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Ernest Solar

*Mount St. Mary's University, solar@msmary.edu*

Angela Marie Mucci-Guido Ph.D.

*Mount St. Mary's University, mucci@msmary.edu*

Carolyn Cook

*Mount St. Mary's University, cook@msmary.edu*

Barbara Marinak

*Mount St. Mary's University, marinak@msmary.edu*Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte>

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## The Motivation to Write Profile-College: A Tool to Assess the Writing Motivation of Teacher Candidates

Ernest Solar  
Angela Marie Mucci-Guido  
Carolyn Cook  
Barbara Marinak  
*Mount St. Mary's University*

### Introduction

Writing is an important aspect of literacy in the field of education, regardless of the grade or discipline. State standards have defined the writing genres, crafts, and skills that are to be taught by teachers in PK-12 classrooms. However, writing standards alone will never nurture effective writers. Writing instruction requires attention to motivational conditions such as nurturing positive self-concept as a writer and promoting the value of writing by engaging students in authentic tasks. Research indicates that a teacher's own conception of writing is crucial to establishing classroom conditions necessary for young writers to grow, explore and take risks (Bruning & Horn, 2000). If this is the job of PK-12 educators, then it is essential for higher education instructors to understand and explore the writing motivation of teacher candidates. By examining the motivation to write of teacher candidates, higher education faculty will be in a position to better prepare future teachers to provide instruction in writing as motivated writers themselves.

Embracing the work of Pajares (2003) who suggested that undergraduates' writing beliefs affected their writing behaviors, a team of educational researchers explored the writing motivation of teacher candidates. More specifically, the researchers examined teacher candidates' beliefs about writing and how writing influences their own performance and their ability to provide instruction in writing (Daisey, 2009; Norman & Spencer, 2005). Ultimately, the goal of the research team was to prepare teacher candidates to be better instructors of writing through understanding their own beliefs and values about writing.

This exploration led to the development of the Motivation to Write Profile-College (MWP-C), a brief instrument used to assess the writing

motivation of teacher candidates. This article explains the development of the tool as well as the potential for use of the MWP-C with college students and teacher candidates.

## Theoretical Framework

Several issues emerge when considering a theoretical justification that motivation can and should be assessed in teacher candidates. These include the importance of writing, writing beliefs in the pre-service classroom, writing motivation, and the importance of assessing writing motivation with theoretically sound principles.

### The Importance of Writing

Perhaps Don Graves said it best many decades ago when educators at all levels were struggling to understand writing and writing instruction. He observed that “writing makes sense of things for oneself, and then for others” (cited in Bright, 1995, p. 36). In other words, writing promotes intellectual growth by encouraging students to connect prior knowledge with new learning and expectation.

Writing also teaches students to clarify, revise and retain (Applebee & Langer, 1987; Clark, 2007). The author John Updike described the importance of writing in even stronger terms. He said, “The humblest and quietest of weapons [is] a pencil” (cited in Rountree, 2002, p. 46). Writing, according to Greenberg and Rath (1985), enables the writer to experience how the written word can affect others.

Despite widespread agreement on the importance of writing, many PK-12 schools in the United States devoted little time and attention to teaching writing or using writing as a tool to support learning (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; National Commission on Writing, 2003). Some shift in this focus is occurring with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association, 2010). According to Graham and Harris (2015), by providing benchmarks at every grade level, the CCSS has made writing a central part of the school reform movement. However, researchers warn (Daisey, 2009; Graham, Gillespie & McKeown, 2013) that there are many factors that could limit the impact of the CCSS and other similar state standards. One of these factors is the capacity of teachers to implement them due in part to writing and writing instruction being overlooked in the nation’s 1300 schools of education. In fact, according to the National Writing Project and Nagin (2003), most state teacher certification programs do not require specific coursework in writing. The concern for a lack of writing knowledge in current and future educators caused the

National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges to issue a recommendation. The group noted it is imperative that schools of education emphasize writing instruction across the curriculum (Daisey, 2009). Though efforts are underway, more work needs to be done, especially related to the beliefs and motivation of pre-service teachers.

### Writing Beliefs in the Pre-Service Classroom

Once again, Don Graves reminds teacher educators why an exploration of writing motivation with pre-service candidates is important. Teachers, he notes, are the most important variable in the literacy classroom. And, as such, they pass on their beliefs and attitudes about writing to their students (Graves, 1990). Research indicates that teachers who do not like to write, ask their students to write less than teachers with positive attitudes toward writing (Claypool, 1980). In addition, they rarely discuss their own writing experience and conference less (Bizzarro & Toler, 1986). Augsburger (1998) notes just the opposite is needed. Teachers should understand writing, be comfortable engaging students about writing, and be willing and able to provide effective feedback (Augsburger, 1998). Yet many studies continue to reveal that teachers across all grade levels are not motivated to write, nor teach writing, and experience writing apprehension (Daisey, 2009).

Therefore, it is never too early to begin exploring and discussing writing in teacher preparation programs. Long-held beliefs inform how teacher candidates will internalize, integrate and navigate the knowledge, skills and dispositions being taught in pre-service courses. If their prior experiences and current beliefs remain unexamined, content and pedagogy instruction may not influence their practices (Britzman, 1986; Lortie, 1975). In other words, if beliefs about writing are not explored in pre-service classrooms, efforts to bolster knowledge, skills and dispositions in writing could prove ineffective because teacher candidates have not been invited to explore their own histories, apprehensions, and experiences.

### Writing Motivation

One of the foundational constructs related to writing beliefs that should be explored with teacher candidates is motivation. Boscolo and Hidi (2007) suggest that motivation as a construct is multifaceted and the conceptualization of writing is complex. They note that writing motivation research can be divided into three larger foci. The first examines the motives, values, and interests which activate behavior. A second area is related to the writers' self-concept and perception of

competence. And the final area of recent investigation is the writer's ability to employ strategies and persist (Biscolo & Hidi, 2007).

These three areas of research often come together. For example, studies suggest that judgments of confidence and valued outcomes codetermine the tasks in which individuals will engage and the success they will experience (Wigfield & Eccles, 1992). According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy judgments in part determine the value that people place on tasks and activities. Students who expect success in a school subject tend to value that subject. In addition, the ability and willingness to use self-regulated learning strategies also correlates with writing competence (Harris & Graham, 1992; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1994; Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997). Students appear to develop beliefs about their academic capabilities as a result of how successful their use of strategies (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The effective use of strategies has then been linked to more strategy use, higher motivation, and more focus on greater achievement (Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1998; Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 1999).

The relationship between the first two areas of research, values and self-concept, is the basis of the expectancy-value theory of achievement motivation. Expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983) argues that individuals' choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their perceived ability to complete the task successfully and the extent to which they value the activity (Wigfield et al., 2006). Ability beliefs (expectancies) are defined as an individual's perception of his or current competence at a given task (Eccles, 1983). Achievement values are described as the importance of doing well on a given task leading to a willingness to spend time and effort to engage in that task regularly or in the future (Eccles, 1983).

More specifically, expectancy is thought to arise from the individual's task-specific self-concept. Value, on the other hand, is composed of importance (how a task meets different needs of individuals, intrinsic value (the enjoyment one gains from the task) and, usefulness (how a task fits into an individual's plans) (Eccles, 1983; Wigfield & Eccles, 1992).

### Assessing Writing Motivation in the Pre-Service Classroom

While a writer's ability to employ strategies and persistence is clearly important, for the purposes of this investigation and instrument construction, writing motivation has been defined based on the two constructs of expectancy-value theory: self-concept and value. Expectancy-value theory has proven to be a valid and reliable construct for assessing achievement motivation in a wide variety of

disciplines including reading, writing, mathematics, and science (Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2013; Mantzicopoulos & Samarapungavan, 2009). This theoretical model posits that motivation is composed of an expectancy that they will be successful in performing a task (self-concept) and that they perceive a value in accomplishing the task.

As noted above, teacher candidates bring many years of writing experiences into the pre-service classroom. Recognizing a link between skill and motivation (Pajaras, 2003), one would assume that writing motivation increases as students become more skillful throughout high school. However, recent studies suggest that writing motivation has most likely significantly eroded by the time teacher candidates enter college. Numerous investigations reveal a pattern of decreasing motivation in language arts skills beginning in sixth grade. It appears that though writing instructions and experiences increase throughout the secondary grades, becoming a more skillful writer does not necessarily result in a more motivated writer (Pajaras, 2003). These findings underscore the importance of understanding teacher candidates' writing motivation.

There are a variety of methods teacher educators can employ to assess writing motivation in the pre-service classroom. This might include journaling, discussion, response to open-ended prompts, or a self-report survey. The Motivation to Write Profile-College (MWP-C) is a very brief, self-report instrument designed to assess self-concept as a writer and value of writing. The MWP-C can be used alone to assess the writing motivation of teacher candidates or in conjunction with other formative assessments. Whether used alone or with other forms of assessment, the MWP-C can provide teacher educators with valuable information that can be used to promote discussion, shape course content and inform internship experiences. Given the minimal time spent teaching writing methods (as compared to time spent teaching reading methods), optimizing these minutes is critical. And if teacher educators are to use this time effectively, it is essential that research consider the writing motivation of teacher candidates. Because as research indicates, the writing motivation of teacher candidates, or lack thereof, will influence what they learn about writing and how they deliver writing instruction during their internships and in their future classrooms. The MWP-C is a tool to support teacher educators to plan these important conversations and experiences in the preservice classroom- and beyond.

### **Development of the Motivation to Write Profile-College**

Informed by expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983) and earlier work on the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP; Gambrell, 1996), Motivation to Read Profile-

Revised (MRP-R; Malloy, et al., 2013), and the Me and My Reading Profile (MMRP; Marinak, Malloy, Gambrell, & Mazzoni, 2015), a 24-item instrument was developed for college students in a teacher preparation program. Like the MRP, MRP-R, and MMRP, the Motivation to Write Profile-College (MWP-C) draws on work suggesting that motivation can be assessed based on self-perceived competence and task value. Hence, two subscales were created and an initial pool of items were developed based on the subconstructs of self-concept and value. Twelve items were related to self-concept as a writer and twelve were related to value of writing. The instrument contains a traditional five-point Likert scale. In order to increase the reliability of student responses, the items are variably scaled. Some items have the responses arranged from least motivated to most motivated (scored 1-5) and others have responses arranged from most motivated to least motivated (scored 5-1).

A panel of literacy educators then carefully vetted the items. Literacy professors, reading specialists, and graduate education students critiqued the items for construct validity. They were asked to sort the items into three categories: (1) self-concept as a writer; (2) value of writing; and, (3) not sure or questionable. All the items received 100% trait agreement and were included in the pre-field test profile.

### **Field Testing the Motivation to Write Profile-College**

The MWP-C was administered to 239 undergraduate and graduate students in a teacher preparation program at a university in the mid-Atlantic region. Of the field test population, 39 students were male and 200 were female. The MWP-C was field tested on a convenience sample of students in graduate and undergraduate courses. Course instructors were provided with packets containing informed consent, the profile and administration procedures. Data from the field tests administration was loaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Validity and reliability testing was conducted using NCSS statistical software.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The MWP-C administered during the field test was a 24-item instrument. Analysis using a factor analysis (Cronbach, 1951) indicated scale alphas ranging from .23 to .83. Ten items did not appear to contribute to either the self-concept of writing construct or the value of writing construct. Data from these ten items were removed and a second factor analysis was conducted, using a varimax orthogonal rotation to examine the inter-factor correlations. The remaining 14 items yielded

scale alphas ranging from .55 to .83 with all items contributing to the overall scale reliability. Table 1 displays the internal consistency reliabilities for each scale. Considering the ordinal nature of the survey scale, reliability and validity estimates are judged to be well within acceptable ranges for both classroom use and research purposes (Drost, 2011).

Table 1  
Number of Items and Internal Consistency Reliability Ranges for Each Sub Scale  
(n=239)

Sub Scale Reliabilities	Number of Items	Alpha
Self-Concept	7	.68-.83
Value	7	.55-.82

### The Final MWP-C

Following validation, the final MWP-C contains 14 items comprised of two subscales: one that assesses the students' *self-concept as a writer* (7 items) and one that assesses the students' *value of writing* (7 items).

#### Administering the MWP-C

The MWP-C (Figure A1) can be administered to a whole class, small groups, or individually using the administration guidelines found in Figure A2 of the appendix. The instructor should allow 15-20 minutes for completion of the profile.

#### Scoring and Interpreting the MWP-College

To assist educators in navigating the variability of responding, a scoring table is provided in Figure A3. The scoring table allows the instructor to calculate scores for the two subscales-self-concept as a writer and value of writing- as well as a total writing motivation score.

Though a reliable and valid performance assessment, interpretation of the MWP-C should be approached with caution. Quantitatively, scores from the instrument can be used to provide higher education instructors with screening data related to self-concept as a writer, value of writing and total writing motivation. Subscale and total scores can be converted to percents and considered based on quartiles with 0-25% being least motivated, 26%-75% representing average writing motivation, and 76% and higher indicating most motivated.

Perhaps more important, the self-report results can be used to explore the writing motivation of a class of teacher candidates or individually during writing conferencing. The tool can also be administered to teacher candidates but not collected-serving only to promote reflection and discussion.

### **Uses of the MWP-College in Higher Education and PK-12**

The MWP-C grew out of concern for the writing motivation of teacher candidates. However, many other instructors, PK-12 and higher education, are concerned about the writing motivation of their students. In higher education, across a wide variety of disciplines, such angst often stems from students struggling with the rigorous writing expectations Perry and colleagues describes this as the “paradox of failure” whereby disproportionate numbers of capable students fail early in their college experience (Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, & Pelletier, 2001).

In fact, numerous researchers suggest that concern for the motivation to write is as important, if not more important than skill-based instruction and/or remediation (Robinson, 2009; Weaver, 2006). Specifically, in numerous studies Perry and his colleagues (2009) found that students who felt “in control” were more motivated and likely to persist. The MWP-C can be used by higher education instructors in any discipline to explore important perceptions related to self-concept and value of writing. Clearly being aware of one’s writing motivation and engaging in discussion about self-concept and value of writing can, perhaps, support college students to navigate the rigors of writing in their courses. (Perry, et al., 2001).

Given that validation of the MWP-C included older adolescents in college, the tool can also be used in the upper grades of high school. Three decades of research has confirmed the relationship between motivation and achievement across a variety of content areas including reading, writing, and mathematics. In writing, it is clear that all students, those with and without learning disabilities, who are motivated to write achieve at higher levels (Graham & Harris, 2006;

Schunk & Swartz, 1993). Similar to use in higher education, the MWP-C can be used in grades eleven and twelve to assess writing motivation and promote discussion about self-concept and value of writing. Such discussions could be rooted in writing motivation for a particular discipline such as English or social studies. The MWP-C could also be used to explore writing motivation in the larger context of writing expectations as students transition from high school to college.

In addition, the MWP-C can be used to support professional development of PK-12 teachers. The profile could serve to jump start professional development aimed at nurturing the writing motivation of classroom teachers. As Bruning and Horn (2000) note, teachers' conceptions about writing inform their skills as teachers of writing. Being motivated to write and teach writing are critical to creating the positive classroom conditions within which writers become strategic and courageous.

The MWP-C has the potential to promote important discussion with teacher candidates, college students, adolescents preparing for college, and PK-12 teachers at all grade levels. This brief profile encourages reflection about self-concept as a writer and value of writing-critical constructs to promoting the intrinsic writing motivation (Eccles, 1983).

### **Classroom and Research Implications**

In any preservice teacher training course, the MWP-C can be used as a formative assessment to evaluate the value and motivation of the entire class and each individual student. For the instructor the MWP-C provides a) a quick view of the value and motivation of the entire class to write, b) guidance on how to structure writing instruction for the class, and c) guidance on how to academically manage each student related to his or her personal writing profile. For the student, the MWP-C provides a) a quick view into his or her own belief related to writing, b) a better understanding if he or she finds value in writing as a form of communication, and c) a better understanding of his or her self-concept as a writer, which affects his or her motivation to write.

When the scores are reviewed and it is discovered that an individual writer or the entire class has a low self-concept in writing (i.e., lack of confidence in writing), it is important to work on building their confidence. The first step in the process is to meet with each student individually to learn where they lack confidence in their writing ability. The student's lack of confidence could be due to specific writing skills (i.e., correct grammar or sentence structure) (Pajares & Johnson, 1993). Or, the student's lack of confidence could be due to the fear of

successfully completing a specific writing task (i.e., letter, essay, or term paper) (Pajares & Johnson, 1993).

After meeting with the student, develop a plan to help build his or her confidence in the ability to write. If the student's weakness is due to technical writing skills, encourage them to work with a tutor or seek help at the school's writing center. If the student's weakness is in successfully completing specific writing tasks, as the instructor, break down the writing tasks into smaller manageable parts. With the assignment broken into smaller parts the writing task will seem less daunting and successful completion of each part will be proof of success to the student.

When the scores of the MWP-C display a low value score (i.e., lack of finding the purpose to write) it is important to be flexible and creative with writing assignments. Research has shown that a large portion of college students find more meaning and value in free choice writing, journal writing, and creative writing projects as compared to a small portion of students that value analytic and expository writing (Norman & Spencer, 2005). As the instructor, often times there are analytic and expository writing assignments that are necessary for certification, licensure, or content knowledge for the subject. However, if there is an opportunity to allow students to produce free choice, journal entries, or creative writing assignments within a specified structure, we strongly encourage the instructor to capitalize on the opportunity because the students find that these opportunities allow them to express themselves in personal ways that they value (Norman & Spencer, 2005).

### **Conclusion**

In the early 1990's college students perceived themselves as readers and writers in the traditional sense (Pajares & Johnson, 1993). Meaning, these students read paperback books, magazines, and newspapers. And they wrote, with pen and paper, letters, traditional term papers and essays. College students, including pre-service teachers, of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may not see themselves as traditional readers and writers as defined 30 years ago, due to the increase in digital literacy. Therefore, current college students may hold less value in completing traditional assignments tasked by professors; such as, research papers, essays, and letters. This in turn may lead to less motivation of the college student wanting to write those assignments for class to the best of their ability. There may be no correlation between the increase of digital literacy and the lack of writing instruction across the curriculum in schools; however, for the pre-service teacher, providing writing instruction and writing as a tool should remain as a critical

component of learning (Gilbert & Graham, 2010; National Commission on Writing, 2003).

Regardless of the rise of digital literacy, the ability to communicate through writing is still critical to succeeding in the classroom and essential in the workplace (Norman & Spencer, 2005). As Norman and Spencer (2005) pointed out at the turn of the century, the quality of student writing continues to be a concern for educators and policymakers (Daisey, 2009; Gilbert & Graham, 2010; Nagin, 2003; National Commission on Writing, 2003). In order for an instructor to help a student improve his or her writing, the instructor must first understand the student's beliefs related to writing. The MWP-C provides a quick snap shot into the student's beliefs related to writing as a form of communication and their own ability as a writer. The MWP-C opens the conversation with students in regards to their perception on their ability to write, the value behind writing, and the motivation to write. As an instructor this information will help inform how writing should be taught and supported in the classroom.

There is a belief among instructors that writing is a fixed talent or a gift that a person has or does not have. However, with proper support and instruction, writing can be a malleable talent that can be improved (Norman & Spencer, 2005). In conjunction with the MWP-C, for the benefit of strong and weak writers, establish a supportive writing environment in the classroom to increase writing performance. Creating a supportive writing environment includes the instructor helping each student establish short-term and long-term writing goals for the length of the course and beyond. In the learning environment providing social comparison opportunities for students to discuss opposing viewpoints they have read and allow students the opportunity to read and critique their peers' writing in structured review sessions (Pajares & Johnson, 1993). As the instructor evaluates written assignments, provide encouraging comments to each student's writing assignment and provide constructive criticism that will improve their writing ability or confidence. Lastly, provide direct writing instruction to the students via the instructor or a guest speaker. Finally, provide many opportunities for students to write. Just like reading, the more a person writes, the better they become.

## Appendix

Figure A1: Motivation to Write Profile-College

1. I am an effective writer.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2. Writing is something I like to do.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
3. I am comfortable completing a writing assignment.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
4. I have used feedback to improve my writing.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5. I talk with others about my writing process.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I am a good writer.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
7. I spend time thinking about my writing process.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
8. I worry about my writing ability.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
9. My writing has improved because professors have spent time teaching me how to improve my skills.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. Writing is hard for me.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. I am interested in ways to improve my writing.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
12. I do not like to write because of negative experiences in the past.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
13. I like to share my writing with others.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
14. I am able to express my ideas clearly when writing.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

Figure A2

**Directions for Administration of the MWP-C**

The MWP-C is designed for instructors to use in their pre-service classroom. The MWP-C is a 14-item multiple-choice instrument comprised of two subscales: one that assesses self-concept as a writer (7 items) and one that assesses value of writing (7 items).

The MWP-C is designed for whole class or small group administration. The entire profile takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

**Instructor directions before the MWP-C is distributed:**

Today I would like you to complete the Motivation to Write Profile for college students.

The profile is designed to explore your self-concept as a writer and value of writing. There are no right or wrong answers. The profile will not be graded. Your answers will serve to inform our discussion of writing instruction. Think about each question and then circle the answer that is most honest for you.

Figure A3

**Motivation to Write-College Scoring Guidelines**

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In order to increase the reliability of student responses, the items are variably scaled. Some items have the responses listed in order from *least motivated* to *most motivated* (scored 1-5) and others have responses that are listed in order from *most motivated* to *least motivated* (scored 5-1).

To support you in scoring items correctly for calculating the *Self-Concept (SC)* and *Value (V)* subscales, please use the following table to guide you.

Total MWP-C \_\_\_\_\_/70

Total SC \_\_\_\_\_/35

Total Value \_\_\_\_\_/35

**Total Instrument**

Item Number and Subscale	1 <sup>st</sup> response	2 <sup>nd</sup> response	3 <sup>rd</sup> response	4 <sup>th</sup> response	5 <sup>th</sup> response
1 SC	1	2	3	4	5
2 V	1	2	3	4	5
3 SC	1	2	3	4	5
4 V	1	2	3	4	5
5 SC	1	2	3	4	5
6 V	1	2	3	4	5
7 SC	1	2	3	4	5
8 V	5	4	3	2	1
9 SC	1	2	3	4	5
10 V	5	4	3	2	1
11 SC	1	2	3	4	5
12 V	5	4	3	2	1
13 SC	1	2	3	4	5
14 V	1	2	3	4	5

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