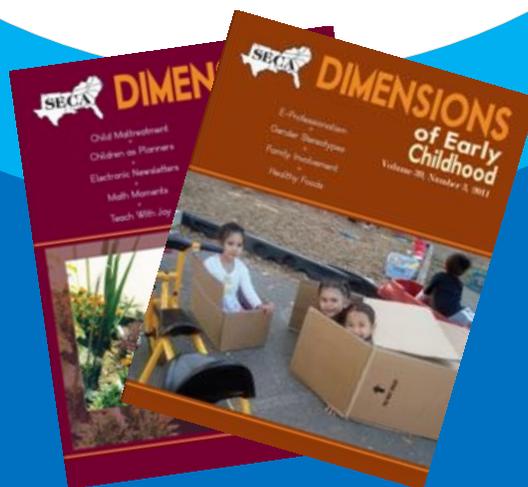


**REVIEWING FOR**  
*Dimensions of Early  
Childhood*

**A MANUAL FOR REVIEWERS**

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**SOUTHERN EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSOCIATION**

# Table of Contents

Welcome Message to Reviewers	2
Qualifications of Reviewers	2
Getting Started	2
The Role of a Journal Reviewer	3
Differences in Manuscript Types	3
So... What Are We Looking For?	3
What Does it Mean to be a “Peer-reviewed” Journal?	4
The Three Legged Stool of Reviewing	4
Authors	4
Readership	5
Reviewers	6
What Does a Reviewer Do?	6
How to Review a Manuscript	7
Processes Involved	7
Guidelines for Reviewing	7
To Publish or Not	7
Role and Responsibilities	8
What to Look For	9
Providing Feedback	10
Samples of Previous Reviewer’s Comments	10
How Many Manuscripts Will I Need to Review?	11
What Kind of Reviewer Will You Be?	12
Time and Effort	13
Time—Stepping into Others’ Shoes	13
Effort	13
Final Thoughts	13
Appendix A: Sample of Reviewer Request Email	14
Appendix B: Sample of Reviewer Form	15
References	16

*“You write to communicate to the hearts and minds of others what’s burning inside you, and we edit to let the fire show through the smoke.” - Arthur Plotnik*

## **Welcome Message to Reviewers**

Congratulations! The Editorial Committee welcomes you to an exciting professional pursuit! Becoming a manuscript reviewer for our journal, *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, is extremely significant and allows you to contribute to the quality of publications put forth by the **Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA)** for its members and others interested in serving the very young.

## **Qualifications of Reviewers**

Peer-reviewers for *Dimensions of Early Childhood* have to meet very specific criteria. These criteria include holding a bachelor’s, master’s, or doctoral degree in a discipline reflective of the journal and mission of SECA; a minimum of five years of professional experience in an early childhood setting; and demonstrate knowledge of the early childhood field.

As a peer-reviewer, you were selected because you met the above criteria and notably have the expertise to make professional judgments on the quality of submitted manuscripts. Two critical qualities identified were your ability to pay attention to details and your predisposition towards writing well. These key predispositions were exemplified by your essay and your professional resume or curriculum vitae.

## **Getting Started**

Becoming a manuscript reviewer means that you have a certain skill set that allows you to assess the writing of others and to determine the merit of their contribution to the field. As a peer-reviewer, the Editorial Committee counts on your active commitment to make professional judgments about other’s work.



## The Role of a Journal Reviewer

Those who desire to review manuscripts do so for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons emanate from a professional side; other reasons are more personal. Professionally, serving as a manuscript reviewer allows one to use judgment to:

- Enhance the quality of manuscripts read by the profession,
- Introduce the readership to new ideas,
- Use your own expertise, and
- Help authors improve their writing.

Personally, serving as a reviewer allows one to:

- Remain current in the field;
- Develop an understanding of submission specifications for one's own manuscript; and
- Learn new ideas, approaches, and techniques.

## Differences in Manuscript Types

Many different types of pieces are written for a variety of publications. Most, however, fall into two broad categories: Popular pieces for magazines, or scholarly works for journals, known as manuscripts (unpublished documents) and articles (published manuscripts). A vast difference between the two categories exists. Articles for popular, or trade, magazines, such as *Glamour*, *Men's Health*, *O, Gentlemen's Quarterly*, *Bride*, *Outdoorsmen*, and *More*, are written for the general public and contemporary interests. Pieces published in trade magazines have polished eye-catching covers that attract readers to the magazine. The written work is casual, entertaining, and easy to read. Often times, references are not used; and editors review the material before it is printed.

Articles written for journals are scholarly: typically written by a knowledgeable individual or expert in the field. Scholarly works are written for a specific audience, with embedded citations or references, and are peer-reviewed. They are formal, factual, scholarly, practical, and/or technical. They may use common jargon accepted in the field and are written towards a specific readership.

## So...What Are We Looking For?

Writing for *Dimensions of Early Childhood* is writing for a scholarly journal. *Dimensions of Early Childhood* is not a popular or trade magazine. Authors should write for the readers of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* which targets individuals whose interests are with young children. Writings for *Dimensions of Early Childhood* vary from scholarly research to practical approaches to a variety of ideas and topics, all of which are peer-reviewed. Works submitted for review to *Dimensions of Early Childhood* are called "manuscripts." Manuscripts are unpublished works; whereas "articles" are considered published manuscripts!

## What Does it Mean to Be a “Peer-reviewed” Journal?

A journal that is peer-reviewed means that peers or colleagues in the same discipline read the manuscript and determine its merit. Peer-professionals are familiar with the field and remain current so that they are able to use their professional judgment to determine the worthiness and contribution that might be made if a manuscript were published and read by others. Often, peer-reviewed is also called “refereed.”

Peer-reviewed, or refereed, journals assess manuscripts through “blind review” processes. This means that the reviewers do not know who the author is of the manuscript, nor how many authors wrote the manuscript. Consequently then, the review process is not based on who wrote the manuscript, but on the merit of the manuscript’s content. Thus, refereed journals are viewed as credible educational publications that support authors’ professional recognition and reviewers’ expertise.

*Dimensions of Early Childhood* is a peer-reviewed, referred scholarly journal on applied research or articles that translate into exemplary professional practices. As such, blind reviews are conducted whereby each manuscript is assessed by three independent reviewers. The peer-reviewers are selected by the Editor of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* and are unknown to each other.

## The Three Legged Stool of Reviewing

Reviewing manuscripts encompasses three intertwined components: Author/s, Readership, and the Reviewers. Each leg of the stool supports the other, is dependent on the other, and maintains the stability of the stool. Each leg is invaluable.

### Author/s

Without authors, nothing exists to read. All authors write for a purpose, regardless of the publication type. Most often these reasons include the following motives:

- Entertain;
- Stimulate public thought, debate, or action;
- Assist with a community or common belief;
- Expose and disseminate ideas, thoughts, and research;
- Inform;
- Question professional concepts;
- Share personal stories, such as memoirs or experiences; and
- Demonstrate creativity, such as short stories, poems, artwork, photos, etc.

Many authors take professional and personal risks when their words become public. Courage is needed to write a piece for others to read. Yet, all prices written are not ones that should be shared through publication. While authors risk much when submitting manuscripts, feedback and commentary assists their growth in writing abilities. A professional obligation reviewers' bear is to be bold, fair, and honest; and likewise courageous by providing professional constructive feedback to authors. Feedback should not discourage writers, which it may ultimately do; rather, feedback guides those authors that want to pursue their objective through rewriting in ways to help them become published.



## Readership

Readers of magazines, or journals, want to read pieces that are meaningful to them and have personal or professional value. If articles or published works are insignificant to the reader, the magazine or journal will become obsolete.

Often times, the readership determines what is published. Readers influence the topics, quality, type, relevance, and significance of publications. If readers find these qualities in the magazines or journals read, they will continue to read and subscribe to that magazine or journal. If these qualities are less valued or missing, readers turn to more beneficial materials. For example, *Teen Magazine* is written for new teenagers; *Seventeen Magazine* is quite appropriate for high school girls. Readers who find *Glamour Magazine* relevant are typically older females than those who read these two previous magazines and thus will not read *Teen* or *Seventeen Magazine*. The opposite is true too: new teens and older teenage girls may find *Glamour Magazine* irrelevant to their daily lives. Likewise, readers of *Glamour Magazine* might find *More Magazine* boring because they are not yet near or in their forties which is the age range readership of the latter magazine.

The readership of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* is geared towards individuals who work with children in the early childhood age range, using the National Association for the Education of Young Children's definition of early childhood. According to our webpage, "SECA publishes a variety of materials for those in the field of Early Childhood Education. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, (is) our nationally recognized refereed journal ... covering a range of topics of interest to the early childhood professional."

Unless authors write manuscripts that are relevant and of interest to early childhood professionals, *Dimensions of Early Childhood* would not be read. Thus, the readership is dependent upon authors to develop and construct manuscripts or other peer-reviewed materials that are of use to the field. Those who write for *Dimensions of Early Childhood* must know and understand current readership interests, range of pertinent topics, and the profession.



## Reviewers

An editor takes the responsibility for ensuring that manuscripts are of the upmost quality for publication and are appropriate for the readership. Editors of referred journals, such as *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, do so through qualified peer reviewers. Reviewers must be current, knowledgeable, and provide guidance to the editor regarding manuscripts submitted. Reviewers are the link between authors and the readership—the third leg of the stool. Through the recommendation of manuscripts to be accepted for publication, the reviewers intentionally determine the usefulness and benefit readers would derive from the manuscript.



## What Does a Reviewer Do?

As a reviewer, the journal editor counts on you and your expertise. Reviewers provide feedback as they assess the clarity, quality, and originality of the manuscript. Reviewers are expected to have a variety of skills to provide straightforward and candid feedback. Some of these skills include the ability to:

- Determine the merit or worthiness of the manuscript;
- Maintain confidentiality;
- Provide a sound rationale for decisions;
- A reviewer is:
  - Judicious
  - Reasonable
  - Explicit
  - Respectful
  - Truthful

The feedback a reviewer provides is communicated in writing, electronically. The review must be effectively written from both the soul and professional wisdom; sometimes this is a very hard undertaking.

## How to Review a Manuscript

A successful reviewer maintains familiarity with the journal. Knowledge of the journal as well as reading other SECA publications keeps the reviewer well-informed with the journal's direction, readership, and purpose. Keeping current means knowing the processes involved, understanding the reviewing guidelines, and recognizing your role and responsibilities with reviewing manuscripts.

### Processes Involved

All manuscripts are submitted electronically for blind review. The editor assigns three reviewers to read each manuscript; the author/s is/are not divulged. Likewise, the reviewers assigned to manuscripts are not revealed to the author/s or to the other reviewers. Each review is submitted independently and confidentiality. Reviewers never know what other reviewers wrote.

An email is sent to the reviewers notifying them that they have been assigned a manuscript to review, along with the manuscript and reviewer form noting the deadline for completing the review. (A sample of a reviewer request email and a reviewer form are in Appendices A and B, respectively.) All reviewers are asked to acknowledge/confirm receipt of the manuscript. Each reviewer is expected to complete the manuscript review and form within the timeframe allotted, which is typically a month. All reviews are completed and submitted on the form electronically. A friendly reminder is sent to reviewers one week in advance of the due date.

### Guidelines for Reviewing

Read and re-read the manuscript, looking for appropriateness and fluff. Identify the strong, weak, and challenging features of the manuscript. Brush up on APA format, so you can determine if the guidelines for the manuscript format were followed throughout the document, as well as how references were cited. Write your summation, impressions, worthiness, and befitting nature of the manuscript in clear third party statements, not questions to the author/s. Be clear so the receiver of your feedback understands what you are saying. (Remember— model correct grammar!) Write in APA style and use “author/s” since you will not know if a single author or multiple authors wrote the manuscript. Make recommendations and note whether the author/s addressed what was expected. Remember, the reviewers' feedback is to aid the editor with publishing decisions. The more details you can supply regarding your decision, the easier it will be for the editor to make a decision to publish the manuscript or not.

### To Publish or Not

Each reviewer must in the end judge the merit of the manuscript and determine whether or not it is publishable. You will indicate your decision on the reviewer feedback form. You will advise the editor to: **1)** accept for publication, **2)** to revise and resubmit, or **3)** reject the manuscript. You must provide explicit feedback regarding your decision.

Ultimately you must decide, based on your professional expertise and understanding of the SECA readership and organization, if the quality of the manuscript warrants publication. The weight and thoughtfulness you give to your resulting judgment, coupled with the supporting details undergirding your rationale, will influence the publication decision.

Finally, each reviewer needs to determine how transparent your decision and individual remarks regarding the manuscript should be. You may choose to reveal your comments to the author/s or not. Think about being in their shoes; would you like to obtain feedback about your work, whether published or not? Would you like to know what strengths were found in the paper? What areas need to be stronger? Try to express your concerns in a positive instead of a negative voice. For example, instead of saying, “The examples are poor,” say, “Provide examples that relate to what you want to emphasize.”

## Role and Responsibilities

As a reviewer you are making judgments on the merit of the manuscript based on several factors. Bottom-line, you are determining the quality and type of materials that the SECA readership will read. This is a huge responsibility and needs to be taken with much thought, dedication, and honesty. What is printed in *Dimensions of Early Childhood* is a reflection of SECA, which is visible world-wide.

The editor and other reviewers are counting on you to be thorough, detailed, and timely with your review. Some questions to ask in order to determine the merit of the manuscript are:

- Is the manuscript appropriate for the readership?
- Is the manuscript original and thus able to add to the field? Does it add value?
- Is the manuscript summarizing known information?
- Is the manuscript more of a paper for a college class than for the journal?
- Are references current and accurate? Formatted in APA?
- Is the manuscript full of “fluff”?
- Are the scholarship and practicality levels appropriate for the readership?

As a selected reviewer, you are expected to make professional decisions on the basis of the manuscript you agreed to review. Reviewers refrain from personal reactions to the document, especially if the author/s is/are uncovered or known or the topic is not one you generally agree with or support, (e.g., children raised by two same sex parents). Your job is to determine if the quality of the manuscript is worthwhile reading; supports the mission of the journal and the organization; and communicates new material, thoughts, ideas, perspectives, and/or best practices to the profession.

## What to Look For

As a reviewer, there are many details that need to be uncovered, scrutinized, and assessed. A sample list of these is provided below to help you in assessing the worthiness of the manuscript:

- Are the manuscript guidelines followed, such as APA format?
- Is the title of the manuscript aligned to the paper?
- Is there alignment between the sections of the manuscript which reinforce the title?
- Does the manuscript align to the gist or theme of the article?
- Is the level of scholarship too high or too low for the journal?
- Is the manuscript organized so that it is easy to follow?
- Is the manuscript concise?
- Is the manuscript clear, overall?
- Is terminology defined, explained?
- Do transitions flow from one thought to another?
- Are there gaps in the manuscript?
- Does the manuscript repeat itself?
- Is the content/topic relevant?
- Are citations current and in current APA format?
- Is the manuscript written professionally in Standard English?
- Is the manuscript confusing or is it difficult to read and grasp the concepts of what the author/s communicates?
- Does the manuscript add to the field?
- Do supplemental materials related to and reinforce the topic?

## Providing Feedback

The feedback you provide allows others to understand your perspective and decisions. First and foremost, respond to the prompts provided on the review form and submit the completed review on time. (See Appendix B.)

Some tips on writing feedback include writing confident statements; never write questions as there will not be a response. Should you be unclear about something in the manuscript, state that clarity is needed and pinpoint the specific parts that seem confusing. Be constructive, honest, fair, and thoughtful in the remarks provided. Identify areas which are commendable as well as those that need more depth. Use “author/s” in lieu of “he” or “she,” as gender of the author should not be assumed. Be consistent in the tense used when writing your comments; use either present or past tense. Proofread your own work, as this reveals your own attention to detail and much about you as a professional writer.

Secondly, decide if the reviewed remarks should only go to the editor or if you want your remarks also to be provided to the author/s. One way to increase the quality of the author/s’ writing and potential for publication is for author/s to receive the external reviewers’ comments. If the manuscript is “poor,” be brave enough to say so in ways that minimizes defeat and discouragement for the author/s.

Third, keep a copy of your review. Rarely will a review be misplaced; having a copy will save you time and keep you from re-reviewing the manuscript a second time if needed. Often how you reviewed a manuscript will serve as a reminder and a reference for your own writings, as well as provide a record of consistency on how you review manuscripts.

## Samples of Previous Reviewer Comments

Below are some examples of authentic reviewers’ comments. These are divided into two categories. Those that are unhelpful and vague:

- “Had outdated sources.”
- “The topic is not current.”
- “Proofread.”
- “Unorganized.”
- “Needs clarity.”
- “Weak.”

And those that are more helpful, yet succinct:

- “Of the 23 resources, 3 were current.”
- “The author/s wrote for older children and not those appropriate for the readership.”
- “The manuscript seems to be written for a language arts methods class.”
- “Realistic examples were provided.”
- “Inconsistencies existed in the manuscript. For example....”
- “On the charts, use column labels.”
- “More examples for young children were needed, in lieu of examples for upper elementary grades.”
- “The author/s were unclear about the age represented.”
- “The topic was very relevant and timely.”
- “This was one of the best manuscripts read and exemplifies current understanding of research, theory, best practices, and action research.”
- “Very nicely organized and logical.”

## **How Many Manuscripts Will I Need to Review?**

Each reviewer is expected to review a minimum of two manuscripts per year during their two year commitment. However, if you have expertise in a select specialization or area and if few others share your expertise, you may be asked to review more manuscripts than anticipated. Should this occur and you feel overwhelmed or unable to add more reviews to your “plate,” please notify the editor immediately. Likewise, if many other reviewers share your expertise or knowledge of a particular field, you may be asked to review fewer manuscripts. If you feel abandoned as a reviewer, contact the editor and inquire as to why you might not be receiving manuscripts to review.

Each review is expected to be completed within 30 days. Life happens, however; and when it does and you are unable to meet the 30 day turnaround, please contact the editor.

## What Kind of Reviewer Will You Be?

Many types of reviewers exist, and each displays different characteristics. Some of these are shared below and adapted from Bedley (2009):

- **Picky Patty**—She catches every minute detail, everywhere. This includes issues with commas vs semi-colons, misuse of pronouns, spacing, indentations, etc. (While misaligning the pronouns with nouns is a concern, not every error found in the document is necessarily to be commented on. A general statement about common errors needs to be written, perhaps with one or two examples from the manuscript.) Picky Patty is more concerned about picking out each and every error and the content of the manuscript is lost.
- **Social Sammy**—He is serving as a reviewer to fill his resume. He is unconcerned about the seriousness of his role as a reviewer, will do the minimum, and accept every manuscript as publishable that comes his way. His comments are very broad and general, if he writes comments at all.
- **Defensive Dave**—Dave became a reviewer specifically so he could thwart other authors' work because his submission was rejected. He also looks for his own work to be cited and, if not, automatically rejects any and all manuscripts.
- **Mean Maggie**—She is callous and spiteful in her remarks. She is insensitive to what and how she writes her comments, whether or not the author/s see them. Maggie is unable to couch her remarks in a considerate or subtle manner, always using the negative rather than the positive.
- **Procrastinator Paul**—He needs constant reminders, as he never submits his reviews in a timely fashion. He is always late and misses deadlines.
- **Regular Rachel**—She provides a fair assessment of the manuscript, noting strengths, areas to expand, and useful constructive criticism for consideration.
- **Pilfer Phyllis**—She likes to read manuscripts so that she can use ideas for her own scholarship.
- **Publishing Phil**—He is too busy to take time to review manuscripts. He likes to skim them for interest. He is a combination of Pilfer Phyllis and Social Sammy!

## Time and Effort

### Time—Stepping into Others' Shoes!

Time is a precious commodity that often is overlooked. We forget that time is needed to develop a manuscript until author/s feel that the work is worthy of peer-review. Many reviewers continue to publish on their own. Yet, as reviewers, we often forget how much time is invested into a piece—especially as we read someone else's work. As experienced writers, we become more selective and pronounced in our own work. Many of us become our own worst critic which impacts more time to produce a well-thought out and suitable manuscript. Perhaps too are the author/s of the work we review. As reviewers, we need to remember to be sensitive to the writer/s also, as they invested time into their work, regardless of what we think of the manuscript, as reviewers.

Equally, exceptional reviewers will spend time reading and re-reading the submitted manuscript to assess it fairly, appropriately, and adequately; reading and re-reading their own feedback to ensure clarity and explicitness for both the journal editor and the author/s. This, too, is time consuming; yet, the professional service and commitment we undertake as journal reviewers is very needed, worthwhile, and professionally rewarding.

### Effort

To construct a well-built manuscript consumes much effort. One must have tenacity, dedication, and the belief that one has a contribution to make to the field. Likewise, reviewers must possess the same skill set. Serving as a reviewer for a journal is not easy, especially when one rejects a manuscript. However, the effort put forth results in a professional journal that is sought after, has increased readership, and is valuable to its members.

## Final Thoughts

Becoming a SECA reviewer is professionally rewarding. A reviewer makes critical decisions about the kinds of articles the members read. By becoming a reviewer you maintain your own currency in the field. By becoming a reviewer, you improve your own writing skills and aid others in improving their own skills as well.

To conclude, comedian Steve Martin (n.d.) summed it best when he commented:

“I don't think anyone is ever writing so that you can throw it away. You're always writing it to be something. Later, you decide whether it'll ever see the light of day. But at the moment of its writing, it's always meant to be something. So, to me, there's no practicing; there's only editing and publishing or not publishing.”



## Appendix A: Sample Email

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Attached to this email you will find a new manuscript to review for publication in SECA's journal, *Dimensions of Early Childhood*. I've also attached a review form. Please make note the following:

- 1) The due date for the review is \_\_\_\_\_.
  
- 2) We're asking that you submit your review electronically, if at all possible. You can do this either by typing directly on the attachment, saving it, and emailing it back to me as an attachment, or you can type up your comments in a new Word document. If you choose the latter option, please be sure to indicate your recommendation for publication with your comments.
  
- 3) Your expertise will help us disseminate significant information to the field of early childhood education. We value your comments and therefore I want to remind you that your job as reviewer is to focus on the content of the manuscript. You do not have to edit the manuscript, you can make reference to the need to check grammar and style.

Please let me know if you have any questions. **Also, please reply to this email by \_\_\_\_\_ so I can confirm that you received it.** We sincerely appreciate your thoughtful comments!

Thank you,

Maurena Farr  
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**To return your review by e-mail to SECA:**

Maurena Farr: [editor@southernearlychildhood.org](mailto:editor@southernearlychildhood.org)

If you write on the manuscript, please return it by surface mail to:

Editor, SECA, 1123 S. University Ave, Ste. 255, Little Rock, AR 72204.

## Appendix B: Review Form

### SECA Dimensions Manuscript Review

This form is used by trained reviewers to assess manuscripts submitted for potential publication in *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, a peer-reviewed professional journal published by the Southern Early Childhood Association. The attached manuscript has been submitted for publication consideration. Please comment on the quality of this manuscript with regard to these primary considerations, make any pertinent comments, and indicate your recommendation for publication.

The due date for the review of this manuscript is \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Manuscript \_\_\_\_\_

#### Content

Please comment on the currency and relevancy of the manuscript.

Please comment on the suitability for the SECA audience.

Please comment on the originality, interesting and new ideas, and realistic/authentic examples.

Please comment on the current understandings of research, theory, and best practices which advances knowledge in the field.

Please comment on whether the manuscript meets the SECA guidelines for publication, including the most recent APA formatting.

---

#### Manuscript Style

Please comment on the clarity, conciseness, and logical organization of the manuscript.

Please comment on whether or not the main point(s) are well developed throughout the manuscript.

---

#### Comments to the Author/s

Please add additional comments to the author/s, as appropriate.

---

#### Publication Recommendation

Select your professional recommendation regarding the publication of the manuscript:

- Accept for publication
- Revise and resubmit (Provide explicit feedback to the editor and author/s)
- Reject (Provide explicit feedback to the editor and author/s)

---

#### Reviewer

Please type in your name and date of the review. Submit your review of this manuscript below.

- I have read the *Manual for Reviewing Manuscripts*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## References and Resources

The following are resources that may help in your work as a reviewer. Some of these resources have been referenced elsewhere in this manual.

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