

Pearson LCCI

**English for Business
Reading and Writing
Level 4**

On Demand
Time: 3 hours

Paper Reference
ASE4041

You must have:
An answer book

Instructions

- Answer **all 4** questions.
- All questions carry equal marks.
- All answers should be correctly numbered, but do not need to be in numerical order.
- Adequate and appropriate communication is more important than a particular number of words.
- Check your work carefully.
- You may use an English or bilingual dictionary.

Information

- On Demand Paper Version ASE4041D3R

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1 (a) Task

Read the following article from 'Business Week' and answer the questions that follow it.

Credit will be given for answering the questions in your own words and demonstrating comprehension, rather than quoting directly from the text.

Out One Door - and In Another

Last July, Bank of America made one of those announcements that routinely comes after a merger; it said it would slash some 9,000 to 10,000 management jobs to eliminate duplications arising from its pairing 2 years ago with Nations Bank. Since BofA is just now finishing those reductions, simple logic might lead to the conclusion that middle managers seeking employment need not apply. Well, not exactly.

Even as the door is slamming behind its "duplicate" managers, BofA has a "Help Wanted" sign hanging in its window. In fact, its careers' website lists dozens of open positions, many in middle management. Spokeswoman Kelly Hartis says the bank is hiring in areas where it sees the "biggest return for our dollar" – such divisions as asset management, technology and global corporate investment banking.

The company encourages axed employees to apply, Hartis adds, but it didn't consider retraining them for open positions instead of handing out pink slips. Given that the job cuts were meant to eliminate expenses (other than severance pay, of course) it didn't "make much sense to spend money on training," she explains.

Instead of retraining employees for growth areas of the business, many organisations simply toss them out and bring in workers who are ready-made for those jobs. "Companies aren't willing to evaluate each person and figure out what else they can do," says Jo Bennett at executive recruiters Battalia Winston in New York. In fact, she adds, when a displaced worker lands a job elsewhere in the company, it's usually because a manager rallies on their behalf. "It's pretty seat of the pants," she says.

That's because it's a lot easier to simply wave goodbye than offer a more human solution, and because once the layoff train leaves the station, there's no way to slow it down. In large reductions, affecting hundreds or thousands of employees, companies are often so preoccupied with trying to get people out the door smoothly - and legally – that they have little time to think about recycling them. "People have 'I'm just following orders' mentality, instead of stepping up and saying 'we could do this differently,'" says Colleen O'Neill, talent management practice leader at consulting firm William M Mercer.

Make or Buy

In many cases, moreover – just like the consumers they depend on - many companies prefer new to used. "It's a make-or-buy decision," says Lisa Lynch, former chief economist at the Labor Dept and a professor of international economic affairs. "Companies are weighing the costs of making a worker through retraining or buying someone who already has the skills. If there's a ready supply of folks (in the market place) compared to making an extensive investment of time and money to retrain that's going to be considered."

QUESTION 1(a) CONTINUED

Retraining costs can vary widely, depending on what's required to prepare a worker for a different job. Overall, budgets for employee training have dipped in recent years: latest figures from the American Society for Training & Development show that the average US company spent \$677 per eligible worker on training in 1999, down from \$724 a year earlier.

If a company is cutting back on employee development in good times, don't expect it to commit a large scale retraining effort when it hits a rough patch, experts say – even if it might be a cheaper alternative than doling out severance pay to thousands of workers. A typical severance package is one to 2 weeks' pay for every year of service, and it often includes such extras as career counselling and payment for unused vacation

“Please DON'T Come”

A good example of both the traditional approach and what some experts would call a more enlightened one is Intel, which announced in March that it would trim its worldwide headcount by 5,000 this year. It “never has a freeze on hiring,” says company spokesperson Chuck Mulloy. Indeed, while it has been widely reported that the chipmaker is offering new hires who haven't started yet “please don't come” packages – 2 months' salary plus any signing bonus that was originally guaranteed – it isn't giving this option to all prospective employees. “There are certain critical positions for which the talent pool isn't big enough,” Mulloy says. “PhDs in material science or physics don't grow on trees.”

Eye-Opener

Of course, even if a company offers to retrain downsizing victims and move them to other divisions, few might be willing to take the offer in a healthy economy. With 4.5% unemployment in the US some workers – particularly those with skills that are in high demand – might prefer to jump back into the job market rather than learn something new.

Helen Drinan, president of the Society for Human Resource Management, recalls what happened in 1998 when her then-employer, BankBoston, announced plans to cut 1,500 jobs following an acquisition. As the bank's executive Vice-President for Human resources, Drinan helped establish its first-ever training program to prepare displaced workers for vacant positions elsewhere in the organisation.

BankBoston's management even gave participants an easy out – if they didn't like what they were doing after 3 months of retraining, they could leave the bank and still collect their full severance pay. Despite the “fail-safe”, less than 15% of the affected employees took the training. Those workers stuck with the bank after completing the program, but Drinan says the low turnout was an “eye opener” to senior management. The “uncertainty of doing something entirely different” even with the promise of severance if it didn't work out – dissuaded many workers from signing up, she contends.

- (i) In which areas are companies hiring and in which are they firing and why are they doing it at the same time? (3)
- (ii) According to Jo Bennett, why do some workers get rehired and what do you understand by "it's pretty seat of the pants"? (2)
- (iii) Why, in general, does this system go unchallenged? (2)
- (iv) Why do companies prefer to "buy" than "make"? Is it, in fact, cheaper, according to the writer? (3)
- (v) What is significant about the general fall in training expenditure in this context? (2)
- (vi) What is the "Please don't come" policy and how is it being applied? (2)
- (vii) Why do some workers not want to be rehired? (1)

(b) Situation

You are the Human Resources Manager of a company that is planning to make a number of employees in the support services sector redundant. You are convinced that the management has not sufficiently considered the possibility of redeployment of these staff. There are currently vacant positions in other parts of the company (such as Sales and Marketing).

Task

Write a memo to the Managing Director, making a brief case for further consideration of retraining and redeployment - using ideas from the text. Ask for a meeting to discuss this further.

(10)

(Total for Question 1 = 25 marks)

2 Situation

You are the manager of a large hotel (The Range) in Brighton, on the south coast of England. One of the main businesses of the hotel is hosting international conferences and large-scale meetings and events for multinational companies. You have recently been having problems with the behaviour and attitude of some of the newer, younger staff and although you have spoken to many of them individually, in general, customer satisfaction rating has fallen dramatically.

On the same day, you receive the following 3 pieces of information. On the basis of these, complete the tasks on page 7.

Telephone Message

Sally Kenny rang from Infotel – the telecoms company who held their AGM here last week. Says internal feedback has been very poor, listing:

- disorganisation on arrival - reception seemed very uninformed
- confusion over rooms for side-meetings
- catering facilities, poor (all she said)
- tea/coffee service late.

Said she wanted to let you know what you were in for as she hadn't got round to writing properly yet – but will soon.

Article in 'Conference Organiser' (Major trade journal)

The Range, Brighton – Review

The Range is one of the many hotels with conference facilities situated on the front in Brighton. We recently joined the Infotel AGM there to test out its services and performance in the context of a large scale company meeting.

The hotel itself is a beautiful Victorian building, 2 kilometres from the train station with a convenient taxi service. Initial impressions were good with a uniformed door man assisting with our arrival and directing us to reception. This impression, however, was not to last. The reception seemed to have little or no idea of the venue for the main meeting, the side-meetings or, indeed, how to address and deal with some of the most important figures in the telecoms business who were attending the function. After a senior manager had dealt with these problems, again our experience fleetingly improved: the rooms themselves were light, airy and well-equipped.

If the hotel has many architectural merits these are not, sadly, backed by good, efficient and prompt service. There seemed to be a woeful lack of knowledge on the part of anyone attached to the hotel about everything, down to where the nearest ladies' cloakroom was! This doubled or tripled the work of the Infotel organiser, Sally Kenny, who valiantly struggled alone to keep the show going.

The tea and coffee arrived late and was indifferently served - the standard of English of many of the staff was entirely insufficient even for this limited job. At one point I dusted off my twenty year old Spanish to ask a question, which, even when the waiter understood it, he was once again unable to answer.

The hotel boasts a well-respected chef. Unfortunately, although he may cook good food, he clearly can't get it to thirty tables while it is still hot, single-handedly. The service was again what let The Range down.

Overall, a beautiful place with major staff problems. It won't be worth considering as a site for conferences or meetings until they get this sorted out.

QUESTION 2 CONTINUED

**PTA Manufacturing Ltd
Folly Bridge,
Oxford,
OX4 7AJ**

30th November 2001

Mr David Cassidy
General Manager
The Range
Esplanade South
Brighton
BR53 5JA

Dear Mr Cassidy

As you are probably aware, we have held a major one-day conference on plastics manufacturing at The Range in November for the last 4 years. It is currently not our intention to continue with this practice after our experience at the hotel last week.

In the past we have been delighted with the standard of service starting from the planning meeting with your conference liaison manager, Mr Reynolds, through the reception services offered, to the catering and other hospitality issues professionally dealt with throughout the day. However, this year was very different. Although I had an initial cordial chat with Mr Reynolds by phone, when I travelled to The Range to talk through details I was told he was unavailable that day. I had the meeting with a young woman, Sylvia Steiner, who, whilst pleasant and polite, had neither the English nor the expertise to cope with such a large scale event.

This may go some way to explaining why our experience at the conference this year was so different from previous years. The reception service was woefully underinformed and inadequate. The general attendants (some of whom were very slovenly dressed) had limited English and were apparently totally untrained in customer care. The tea and coffee was served late and there were insufficient cups for the number required; the lunch was also late and the service was of a very poor standard. The late lunch caused programming problems in the afternoon, which were exacerbated by some technical equipment difficulties that nobody was on hand to deal with.

Our overall impression of The Range was that it has deteriorated dramatically. However, the far more worrying problem for our company is the impression that such a conference gives to our customers and to the industry of PTA manufacturing.

As I indicated above, this will be the last time we hold the conference at The Range.

I look forward to receiving an explanation at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Polly McDonald

Polly McDonald
PA to CEO

QUESTION 2 CONTINUED

Task

- (a) Write a memo to all staff. Outline the problems and complaints; give instructions on remedying these problems; give details of training etc. that will be undertaken by the staff to improve their performance and details of performance assessment which will be set up. Warn the staff of the consequences of not improving.

(12.5)

- (b) Write a letter of apology to Polly McDonald: give any explanations that you can, offer compensation of some kind and, above all, think of ways to try to win back the business.

(12.5)

(Total for Question 2 = 25 marks)

3 (a) Situation

You work as the Corporate Communications Assistant in a multinational company that is considering drawing up an Ethical Policy Statement. You receive the following, advertising a conference on Corporate Ethics. You would like to attend the conference.

Task

Write a memo to your superior, summarising the contents of the article below and asking for authorisation to attend.

(12.5)

Conference: "Ignorance is Not an Ethical Policy"

West Central Hall, London WC8

13 – 15 March 2002

On paper, the advent of a global trading system has enormously increased the power and profitability of those companies best able to exploit economies of scale: the multinational. And yet their reputations have become more vulnerable than ever before.

This paradox has been all-too-evident in recent events. We have seen a major oil company's chairman barracked by shareholders for alleged links with unsavoury third world regimes; we have seen confectionery companies mired by presumed association with slave labour. Look back a little further and you will find that these are only the most recent in a long line of blue-chip public relations disasters.

Never mind that specific allegations may be weak, partisan and to some extent misplaced. Companies do nothing at their peril. One company is struggling with the albatross of an infant milk formula scandal nearly 25 years later, mainly because activists won't let the issue go away, even though this particular infant formula has not been sold in European shops for years. The folk memory is implacable.

But much worse than a slightly eroded brand image may now be in store for companies that fail to play the PR game effectively. There is an awful warning in the fate of the high profile chemical research company which was targeted by a determined and ruthless environmentalist lobby group over their testing on animals. Politicians deplore the use of violence, police protection is bolstered, but the investment community still walks away.

What then can companies do to protect themselves and their reputation? A little more realism would be a start. Evidently it is not their responsibility to play the knight in shining armour in the politics of the third world. But nor should they delude themselves that consumer and human rights lobbyists are going to be fobbed off with a scrap of paper entitled Corporate Ethical Trading Policy. Companies should not commit the mental compartmentalism of thinking that they can make a "gung-ho" espousal of a new "caring" corporate identity and then be baffled by accusations of hypocrisy when they are discovered conniving with corrupt and brutal regimes.

The purpose of this conference is to address the heart of the issue – that of management culture. Currently big companies are good on "hard issues", such as asset management and cost control but weak on "softer" issues, typically the province of the Corporate Communications department. We aim to lead companies to address the issues before the barbarians start hammering at the gates and the problem is pressed into the hands of "crisis management" teams who are expected to perform miracles.

The conference agenda will include:

- drawing up the initial corporate statement
- carrying out a corporate audit
- training and changing management and staff
- presenting an ethical face to the press
- dealing with worst-case scenario.

(b) Situation

You work as a market analyst in an advertising agency in England. One of your clients, a foreign supermarket, Meilleur Marché, is considering changing their print advertising from solely national newspapers to regional and local newspapers as well. They have commissioned a report on how far people orientate themselves locally and the importance of regional and local newspapers in influencing consumer choices.

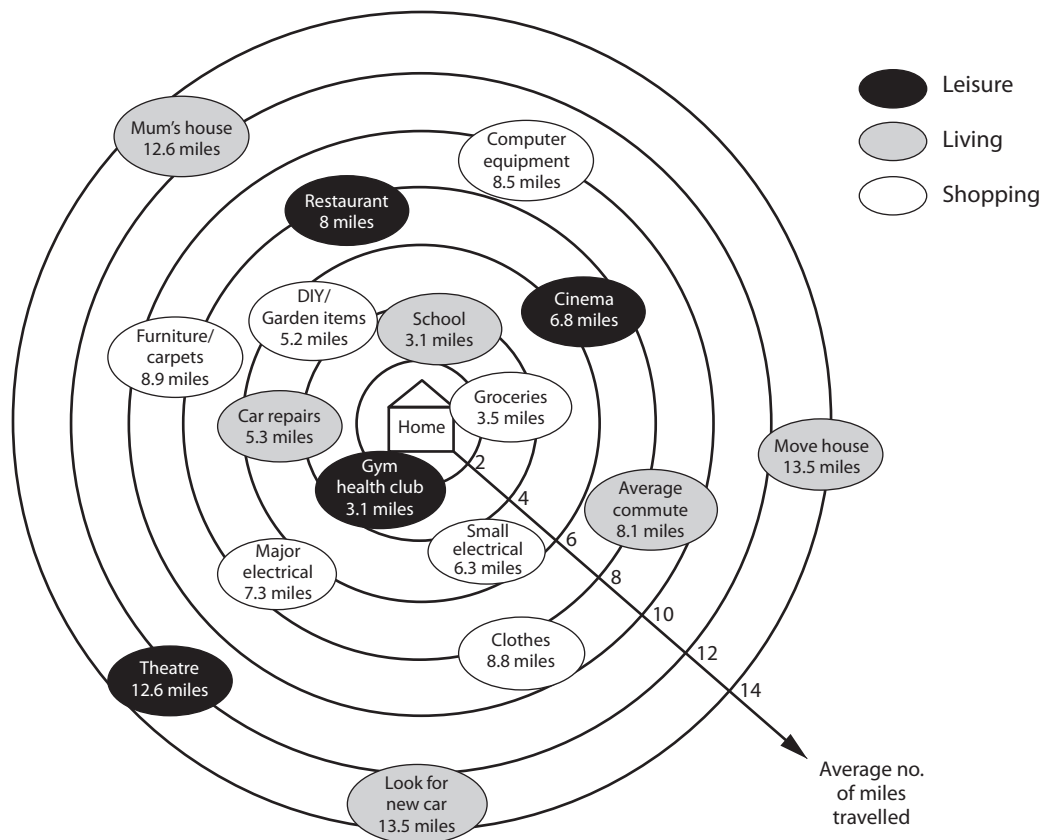
Task

Write the report based on the graphs on pages 10 and 11.

(12.5)

Local Press

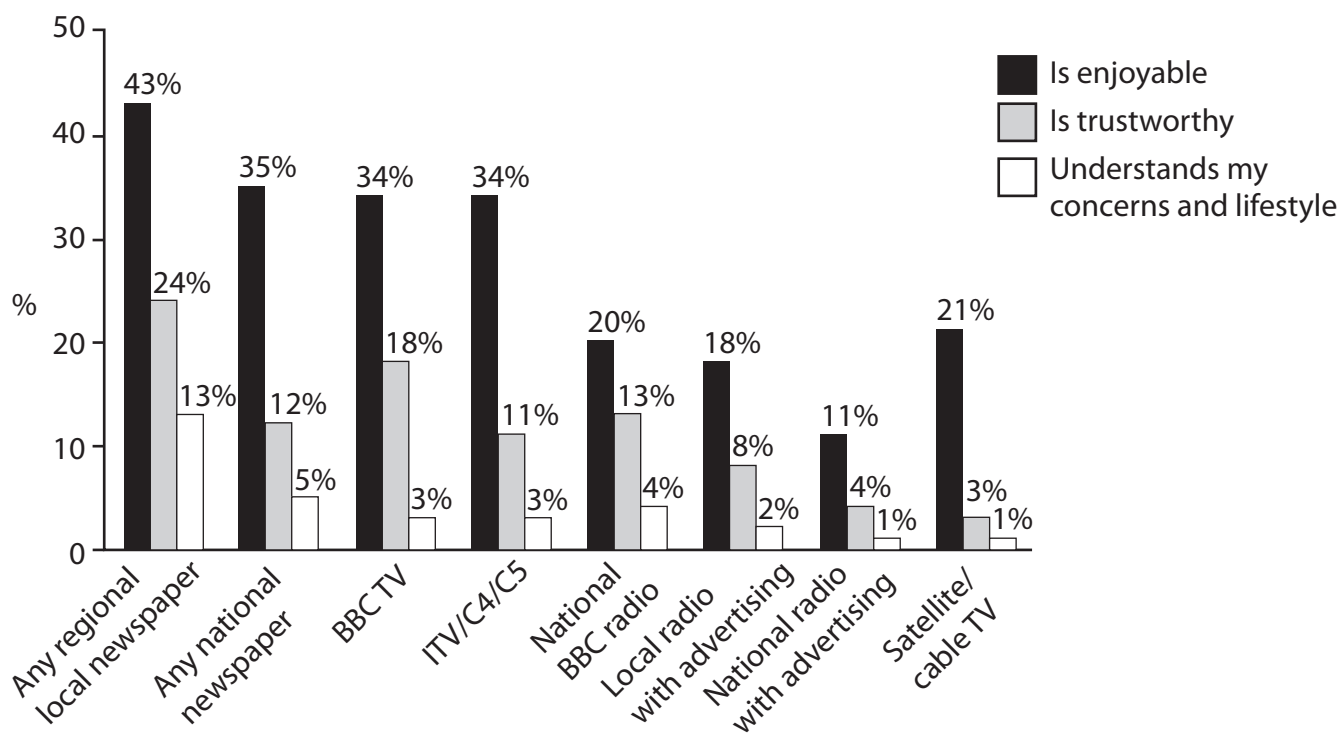
Average distance travelled for various reasons



(Source: DETR/ONS/Newspaper Society/The Future Foundation)

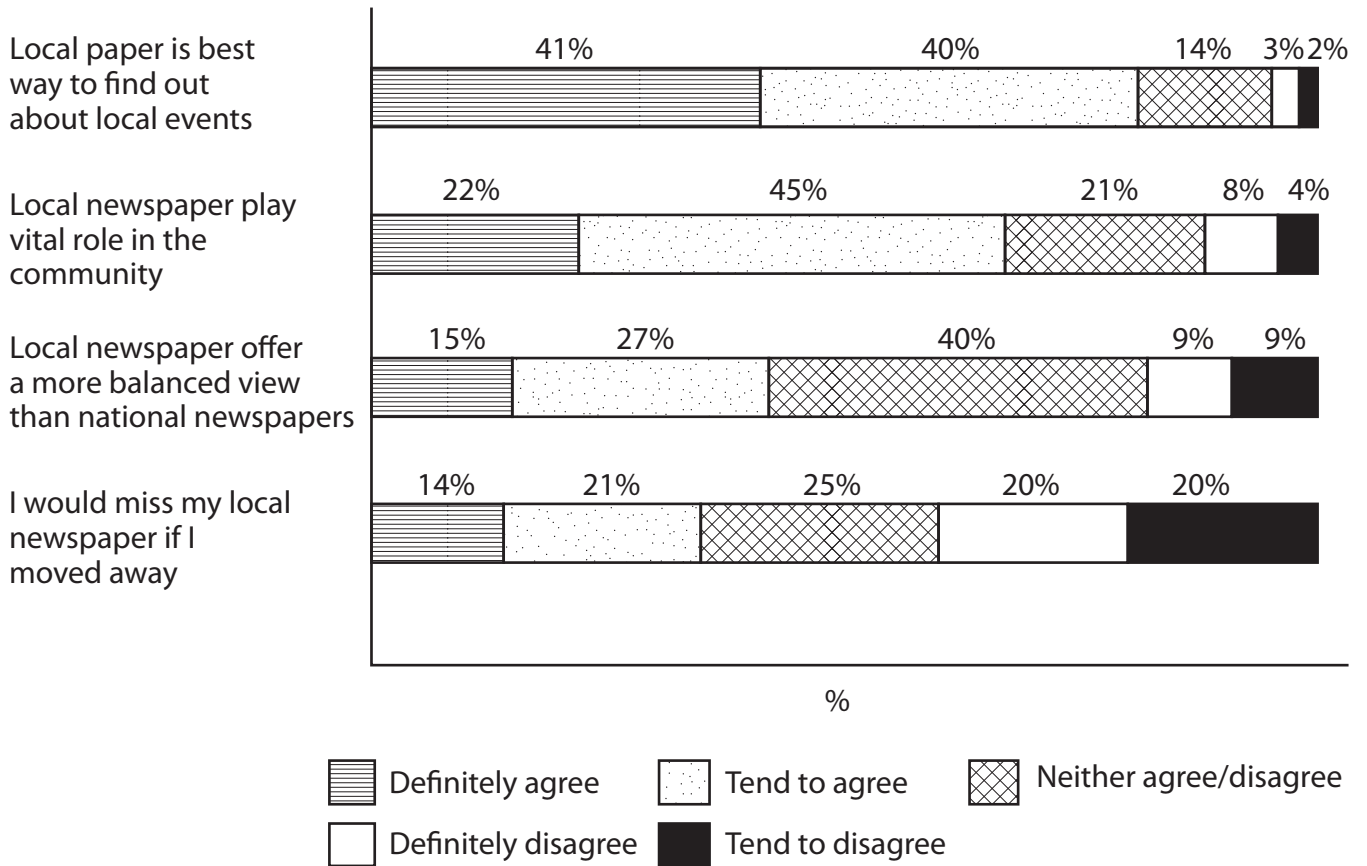
QUESTION 3(b) CONTINUED

Perceptions of various media



(Source: Consumer's choice IV©Newspaper Society)

Agreement with statements about local newspapers



(Source: Consumer's choice IV©Newspaper Society)

(Total for Question 3 = 25 marks)

- 4 On the basis of the 2 following opening extracts and according to the instructions accompanying them, continue and complete each extract in an appropriate way.

The list of key words should be used for guidance; some or all of the words may, but do not have to be, included in the text.

(a) **Situation**

You are the business development manager of The Range, the hotel focused on in Question 2 above. As part of the improvement of the image and recovery of the business after the appointment of the new Customer Liaison Manager, you are writing a promotional letter to companies who made an enquiry about business conference or event facilities, but who did not subsequently use the hotel.

Task

Write the promotional letter. The letters are individually addressed to the named contact.

Key words:

enquiry/meeting rooms/bedrooms/travel connections/restaurant and catering facilities/leisure facilities/office support/promotion offer/presentation lunches

Dear Mr Collins

We know that Furniture World wants the best in conference and corporate facilities and The Range Hotel, Brighton...

(12.5)

(b) Situation

You work in the Corporate Communications Department of a large car manufacturer (Plaza Motors). You are responsible for producing the company newspaper. The company has recently opened a new learning centre at the head office. This will be made available to all staff training in business subjects either in person or through study materials on-line. Employees following a series of courses will be able to gain credits to attain the Plaza Business Studies Diploma

Task

Write the news article to report this development

Key Words

announce/business courses such as/available in the centre/on-line capability/
convenience/training director says/further details from

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Plaza is proud to announce the...

(12.5)

(Total for Question 4 = 25 marks)

TOTAL FOR PAPER = 100 MARKS

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