive technology. As part of this approach it states:

*‘Many students now have personal/table computers, or smart phones with equivalent capability, which may have been purchased for them by their parents or alternative sources. Where pupils with special educational needs, or with distinct educational requirements, have personal computer with relevant educational software or technological packages, which can assist them in schools, **schools should allow those pupils, subject to agreement and supervision, to use such devices in schools.** It will be a matter for schools to ascertain the relevance of the educational equipment or software being used and to supervise its use in school, in accordance with the schools policies on the use of electronic equipment in schools’.*

If the computer and/or software are bought by parents for home/personal use, the VAT can be claimed back using Form VAT 61A from the VAT repayments section. The form can be downloaded online from www.revenue.ie. Factsheet 15 outlines the assistive technology that is available. To help people choose suitable technology for their individual needs, UrAbility (www.urability.com) and the Dyslexia Association of Ireland provide courses on Assistive Technology. UCC also provides courses on assistive technology for post-primary students in the Munster area. UCC have made the content of these courses available in 18 videos at www.ucc.ie/en/dss/callouts/resources/videos.

Conclusion

The Guidance Counsellor has a key role in supporting the student with dyslexia at post-primary and possible interventions include:

- Analysis of, for example, CAT or DAT scores to check for anomalies which might indicate a learning difficulty.
- If the student has language exemptions, inform them of the need to let the CAO and colleges know they are in place.
- Assistance with subject choice at junior and senior cycle, career choice and decision making.
- Input on whole school policies such as:
 - Dyslexia friendly production of handouts, notes and exam papers.
 - Readability of texts.
 - Communication of the student’s profile to all staff.
 - Use of the *Asking for Help* form.
 - Provision on whole school in-service on learning difficulties.
 - Information to parents on how they can support the student.
 - Information to students on relevant study techniques.

Biography

Wyn McCormack is at present a consultant with Dyslexia Courses Ireland and is involved in providing courses to schools for teachers and parents and study workshops for senior cycle students. She was a Guidance Counsellor and Special Education Teacher in St. David's School, Greystones. She was a member of the SESS team on Dyslexia and delivered in-service courses at second level. She has written *Lost for Words, a Practical Guide to Dyslexia at Second Level* and was co-author of *Dyslexia, an Irish Perspective* and *Factsheets on Dyslexia at Second Level for Schools, Teachers and Parents*. For many years she has delivered courses to students, parents and teachers on behalf of the Dyslexia Association of Ireland.

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Appendix 1: Indicators of a possible learning difficulty arising from dyslexia (ages 12 Years+)

- Still reading slowly and without fluency, with many inaccuracies.
- Misreads words (e.g. *hysterical* for *historical*) or information.
- Difficulty modifying reading rate.
- An inadequate store of knowledge due to lack of reading experience.
- Continues to experience serious spelling difficulties.
- Slow, dysfluent and/or illegible handwriting.
- Better oral skills than written skills.
- Difficulty planning, sequencing and organising written text.
- Difficulty with written syntax or punctuation.
- Difficulty skimming, scanning and/or proofreading written text.
- Trouble summarising or outlining.
- Problems in taking notes and copying from the board.
- Procrastinates and/or avoids reading and writing tasks.
- Does not complete assignments or class work or does not hand them in.
- Slow in answering questions, especially open-ended ones.
- Poor memorisation skills.
- Still mispronounces or misuses some words.
- Problems recalling the names of some words or objects.
- Poor planning and organisation skills.
- Poor time management skills.
- More difficulty in language-based subjects (e.g. English, Irish, and history) than in non-language based subjects (e.g. mathematics, technical graphics).
- Lacks self-confidence and has poor self-image.

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Appendix 2: Asking for Help Form

To (teacher's name)	From (pupil's name)
<p>1. I think I could do better in your class if you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let me work with a 'support buddy'.• Let me sit in the front nearer to your desk.• Gave me more time to answer questions and do my work.• Gave me more help in the classroom when I don't know what to do.• Showed me how to do things rather than just telling me.• Let me photocopy the overheads or lecture notes.• Gave more information on handouts.• Used more visual information like illustrations, graphs, maps charts, videos, photographs and posters.• Used simpler words when explaining things.• Spoke slower.• Would give instructions one at a time and repeat them.• Let me use a coloured overlay in class when I read.• Told me I didn't have to read out aloud in front of the class.• Gave me more time to read.• Let me tape record the class lesson.• Let me use a computer to help me do my work.• Let me use a dictaphone or tape recorder. <p>2. I think I could do better if, when you made worksheets, you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Used a bigger and clearer font like Arial, Comic Sans MS or Sassoon Primary in size 12 -16 with double spacing.• Used words that were easier for me to read.• Printed on light coloured paper. <p>3. I think I could do better if, when you use the board or overhead projector, you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Printed rather than used joined/cursive writing.• Used colour chalk or markers.• Read slowly or repeated whatever you write.• Wrote less for me to copy. <p>4. I think I could do better with your homework if you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let me hand in work as mindmaps.• Let me write less than the others.• Let me just write the answers and not the questions.• Let me memorise less.• Let me check with you to see if I wrote down the homework right.• Let me do my homework on my computer.• Let me do my homework on my tape recorder. <p>5. I think I could do better in your tests if you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Read the test questions aloud before the test.• Gave me more time to do tests.• Let me do the test orally.	

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