

The Academic Author

NEWSLETTER

Confronting the Anxiety of Academic Writing:

What if Anxiety About Academic Writing Were to be Taken Seriously?

BY RACHAEL CAYLEY

The first step in confronting the anxiety of academic writing is to ask, "What if anxiety about academic writing were to be taken seriously, rather than ignored, treated as a punchline, or accepted as inevitable?" said Rachael Cayley, author of the forthcoming book, *Thriving as a Graduate Writer: Principles, Strategies, and Habits for Effective Academic Writing*, in her October 19, 2022 TAA webinar, "Confronting the Anxiety of Academic Writing", available on demand (<https://bit.ly/3Vxb9ZS>).

"If we instead try to understand why academic writing is the site of so much anxiety, we can then find ways to improve the experience of academic writers," she said.

To do that, said Cayley, we first have to acknowledge the centrality of writing to academic life and see it as the key metric of professional accomplishment: "No matter how good you may be at every other aspect of your professional life, you still have to thrive as a writer in order to thrive overall." And that acknowledgement leads us to this dilemma, she said: "Despite this centrality, writers often lack both technique and time. So, despite the overwhelming importance of academic writing, writers still often feel confused, unclear, unable to do it well, and struggle consistently with finding the time to do it."

Cayley takes on these two challenges—technique and time—addressing the concerns of each:

Concerns about technique lead to concerns about the actual product.

Some writers say, "I'm a terrible writer", meaning that they think their writing isn't good. In her experience, she says, it is overwhelmingly common for academic writers to think of themselves as bad writers: "And thinking of yourself as a bad writer is different than thinking of yourself as a writer who is struggling with some particular writing challenge. It's a lot worse because you've defined yourself rather than just acknowledging that you find an activity challenging."

One way to help with the reframing—moving away from, "I'm a terrible writer", to "I'm a writer who's having some trouble with this or that"—she said, is to remember that you aren't just one kind of writer all the time: "We often find ourselves quite proficient writers

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Collaborating Across Differences:

Cover Letters to Facilitate Writing Feedback

BY KRISTINA QUINN

The first three articles in this series, "Building Relationships with Co-author Agreements," "Reflect on Writing Habits in Co-author Processes," and "Keep Writing Communication Simple with the 5 Ps," covered strategies for building trust and shared understanding among co-authors. In this final installment on collaborating across differences, we explore feedback techniques for co-authors that reinforce trust and understanding among writers to support positive writing productivity. Read the full series on the TAA Blog, *Abstract* (<https://bit.ly/3BdXYVA>).

Of the techniques we cover in our collaborative writing workshops for faculty and graduate student co-authors, the *feedback cover letter* is one of the most valued by participants. Its popularity is due to its simplicity as well as the letter's facilitation of clear communication across a feedback exchange

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

TAA Welcomes New Executive Director

BY KEVIN PATTON

On behalf of the TAA Council, I am pleased to announce that Kim Pawlak was promoted to Executive Director on January 1, 2023, after Michael Spinella retired as Executive Director at the end of 2022.

Kim has worked for TAA in increasingly responsible roles for more than 30 years, most recently as Director of Publishing & Operations. She was instrumental in the development of TAA's webinar program, Month of Motivation, Writing Gyms, and many other member benefits and services.

In selecting Kim as our next Executive Director, the TAA Council recognizes that she is just the right person to take the helm of TAA as we face profound changes in textbook and academic authorship,

in how members want to be served in professional societies, and the challenges of a rapidly changing academic landscape.

Her deep knowledge of our members and the world of authoring, along with her demonstrated creativity, her insightful and skillful leadership, and her enthusiasm for TAA's mission, are already having positive effects in TAA.



You may wonder how you can join in on the new and exciting adventures that lie ahead for TAA. It's no secret.

One of the best opportunities is to nominate yourself for one of the three Officer positions or two TAA Council seats that are open in our upcoming election. Besides being a great way to serve TAA and build a solid leadership portfolio, I have found that being part of the TAA Council has given me many chances to meet a larger and more diverse group of our members and engage with them more genuinely than I otherwise could have. If you would like to claim your role in helping Kim and the TAA Council shape TAA's future, it's easy to self-nominate online at <https://bit.ly/3uEAMfj>.

The TAA Council and I also thank Michael Spinella for his nearly one decade of service as Executive Director. Under his leadership, TAA made important strides in serving our members and preparing for the future. Many of you have gotten to know him as a friendly, professional, and helpful colleague during his time with us. We wish him all the best in his retirement. ●



TAA Raises the Alarm on Book Banning

By TAA Committee for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CDEI)

In recent years an alarming number of books are being banned in U.S. public school classrooms, libraries, or both.

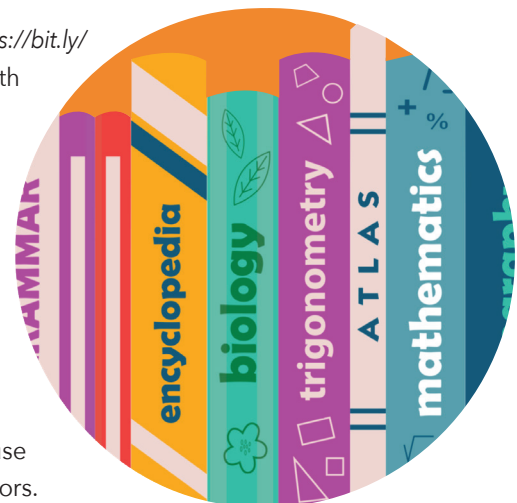
PEN America's Index of School Book Bans (<https://bit.ly/3F4xwP4>) lists 2,532 instances of individual books being banned, affecting 1,648 unique book titles and 1,261 different authors in one year's period (July 2021 to June 2022). The American Library Association (ALA) reports that this current trend in 2022 is the highest number of book challenges since the American Library Association began recording this data over 20 years ago (<https://bit.ly/3F0zYGI>). The subject matter of these banned books relates to content on race and racism, gender identities, and sexual content.

While 75% of these works are fiction, non-fiction works including textbooks are also being banned. For example, history textbooks are being scrutinized for their portrayal of racial segregation (<https://bit.ly/3Y1LB8W>), health textbooks for discussions of abortion

and contraception (<https://bit.ly/3FBFZLr>) and even math textbooks are coming under scrutiny for references to "critical race theory" or "social emotional learning" (<https://bit.ly/3iEnw7A>).

Banned books, be they fiction or nonfiction, are a serious cause of concern for all authors.

Educators must prepare students to critically discuss and debate the full range of today's issues and including being exposed to those issues in their classrooms.



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Help Shape TAA's Future! Nominate Yourself or a Colleague for a Position on the TAA Council

The TAA Governance Committee is seeking nominees for the TAA Council, the association's governing board. Open positions include two TAA Council positions and three Officer roles: Vice-President/President-Elect, Treasurer, and Secretary. Any TAA member in good standing may serve on the TAA Council.

The deadline to submit a nomination is Monday, February 13, 2023.

All terms start July 1, 2023. The term for Council positions is three years. Officers serve two-year terms, with the Vice-President ascending to the role of President for an additional two-year term (subject to Council approval) and then Past-President for another two-year term.

Council Members regularly participate in the work of the Council through attendance at meetings, active participation, and ongoing email communications. They are expected to attend monthly virtual meetings and one in-person meeting, typically held in June. Most travel and lodging expenses related to attending the in-person meeting is covered by TAA.

Learn more about the roles and responsibilities of the TAA Council (<https://bit.ly/3iHflrc>). TAA is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion and strongly encourages qualified candidates from all backgrounds to submit nominations.

Nominees must provide the following in written form:

- Which position you are nominating for.
- Your qualifications to serve (biographical information) and any skills, resources, expertise, and connections you have to offer.
- Why you would like to serve and what you hope to accomplish during your tenure on the Council.

NEW THIS YEAR: Nominees may also choose to submit a 1-2 minute video with the above information.

Nominations undergo a review and approval process by the TAA Governance Committee before elections open on Monday,

February 20, 2023.

The Committee may choose to select a final nomination slate based on diversity, geographic location, institution type, and skills needed.

Complete a 2023 TAA Council Nomination Form at <https://bit.ly/3uEAMfj>.



Nominate Yourself or a Colleague for a 2023 TAA Council Award

The TAA Council has announced a call for nominations for its 2023 TAA Council Awards. Nominations are being accepted for three service awards, the President's Award, Authoring Mentoring Award, and Keedy-Anderson Award; and four writing awards, Rising Star, The Social Justice Award, Pynn-Silverman Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Council of Fellows. The deadline for nominations is April 1, 2023. View awards criteria and complete a nomination form at <https://bit.ly/3VXQdLA>.

Meet the Newest Member of Our Team

Sierra Pawlak joined TAA as Member Services Specialist in December 2022. She has a B.S. in Business Economics from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, MN. Part of Sierra's role will be to provide excellent member service, assisting you with accessing the members-only area of the website, connecting

you with member benefits and services, and answering any questions you may have. We are excited to have Sierra as a part of our team! You can reach her at Sierra.Pawlak@TAAonline.net.



Collaborating Across Differences

that can often feel awkward, befuddling, or even risky for submitting and reviewing authors alike.

Writers who communicate directly and clearly with each other about a document's status, revisions, and next steps, experience less stress, greater confidence, and increased productivity. Letters are a natural genre to facilitate clear communication between writers who come to the writing relationship from diverse backgrounds or different disciplines or different career stages. Letters have a history of helping writers share ideas over vast distances.

A structured feedback request helps an author acknowledge, by declaring upfront, the current state of the document in writing, which can be a clarifying and confidence-building exercise. Simply, a feedback request cover letter addresses the following questions:

- 1) What is the piece of writing about?
- 2) What are the strengths of the piece? or What does the writer feel went well?
- 3) What type of feedback and where in the document will be most helpful in moving the piece to the next stage?

The Feedback Request Letter Can Be as Formal or Informal as Writers Choose

And while some writers elect to craft formal multi-paragraph letters, sometimes mimicking and practicing the formality of article submission to a publisher, most writers elect to dash a few introductory lines at the top of a draft to set the stage for the feedback exchange. For example, an informal feedback request letter may replicate the list:

1. *Attached are first ten pages of a chapter on socializing flow states on research teams.*
2. *The introduction is solid, and the definitions are clear.*
3. *Please review the case study examples. Do they build from the introduction? Can you identify conceptual gaps? Where would you like more details and connections? No need to focus on sentence-level, word choice issues, unless they contribute to issues of development. Thank you for sharing your expertise and insights. Can you return to me at our next scheduled meeting?*

Notice how the submitter's request for "review the case study examples" primes the reader's critical lens to skim the introduction and to focus on descriptions of observations and findings? In crafting the request, the submitting writer must assess and state the status of their work while keeping in mind the reviewer who will provide feedback. The cover letter technique draws together complex elements of writing: meta-awareness of the project, audience awareness, editorial interest, and clear communication between co-authors. For those providing feedback, the cover

letter will focus their editorial eye by narrowing the type and amount of feedback they provide, which often shortens turn-around time.

Not just for collaborative writers, we have found that editing and writing group members who do not co-author together but who provide feedback on their colleagues' writing can also use the cover letter template to focus their group work.

We know the top reasons publishers reject manuscripts concern contributions to the field, integration of ideas, and use of evidence. At the bottom of the list are issues of structure, grammar, and style. (See Elsevier's "Eight reasons I rejected your article" <https://bit.ly/3BajcD>.) We also know that unguided feedback from our colleagues often elicits comments on the lesser grammar and style issues. A cover letter can help redirect a reader's critical eye from the minutia of grammar to the larger challenges of explanation of relevant findings. If you wish to receive higher quality comments from your readers, try prompting your readers with a clear, concise request. They will be grateful, and you are more apt to receive the review you need to move your manuscript to the next level.

When providing feedback, a reader can craft a streamlined reviewer's cover letter to summarize the feedback provided and to acknowledge that they understood the co-author's request. A feedback response cover letter addresses the request, but reverses the order:

- 1) A statement about how the feedback addresses the primary interests of the writer accompanied by an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to read the manuscript.
- 2) A description of what the reader identifies as the strengths of the document. (These may be in addition or contrary to the writer's initial assessment.)
- 3) A comment about the reader's overall impressions about the piece and additional insights that might help move the manuscript forward.

How Might Writers Approach Comments on the Document Itself?

Just as a building a shared vocabulary that speaks to how writers will engage in the process of co-creating a document, openly



talking about the types of feedback can facilitate communication. Awareness of four basic categories of feedback can enhance the reviewer's understanding of what type of will be most appropriate for revisions:

- **Corrective:** reader corrects words, phrases, sentences for the writer
- **Directive:** reader, through marginal comments, directs the writer to make specific edits
- **Interactive:** reader, through marginal or end comments, asks the writer to consider elements or places for revision. The comments may spark conversation.
- **Evaluative:** reader considers the quality of the writing and provides an assessment (modified from Purdue OWL, "Instructor Guide to Providing Feedback"
<https://bit.ly/3Pa7MFJ>)

The nature of the collaboration, type of project, and number of co-authors will greatly determine what types of feedback a reader will provide. In early stages of manuscript drafting, the exchanges may be strategic with an eye to conceptual issues and arrangements, which may illicit *interactive* comments for conversation. In later stages, the feedback process may be more speedy, and feedback may turn toward the *corrective* and *directive* as deadlines draw near.

Two sides of the same process: Giving high-quality feedback to improve a written document is one of the most challenging and rewarding responsibilities of academic life. Receiving feedback is one of the more humbling and necessary experiences to foster our growth and develop our skills as academics. From the lower-stakes exchanges among collaborators to the higher-stakes exchanges of peer review or panel review, feedback is essential to our work together in academe. Among co-authors, having supportive exchange processes can smooth collaborative communications across differences of appointment, culture, nation, or discipline to help us build strong relationships rooted in mutual respect.



Kristina Quynn is the Founding Director of CSU Writes (<https://csuwrites.colostate.edu>), a professional research writing facilitation program at Colorado State University. Trained as a literary scholar, her research and publications have focused on contemporary experimental literature and performative criticism and can be found in publications ranging from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* to *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*. She is co-editor of the essay collection *Reading and Writing Experimental Texts* (Palgrave). Her current research and publications focus on academic writing productivity and sustainable writing practices for researchers.

2023 WEBINAR SERIES

The Future of Textbooks: Bringing Books to Life with AR from an Authoring Perspective

Join Eirik Wahlstrøm from Ludenso and two authors as they discuss the potential role of AR in the authoring process of science, anatomy, history, and language learning titles.



Wednesday, February 22, 11 a.m.-12 p.m. ET

Getting Your Journal Article Published: Simple Steps to Success

Publishing consultant John Bond will present practical steps for any aspiring writer and researcher to follow to go from idea and raw data to submitting a top quality manuscript for possible publication.



Wednesday, March 8, 2-3 p.m. ET

Taxes & Authors: What You Should Know in 2023

Robert M. Pesce, a partner with Marcum LLP, will share the basic tax information you should know as an author.



Thursday, March 16, 2-3 p.m. ET

TAAonline.net/webinars

Watch 250+ On Demand Presentations
on academic and textbook writing
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management, and more!

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Confronting the Anxiety of Academic Writing



in some circumstances, and yet freeze up at other key junctures. When you feel comfortable with your expertise, for instance, when you're speaking to an audience that you think doesn't know as much as you, writing can get easier. When you feel you may be out of your depth, when you're speaking to an audience that you think has expertise, you worry about your credibility, and each word can feel agonizing." That realization alone doesn't

solve the problem immediately, she said: "That lack of confidence could be an ongoing issue for all of us, but it can help to remove the notion that you are fundamentally bad writer, and just recognize that you struggle with writing in certain complicated instances."

Concerns about the role of time in the writing process.

Concerns about time obviously lead to concerns about the writing process, she said: "Some writers say, 'I have a terrible time writing. My writing may turn out okay but getting there is horrible.' Even those of you who don't necessarily feel that you're bad writers, may very well feel that you're writing process is unsustainable. That

it's difficult and drains you in a way that feels like it can't be the optimal way to organize your time."

These concerns about writing product and writing process are so deeply rooted, said Cayley, that they start to feel kind of inevitable: "How draining is it to consistently feel one of those two emotions? It's either, 'I hate what I come up with', or 'I hate the process that I go through to get it.'" ●

The next article in this series will cover tackling the intellectual and practical difficulties that lead to writing anxiety.



Rachael Cayley is an Associate Professor (teaching stream) at the Graduate Centre for Academic Communication, which is part of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto. She teaches academic writing and speaking to graduate students. Before joining the University of Toronto, she worked as an editor at Oxford University Press in Toronto. She has a PhD in philosophy from the New School for Social Research and a BA in political science from the University of British Columbia. Rachael blogs about graduate writing at *Explorations of Style* and has a book forthcoming from the University of Michigan Press, *Thriving as a Graduate Writer: Principles, Strategies, and Habits for Effective Academic Writing* (June, 2023).

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TAA Raises the Alarm on Book Banning

In addition, the adoption of textbooks on grounds other than academic or pedagogical ones limits the breadth of educational content that should be available for open discussion and debate of ideas to all U.S. residents. TAA's Committee on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion recently developed a statement

and materials that represent the diversity of experiences, histories, and identities that constitute today's world. We support authors and open, civil, and inclusive discourse in creating materials so that all learners can fully participate in our sophisticated society." ●

In recent years an alarming number of books are being banned in U.S. public school classrooms, libraries, or both.

on the value of representation in textbooks which was subsequently adopted by the TAA Council this Fall.

"As an organization of textbook and academic authors spanning the disciplines, we strive to offer high-quality, accessible programs

Learn more about TAA's Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (CDEI) at <https://bit.ly/3UFT9uW>. If you are interested in joining the committee, please email cdeicommittee@taaonline.net.

Choosing a Journal to Submit Your New Manuscript

BY JOHN BOND

Your research is done. You have a solid first draft. Now, where will you submit your paper?

Authors will either have a quick answer or struggle to figure out which is the best fit for their work. I suggest you put nearly as much time into thinking through the best match for your work as you did in creating it.

Start to develop a list of possible publications for submission. Potential journals will migrate up and down your list as you learn more about each one.

First understand how the journal operates as this affects who can read your work, and a potential cost. Is the journal subscription-based, published by a society, or open access? Traditional subscription publications mean accessibility of the content is limited to subscribers. Or a journal is published by learned societies or associations. These publications are provided as a benefit to members of that society. Open access means the content is free for all the readers with no or few barriers to access, such as needing a subscription or a membership. There are usually few restrictions on reuse as well. Open access many times means the journal is funded by an article processing charge (APC), which are usually paid by authors, their institution, or the research's sponsor.

Next consider the audience for the journal. Understanding the audience for a journal is essential. It may seem intuitive based on the journal title, but it may be more nuanced than that. The aims and scope section of a journal will be the first place to turn to understand who the audience is.

Consider any metrics available about the publication, such as impact factor, h-index, altmetrics, and Eigenfactor. These and other metrics become more complicated factors to consider when selecting a journal for publication.

Next look into the rejection rate: The rejection rate for a journal (or as a corollary, the acceptance rate) is a key factor that may be available for you to consider. If you go to the About page at the journal website, it may be listed there. Or try a web search to see if it has been discussed or is available in news articles or other sources. Rejection rates can vary widely. Some journals reject 95% or more of all the manuscripts they receive, and other journals reject only 10%.

Another factor to consider is the time to decision which not only varies widely but can be lengthy. Most top-tier journals understand the importance of this metric in attracting the best articles/cutting-edge articles and have worked diligently toward reducing this time to an acceptable amount. The range may be from three weeks to perhaps (unbelievably) half a year. The average is probably 60 to 90 days. Also, time to publication is important. Review the editor and editorial board closely. Consider how many of the board members are familiar to you and that you hold in high esteem. As experts, does the board cover the spectrum of the topics in your field? Are there representatives from the cutting-edge areas in your field?

Do not submit to any journal that you have not closely reviewed articles that had published in their pages. Read the table of contents and the issues closely for key factors that may play into your decision to submit your article. Are the articles well-edited and concise?

Many authors follow the practice of submitting to the journal with the highest reputation first, and if they are not successful, then move down the line. It is an excellent practice; however, it can be time-consuming.

Use an assortment of factors in your journal comparison. The decision of which is the top target journal and the order of the rest of them on the list is subjective. There is no way to weight each factor. But considering these points will help you come to an educated decision.

There are about 45,000 active journals. You will need to be focused when figuring out which ones are best for you to consider. ●



John Bond is a publishing consultant at Riverwinds Consulting. He just released a new book: *The Little Guide to Getting Your Journal Article Published: Simple Steps to Success*. He is also the host of the YouTube channel "Publishing Defined".

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Contact information for TAA Council members is available at TAAonline.net/Council

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NEWSLETTER EDITOR: KIM PAWLAK

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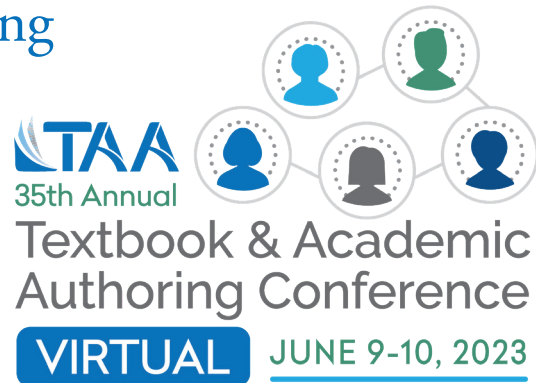
Registration is Now Open for the 2023 TAA Conference on Textbook & Academic Authoring

Network with other textbook and academic authors and gain knowledge on writing and editing strategies, writing productivity, textbook contracts and royalties, and much more! You will leave inspired!

You'll have the opportunity to participate in more than two dozen educational sessions, one-on-one mentoring sessions with veteran textbook and academic authors and industry professionals, and plenty of networking and information-sharing sessions.

TAA's 35th Annual Textbook & Academic Authoring Conference will be held online, June 9-10, 2023, on an interactive virtual conference platform.

Registration is now open. The two-day rate is \$200, and the one-day rate is \$125. TAA members receive \$50 off both two-day and one-day rates with code *Fifty23*. The first 25 registrants will receive three free e-books (details below).



A big thank you to Gold Partner Top Hat, Bronze Partner Archstone Law Group, and Supporters, Rowman & Littlefield, SAGE Publishing, and Stylus Publishing, LLC.

Learn more or register at www.2023taaconference.org

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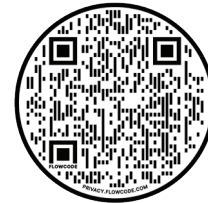
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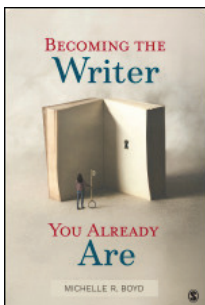


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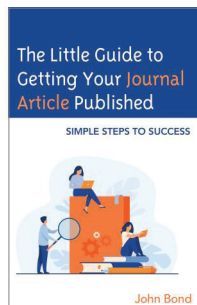
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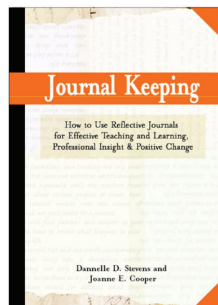
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