



society for technical communication



A Word from our President

- by Leila Meyer

I can't believe it has already been a year since I took over the Presidency of STC Alberta. I stepped up to the task with excitement but also with some trepidation. Although I had been a member of STC for three years, I had never even volunteered, much less taken on any executive role. I was faced with a daunting task of leading a group of people who knew more about the chapter than I did. However, their enthusiasm and support made my job much easier. Now, I look back over the past year with fond memories of new friends and experiences. It has been a wonderful ride, during which I have grown both personally and professionally.

As members of STC Alberta, we are very lucky to have such a dedicated group of people behind the scenes. As a relatively small chapter, we have access to an astounding array of programs and services, all of which have continued to grow and improve throughout this year.

Caroline Kutschke, Vice President: I couldn't have asked for a better Vice President this year. Caroline handled the many incoming requests for information on our phone line, and well as many other miscellaneous duties. All this on top of being the driving force behind our plans for the 20/20 Conference and AGM.

Marty Steadman, Secretary: Marty

was our Secretary this year, which is a challenging role. With the large number of initiatives underway in STC Alberta, our meetings are packed with reports, discussions, and decisions. The minutes Marty produced enabled us to track the vast amount of information being exchanged during those meetings.

Ian Hawkins, Treasurer: Ian has done an excellent job keeping our financial house in order. Lucky for us, he will stay on as Treasurer next year.

Marie Frison Klassen, Past President: Marie made my term as President much easier because she passed so much information along to me at the start, and she continued to be an inspiration throughout my Presidency.

Mai-Ann Sprung, Don Harman, Alyssa Rennie, and Michael Trumper, SuperScript: Mai-Ann, Don, Alyssa, and Michael brought us 10 outstanding issues of

SuperScript this year. Their hard work was recognized with an Award of Merit in the STC chapter newsletter competition. They were also able to solicit paid advertising, which helped offset the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter, and left more money to spend on other chapter activities.

As a relatively small chapter, we have access to an astounding array of programs and services, all of which have continued to grow and improve throughout this year.

Suzanne Scott, Programs Coordinator: Suzanne worked very hard to present six excellent Thursday programs and Saturday workshops. Fena Maucieri's Indexing program and Laura Harvie's Project Scoping program were two of the best-attended Thursday presentations in our chapter's history. She also organized four other excellent programs throughout the year.

Suzanne also arranged a FrameMaker workshop, taught by Philip Sharman, and two RoboHelp workshops, taught by Warren Clendining. These workshops remain popular in a work environment that often demands knowledge of tools as well as communication skills.

Nancy Sequeira, Registration & Hospitality Coordinator: Nancy handled registration and food service for all our programs, workshops, and special events this year. Since Nancy is such an outgoing, friendly person, she was a

natural hospitality coordinator. Her position involved a lot of detail work behind the scenes, and she helped the events happen smoothly.

Darren Tenor, Coffee Night Coordinator: Darren Tenor hosted our coffee nights again this year. Darren's friendly, relaxed manner and sense of humor make him the ideal host for these informal discussions. When

To print or not to print? That is the question!

Print? Email? Web? How do you want to receive your newsletter? At this year's AGM, we're asking you that question.

With the average cost of printing and postage at \$400-600.00/mth, *SuperScript* is the largest single expense our chapter incurs throughout the year. If the newsletter were to be delivered electronically (either by email or by a secure, members-only web page), the considerable savings could be directed to other areas of chapter development, including Programs, Workshops, and Guest Speakers/Instructors. *SuperScript* is our main method of communication within the chapter, and relies heavily on our members' readership and contributions to make the content timely and useful, so the issue of print vs. electronic delivery is best decided by our members.

So, tell us what you think. Look for the poll at the AGM registration table on June 24th. Information gathered from this poll will help instruct the 2000-2001 Executive Council in their decision.

What's Your Racket?

Soon, about 1200 randomly selected STC members and about 600 members of related organizations will receive surveys from the Society's Core Competencies Committee. Why? Technical communicators are a diverse lot, and the Society wants to define who we are and what we do, irrespective of our industries and specialties. Why? There are several reasons:

- To help us market ourselves to prospective employers;
- To help us plan our careers and professional development by determining the skills and knowledge required to succeed;
- To help human resources personnel to write job descriptions and evaluate candidates;
- To provide information instructional designers and academic professionals can use to develop, evaluate, and revise courses and curricula.

Important stuff!

How can you help? Simple: if you are selected, complete the survey and return it by the due date. All responses will be analyzed and kept confidential by an independent consultant, and the results will be published later this year.

We look forward to your input to this important initiative. If you have any questions or suggestions for the committee, contact the manager Ken Rainey or any member of the committee.

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Once again, I am tasked with another writing project. Like a good technical writer, I climb that learning curve, research the subject matter to death, and analyze my audience. After feeling comfortable with the jargon, I fumble with “Frank,” the subject matter expert who just does not speak my language. Frank answers my questions by explaining what he does. He abbreviates everything and points out typos in the rough draft before commenting on the technical accuracy of my document. Does this sound familiar? How often do we face Frank and other similar SMEs? When we continually face communication problems like this, it is likely the message is lost even before it reaches its audience. How can we ensure our message is getting through to our readers?

On May 18, 2000, at the MacDougall Centre, Dr. Barbara Schneider of the University of Calgary presented a workshop on the role of language in organizations. Her casual and friendly manner made for an interesting and informative STC presentation. According to Schneider, language is the medium through which organizational knowledge is produced and organizations maintained. Our view of language, she proposed, dictates our understanding of communication. Schneider did not offer precise solutions to technical communication problems. She did, however, comment on how we understand language through models and how we use these models to solve communication problems. People need effective documents. This has fostered a need for better language models and the move towards Plain Language. As an approach to communication, Plain Language matches the needs of the reader to the writer.

If you have an English or communications background, you probably learned that language is a means of transmitting information. Language is a tool used to mirror reality and send messages about

reality. According to this language model, I can solve my communication problem with Frank when I translate information using concise, cohesive, and coherent writing techniques. Despite my efforts, Frank still wants to use inconsistent naming conventions, and when I insist the first instance of an acronym should be defined, he complains “the reader will know that...it’s redundant!” According to Schneider, the language models of clarity, brevity, and sincerity have brainwashed us and this may be an inadequate way of solving communication problems. Was Schneider proposing that everything I learned at university does not help me to write effectively?

Schneider spoke of the Construction Model that describes language as a producer and reproducer of social settings. The description of something provides the meaning and lays the foundation to react to social settings. The Construction Model of Language can produce an organization’s identity, which carries values, philosophical assumptions, expectations, and relationships. In other words, language shapes our lives. It is the means through which we create knowledge. Frank proudly tells me he can use inconsistent naming conventions. His language mediates or constructs his reality. The problem with the Construction Model, however, is the lack of a shared context. I do not understand why Frank prefers using inconsistent naming conventions. Frank’s concepts and concerns are locked into a language that may be comprehensible to him, and others like him, but incomprehensible to me. Unfortunately, if I use this language model, my communication problem still exists!

Schneider suggests solving this problem by creating a shared context with your subject matter expert. Context is produced by language. Context provides

examples for the discourse of a particular community. For example, simple chatter in an elevator with Frank about the weekend suddenly becomes a business meeting when we talk about deliverables for the week. “Tall” in a coffee shop, at an adult clothing store, in a children’s book about exaggeration, can mean many different things when taken within context. Language evolves from context. Effective writing must have clarity, and this clarity depends on context.

I could share a mutual context with Frank by using metaphors to create a new language between us. I could request feedback and testing to ensure the technical accuracy of my document. I could establish mutual conventions by creating a common dictionary or style guide. I could perform usability studies, defining typical users and using diagrams when words are not enough. Suddenly I understand Frank and realize that effective writing does not necessarily depend on clarity, but how well I can speak the context of a particular community. It may be beneficial to surrender my view of language as I was taught, and accept one that emphasizes writing within context. When Frank corrects my consistent writing, he is trying to make it easier to keep the message intact. My English background and communication

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A Word from our President

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Darren took a couple of months off from STC for the birth of his baby girl, Suzanne Scott found the energy to host coffee nights in addition to her other duties.

Darren Tenor and Grant Sorensen, Archivists: Darren Tenor was also our Archivist for most of this year. In March, Grant Sorensen took over, and has been a great addition to the team.

Darren Tenor, Volunteers Coordinator: Drawing on his seemingly bottomless source of energy, Darren was also our Volunteers Coordinator this year.

Lisa Brent, Membership Coordinator: Lisa Brent is currently wrapping up her second term as Membership Coordinator. During that time, she has been an ideal ambassador, welcoming dozens of new members to our chapter. Although her work is invisible to almost everybody except new members, she has been the glue that holds it all together, working with the Arlington office to keep our records up to date and making sure that everybody receives the benefits that come with membership.

Brian O'Malley, Membership Directory Coordinator: Brian brought together our membership directory for yet another year, and used his research skills to prepare another chapter membership survey. The results of his survey will be published in the fall.

In addition to developing these two important historical chapter documents, Brian has been a tremendous source of advice, encouragement, and friendship. We are lucky to have him so involved in our chapter.

Blair McNaughton, Mai-Ann Sprung, and Lucinda Yaworski, Jobline Coordinators: Blair coordinated our Jobline for the first half of the year. He built a database to track the jobs and started posting them on our web site. His innovations have been a valuable addition to our Jobline service. When Blair stepped down, Mai Ann Sprung took over in the interim, in addition to her newsletter duties. In February,

Lucinda Yaworski joined the team, and she has been doing an excellent job of keeping the many job postings up to date since then.

Diane Laverty, Ken Schmaltz, and Kathryn Bruce, Public Relations Coordinators: Diane and Ken took over our chapter's public relations early in the year, and they immediately began developing media kits to help our chapter, STC, and our profession gain exposure in the press. Recently, Kathryn joined the PR team and she and Diane are moving ahead. This has been an excellent foundation year for our chapter's PR team, and we should start to gain some exposure in the next year.

Gillian Ward, Webmaster: Gillian completely redesigned our web site this year. It's a fresh, new look, and a great place to find information about chapter programs and services.

Fena Maucieri, Mentorship Coordinator: A natural mentor herself, Fena launched our new Mentorship Program this year, which has been a welcome addition to our chapter offerings. During this initial year, she has matched many new technical communicators with experienced mentors to help them transition into the profession.

Laura Harvie, Competitions Coordinator: Laura launched our first chapter competition in many years. With the help of numerous volunteers, she coordinated competitions in technical publications and online communication, and the judging of entries from the Canada West Coast chapter. With 28 entries, it was a very successful competition, and we will have many more in the years to come.


I extend my thanks and appreciation to all the competitions volunteers, including Ruth Maryniuk, Sandra Busby, Diane Laverty, Marty Steadman, and Mai-Ann Sprung. Thanks also to our judges Ken d'Albenas, Marie Frison Klassen, Laurie Holtby, Laura Harvie, Fena Maucieri, Brian O'Malley, Philip Sharman, Kari Strutt, and Michelle Whitten.

Angela Wiens, Edmonton Liaison: Angela ran the Edmonton end of our chapter activities. With the help of volunteers, Edmonton members have been holding regular coffee meetings. Recently, membership in Edmonton has been growing rapidly, probably due to the increased STC activity. Thanks to Rachel Milner, Perry Shulak, Hugh Read, Joanne McLernon, Caroline Smith, John Hillerud, Cheryel Goodale, and John Fleming, who helped with the Edmonton activities.

Ken Schatzke, MRC Liaison: President of MRC's Technical Writers' Society, Ken was in an excellent position to represent the interests of MRC student technical writers.

Glenn Ruhl, Canadian Issues Committee Representative: After being without a CIC representative for most of the year, Glenn Ruhl stepped in. Glenn's enthusiasm and energy make him an excellent rep, and he has already sparked a few ideas to improve opportunities for our profession in Alberta.

Fei Min Lorente, Smart 2000 Committee Chair: One of the major initiatives this year has been Smart 2000, an international conference on technology in education, government, and business, which will be taking place in Calgary this October. STC will be present at the Smart 2000 Conference and Exposition, and Fei Min Lorente has taken over the duties of chairing this committee. With the help of Grant Sorensen, Linda Bligh, Margie Diakuw, and Alan James, STC's presence at Smart 2000 is taking shape.

Conference & AGM Committee: We started planning the conference and AGM very early this year, with the intent of building on last year's success, and it looks like we will achieve that goal. Our dedicated conference and AGM committee consists of Caroline Kutschke, Fena Maucieri, Nancy Sequeira, Don Harman, Darren Tenor, Grant Sorensen, Laurie Holtby, Kim Yarmuch, and Stephanie Seidel. If you bump into any of these people at the conference this year, be sure to thank them for their hard work. 

Advanced RoboHELP

STC Alberta has hosted another successful tools workshop. The Advanced RoboHELP course on May 13 at Mount Royal College, taught by Warren Clendinning, was a success. Participants felt they learned many interesting and complicated features of RoboHELP V6.0. Warren was assisted by Paula Butler and although the class size was small, Paula provided valuable backup for Warren.

Most of the participants were technical writers who wanted to broaden their skills base with a tool that they do not use at work. The participants can feel confident that they now have a solid understanding of how to use many of the features of RoboHELP. It was also good to see that the all-day format works for some of our Edmonton members who felt that it was worthwhile for them to come to a tools workshop in Calgary.

Do You Write Effectively?

Continued from page 3.

So how do you know whether your document is effective? Using language models as examples and the principles of Plain Language, you can develop documents through comprehension and usability techniques. According to these techniques, you write an effective document when your reader understands the message immediately and can use the document. For the message to be useful to your reader, you and the reader must agree to the basic meaning of words. Aristotle once said, "Those who will write well must speak as the common people do and think as the wise people do. So shall everyone understand them." Do not worry the next time your subject matter expert is less concerned with consistency in naming conventions and consistent writing standards. Ask yourself if your document is speaking to its audience. Do you understand your subject matter expert? Do you keep the message intact? Do you spend some time with the users to understand their context? Do you write effectively?

Of course, I can't answer that question right now. Frank and I are going for a tall coffee to get to know one another better. ☺

Nancy Sequeira is a contract Technical Writer who has vowed to become a "good" writer. She has been communicating for the past seven years in business and technical communication, writing and developing technical documents, manuals and online help for the software, manufacturing, and oil and gas industries. To express your comments regarding this article, feel free to contact her by email at Nancy_Sequeira@hotmail.com.

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**For more information, contact: the Centre for Communication Studies, (403) 240-6909
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Website: www.mtroyal.ab.ca Email: admissions@mtroyal.ab.ca**

Edmonton - May Coffee Night

- by John Fleming

This month, we met in our usual haunt, the community room at Chapters on Calgary Trail South.

The topic that drew us together was project management, with material drawn from the Project Management Institute's "A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge."

First, we looked at the nature of a project. By definition, a project is a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects are temporary because they have a definite beginning and a definite end. The product or service is unique because, while it may be similar to something done in another project, it has not been done before.

Then we went on to discuss the nature of project management. It is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities in order to meet or exceed stakeholder demands.

Project management is a balancing act. There are the competing demands of scope, time, cost, and quality. Then there are the competing demands among the needs and expectations of the various project stakeholders. And there are the competing demands between identified requirements, or needs, and the unidentified requirements, or expectations.

Finally, we ended the session with a quick overview of project processes (a series of actions bringing about a result) and the project knowledge areas.

Our next coffee night is in the fall, with details to be announced.

She Said - May Coffee Night

- by Suzanne Scott

Alan Yamada was unable to attend the May Coffee Night discussion, so this month's installment of "He Said/She Said" is limited to "She Said."

Technical writers are entering a new era in the Certification debate. The argument is no longer over whether or not there should be a certification program for technical writers. Now that the Chauncey Group has introduced a certification program, the era of certification in the field of technical communication seems to be upon us.

A few concerned members of the STC discussed this topic at the May coffee night. All of the attendees have accepted that certification will very likely be a part of our future as technical writers. Given this, we agreed that if a certification program is being designed, we want to be able to review the program during the planning stages. However, we do not know how the STC is going to be involved with certification so we do not know if we need to go through the STC to be heard on this issue. We are looking forward to hearing from our region's Director-Sponsor about this when she speaks at our AGM on June 24th.

The certification debate continues to be an interesting topic of conversation. In some ways I expect that the most interesting part has only just begun.

So long, and thanks for all the help ...

SuperScript, the STC Alberta Chapter's official newsletter, has received an Award of Merit in the 2000 STC Newsletter Competition. The newsletter was entered in the category for chapters with a membership between 151 and 300 members. This is the first time the Alberta Chapter has won an award in this category of the STC Newsletter Competition.

The 1999-2000 Editors would like to take this opportunity to thank all the contributors to this year's newsletter. *SuperScript* is only what our members make of it - and we've had terrific support and encouragement from our chapter. The submissions from Program, Workshop, and Coffee Night attendees, as well as those who submitted feature articles and pieces covering other chapter activities, were greatly welcomed and appreciated.

It's been a wonderful learning experience, but mostly, it's been fun.

The Editors

And on that note ...

SuperScript needs you!

Let's keep the momentum going! Stories, technical tips, book, tool, and event reviews, feature articles, and comments can be sent to one of the *SuperScript* editors. Watch the next issue of *SuperScript* for the new Editors' contact information.

All submissions must be received by the first day of each month for inclusion in the current month's issue.

To All STC Members:

Hello, and Happy STC New Year! We are just coming off of another very successful STC Annual Conference, this 47th edition having taken place in Orlando! If you were there, you would have to agree that it was the best yet in terms of the number and variety of sessions. Also, from my vantage, it appeared that everyone enjoyed all the conference activities from our opening keynote, Thomas Koulopoulos, through our side-splitting closing speaker Bill Herz!

If you were not at this year's 47th annual conference, it is not too soon to start planning to attend next year's edition, which will be in Chicago on May 13-16, 2001. Like nothing else, the STC annual conference provides us with the setting to celebrate our profession, renew and make new professional acquaintances, and expand our technical and professional knowledge.

For me, STC's 47th Annual Conference was most special in that I begin my one-year term at the "STC helm," a privilege for which I am most appreciative. And now that the conference is over, I look forward to getting to work on this year's agenda. And along these lines, I would like to introduce you to this year's elected STC board of directors:

Immediate Past President – Mary Wise, Washington DC Chapter
First Vice President – Judy Glick-Smith, Lone Star Chapter
Second Vice President – Ed See, Mid-Hudson Chapter
Secretary – Jean Gabriel, Orange County Chapter
Treasurer – Martha Collins, Suncoast Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 1 – Kitty Aughey, Rochester Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 2 – Chris Benz, Carolina Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 3 – Rob Houser, Atlanta Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 4 – Thea Teich, Southwestern Ohio Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 5 – Suzanna Laurent, Oklahoma Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 6 – Susan Jensen, Twin Cities Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 7 – Ellen Fenwick, Snake River Chapter
Director-Sponsor Region 8 – Andrea Ames, Silicon Valley Chapter

In addition to the elected members, this year's STC board of directors includes seven assistants to the president, or APs for short. These individuals participate in the board meetings and also manage a subset of the Society-level committees. This year's APs are as follows:

Academic and Research Programs – Sandi Harner, Cedarville College Student Chapter
Communications - Lory Hawkes, Lone Star Chapter
Competitions – Michelle Ratcliffe, Suncoast Chapter
Conferences – Deb Sauer, Boston Chapter
External Relations – Laura Ramsey, Puget Sound Chapter
Professional Development – Carolyn Watt, Toronto Chapter
Special Interest Groups (SIGs) – Ray Urgo

All of us are going to be very busy over the summer, helping to advance this year's objectives, and, of course, preparing for the Fall 2000 meeting of the STC board. This year, the Fall board meeting is to be held on September 14-17, 2000, in Winnipeg, MB, hosted by the Manitoba Chapter. With the exception of an executive session, all STC board of directors meetings are open to all members. So, if you are in the area, please stop by. (Location details will be forthcoming!)

The theme of the 2000-2001 STC year is *Providing Value*. Needless to say, all of the efforts to make our organization successful takes the efforts of literally hundreds of individuals – individuals just like you! If there is an area of STC at the Society level that is of interest to you, let me or another member of the board know. Or, if you just want to drop me a line, my e-mail address is onwritetrk@aol.com.

My personal philosophy is to "take what you do seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously." Couple this with my belief about STC: Collectively we have all of the knowledge, but individually, none of us do. This means you are the keeper of a piece of this collective knowledge. Let's share the wealth!

Yours in friendship and service,

Mark Hanigan,
STC President



Mark Your Calendars!

Executive Meeting
Mon., June 19, 6 pm
#1400, 505 3 St. S.W.
All members are welcome.

> > >

Programs
Will return in the fall of
2000

> > >

Coffee Nights
Annie's Books
912 - 16th Ave. N.W. Free.
Tuesday, June 13th, 7 pm
"The Future of the STC
Alberta Chapter."

> > >

20/20 Conference & Annual General Meeting
Saturday, June 24
Don't forget to register
now to guarantee your
place!
The Alberta Chapter of the
STC invites all members
to attend. Region 7
Director-Sponsor, Ellen
Fenwick, will be on hand
as a special guest.

STC Alberta's Year-At-A-Glance

(Dates and locations subject to change.)

June 13 (Tues) Coffee night *
June 19 (Mon) Executive meeting **
June 24 (Sat) 20/20 Conference and AGM ***

Locations & Details

* 7pm at Annie's Books, 912 - 16 Avenue N.W. in the literary salon. Parking behind Tim Horton's. No registration required.
** 6 pm at 1400, 505 - 3 Street S.W.. Parking available on the street and is free after 6 pm.
*** Best Western, Village Park Inn - 1:00pm - 10:00pm

The STC Pan-Pacific Conference

Now is the time to register!

Plans for the upcoming STC Pan-Pacific Conference are coming together. If you live in STC Regions 7 or 8, you have probably received your conference invitation and preliminary program. Be sure to respond soon: the early registration discount ends July 31st, and discounted hotel and airfares end soon as well. This is going to be an exciting and fun conference - you won't want to miss it!

Here is a summary of important Conference information to help you make your plans. All this information and a great deal more, including the registration form, is available on the Conference web site: www.pan-pacific.org. Visit us soon.

Time and location

The STC Region 7/8 Pan-Pacific Conference will be held October 19-21, 2000, in Honolulu, Hawaii. Our conference hotel is the Renaissance Ilikai Waikiki, a luxury hotel located on Waikiki Beach. To whet your appetite, have a look at this beautiful setting: www.ilikaihotel.com. Register for the Conference using the form recently mailed to you, or download a registration form from the Conference web site.

STC Alberta would like to welcome the following new members to our growing chapter:



Sheila Callan
Leonard Halderman
Dawn Huddleston
Tamara Reyes-Muralles

Andrew Donegan
Martha Handford
Kevin Jones
Trish Vandriel
Shannon Wolf

Jana Joujan
Jean Hankel
Heather Rourke
Brendan Wild

SuperScript

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta Chapter of STC, the Society for Technical Communication, and is published 10 times annually, including double issues in July-August, and December-January.

Submissions: the Editors invite readers to submit articles, news, reviews, and other items of interest. Articles may be edited for size.

Reprints: Original articles appearing in *SuperScript* may be freely reprinted, provided that the author and source are acknowledged, and a copy of the reprint is promptly sent to the Editors. Reprints may not be edited for content, or used for commercial or morally repugnant purposes.

Distribution: *SuperScript* is distributed to members in Alberta and Northwest Territories, to all Canadian chapters and Region 7 chapters of the STC, and to interested companies on individual request. Circulation is 225.

Advertising: *SuperScript* accepts advertising of interest to our readership, and which furthers professional development. We reserve the right to limit or refuse advertising.

Rates: Full page \$160.00 Quarter page \$50.00
Half page \$100.00 Business card \$20.00

To place an advertisement: send your cheque, payable in advance to Society for Technical Communication, Alberta Chapter, Attn: Treasurer, at:

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