



Tips for writing

OPINION COLUMNS & TRANSITIONING FROM REPORTER TO COLUMNIST

Daysi Calavia-Robertson,
The Star-Ledger and NJ.com columnist
an NJ Advance Media/Advance Local publication

WHAT IS FIRST-PERSON OR OPINION WRITING?

- Expresses thoughts, viewpoints, opinions or feelings on a specific topic
- Provides reasons, facts and resources to support a viewpoint or opinion
- Is subjective -- not objective (perspectives, values, lived experience, and of course opinions, are all fair game!)
- Helps readers/followers reach a deeper meaning & understanding
- Includes reviews, editorials, op-eds, columns and essays
- Is Journalism! And abides by the same standards of accuracy, fairness and independence as other stories found in print & online news & media outlets

11 TIPS FOR WRITING OPINION

Source: NPR's Eric Deggans via The Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida

01

Opinion writing is journalism.

Reviews, op-eds, and columns are journalism. They have the same standards of accuracy, fairness, and independence as other stories.

02

Think in stories.

Journalists are storytellers. When writing Opinion, present pieces as stories: arguments or assertions blended w/a narrative that has a beginning, middle and end.

03

What's the "news hook?"

If you're writing opinion for a news platform, your piece should be rooted in the news of the day or news events affecting your audience.

04

Honesty matters.

Opinion writing is weakened when the argument made isn't honest. Don't distort the opinions of those with opposing views or leave out inconvenient facts, admit errors & correct them.

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05

State your core thesis early

Your reader should quickly understand the focus of your piece. Don't wait till deep in your story to let them know what point you're trying to make. (There's creative reasons to break the rules, ofc.)

06

Find the purpose of your work

Ask yourself: Why am I writing this? Knowing your purpose is highly important. In bad Opinion pieces, the writer doesn't nail the purpose.

07

Find the theme of your work

A theme is a recurring idea; a motif that sets the tone for your entire work -- it's the thread through which you'll draw along your ideas. Theme answers the q, "Why should I read this?"

08

Provide context

Work must be placed in the proper context. In an op-ed, it means telling readers why they should care that engineers admitted levees in LA failed because they built them badly. Context answers the q, "Why should I care?"



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09

The devil's in the details

Details make your story come alive for readers and deliver tidbits of info they may really care about, especially in art or music reviews. The more generalized the subject, the more important a few telling details can be.

10

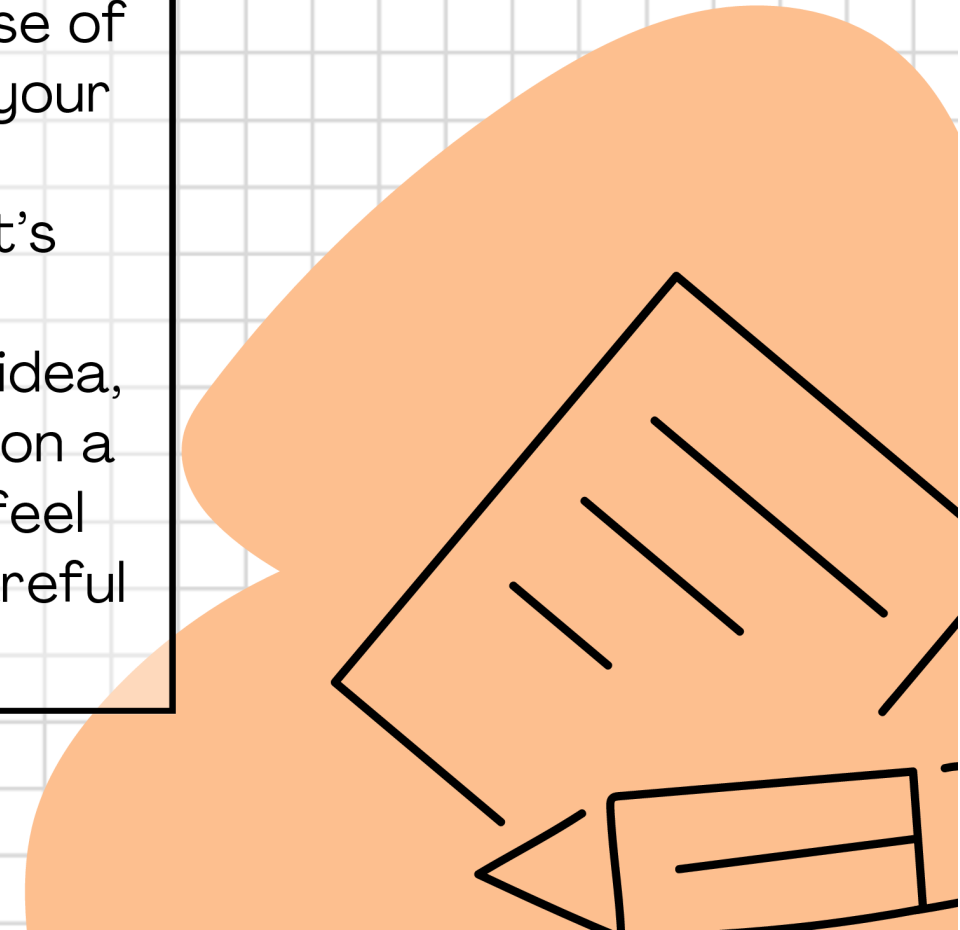
Watch your language

Language matters and word choice is important because it can provide nuance. Learn words often used on your beat and be mindful of cliches.

11

Return to your point at the end

It can create a sense of closure to restate your core thesis at the conclusion. Often, it's best to find a new nuance in the core idea, to give the conclusion a twist. But this can feel repetitive, so be careful w/this technique.



IMPORTANT QUALITIES OF OPINION WRITING. IT'S ...

THOUGHT PROVOKING

Opinion pieces provide relevant and factual information. But also provide analysis and interpretations readers may be blind to. Strong Opinion pieces lead readers to question or even alter their thinking.

ADDS CONTEXT

Opinion pieces add essential context to newsworthy, societal issues. W/out context, such as the history that led to an event, comparison to similar events, the connections between the ppl or orgs. in a story, understanding our world can become more difficult.

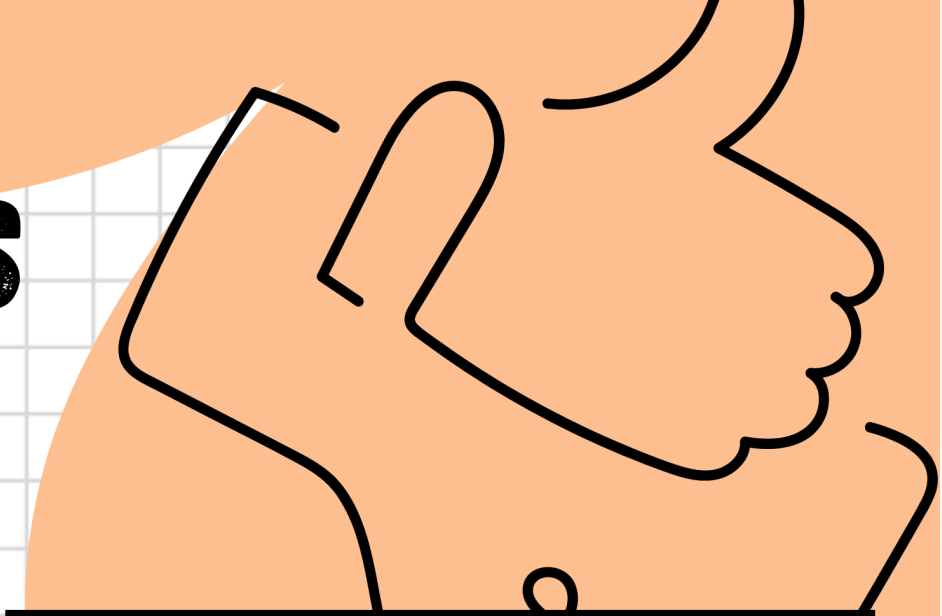
SPARKS DIALOGUE & CHANGE

Opinion journalism is powerful! It sparks dialogue and drives change. Just think of "The Federalist Papers" which were first pubbed in the 1700s. And led to the ratification of our Constitution. The writers of these Opinion essays, were crucial in helping Americans form their own thoughts on the centralization of govt.

RECAP AND FINAL ADVICE

- Opinion writing is important journalism
- Your voice and personal perspective are powerful
- Don't be afraid to be yourself in your writing
- Be factual, be specific and be fair
- Focus on the first grafs & write tight
- Read, read, read and ...
- Write, write and write some more!

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Opinion

An unexpected slice of Peru is hidden here in N.J. and you've got to visit | Calavia-Robertson

Updated Oct 16, 2023; Posted Oct 14, 2023



Deputy Mayor Maria del Pilar Rivas, right, and NJ.com columnist Daysi Calavia-Robertson, chat with Jorge De La Cruz, owner of Tana's Food Market in Paterson on Wednesday, October 11, 2023. De La Cruz shared his insights on Peru Square's history as a cultural hub for residents of the South American country.

Daysi Calavia-Robertson | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

Opinion

I used to judge 'yo no sabo' kids but what happens if my own kids don't speak Spanish? | Calavia-Robertson

Updated Oct 06, 2023; Posted Oct 06, 2023



Every weekday for 30 minutes, I sit with my kids Ford David, 7, and Carolina Rubí, 6, at the dining table to work on Spanish lessons on Duolingo Kids, a language-learning app for children. For me, speaking Spanish is a way to feel closer to my Latino culture and community that I'd love to pass down to my kids.

Opinion

Why is it always the mother's fault? Let's stop judging Dulce Alavez's mom in this heartbreaking missing child case. | Calavia-Robertson

Updated Sep 19, 2022; Posted Sep 16, 2022

Daysi Calavia-Robertson | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com



Noema Alavez Perez welcomes me into her home with a soft smile and a tired "hola." Standing at the door of the humble duplex

Opinion

Ser madres significa que todo es siempre nuestra culpa. Paren de juzgar a la mamá de Dulce Alavez. | Calavia-Robertson

Updated Sep 20, 2022; Posted Sep 20, 2022

Daysi Calavia-Robertson | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com



This column was previously published in English. Find [that version here](#).

Noema Alavez Pérez me recibe en su casa con una sonrisa tierna y un "hola"

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Opinion

I used to judge ‘yo no sabo’ kids but what happens if my own kids don’t speak Spanish? | Calavia-Robertson

Updated Oct 06, 2023; Posted Oct 06, 2023



Every weekday for 30 minutes, I sit with my kids Ford David, 7, and Carolina Rubí, 6, at the dining table to work on Spanish lessons on Duolingo Kids, a language-learning app for children. For me, speaking Spanish is a way to feel closer to my Latino culture and community that I'd love to pass down to my kids.

Daysi Calavia-Robertson | NJ Advance Media

I grew up believing you couldn't be a Latino — not a “real” one, anyway — without speaking Spanish. It's what as a child I was told again and again by my immigrant parents. It's what I must've heard *más de mil veces*, more than a thousand times, from my own mother's lips, every time I begrudgingly sat down at the dining table to complete the afternoon Spanish lesson she had prepared for me.

¿Una hija mía que no hable español? No, she made it clear she wouldn't be like those other Latinos who didn't teach their kids Spanish. The possibility that I may one day not know how to roll my R's — or even worse, become what's now known as a “yo no sabo” kid — seemed ridiculous to her. That'd be a big embarrassment, and not just for her, but for our entire family. Remember, she'd say proudly, “¡Somos Latinos!” — “We are Latinos!”

But in my home now, it often feels as though I'm the only one who is. My husband is a handsome gringo who speaks Spanish only “*un poquito*” and our two kids, who are both in elementary school, still reply mostly in English when I speak to them in Spanish. When I excitedly said “We are Latinos!” my son looked at me puzzled and asked what that meant. My heart sank.

What will being Latino, or even half-Latino, mean for him and my daughter years from now? No sé. The truth is I really don't know. But I can't deny the weight of the responsibility I feel to teach them about our roots and our culture — and yes, our language, too — is heavy. On some days, it's crushing. And I feel so defeated and alone.

Still, Mark Hugo López, director of race and ethnicity research at Pew Research Center, says I'm not. Many, he told me, feel the same way. Latino parents, he says, want their children to speak Spanish, with 85% of Latinos — foreign and U.S.-born — speaking to their kids in Spanish and encouraging them to do so.

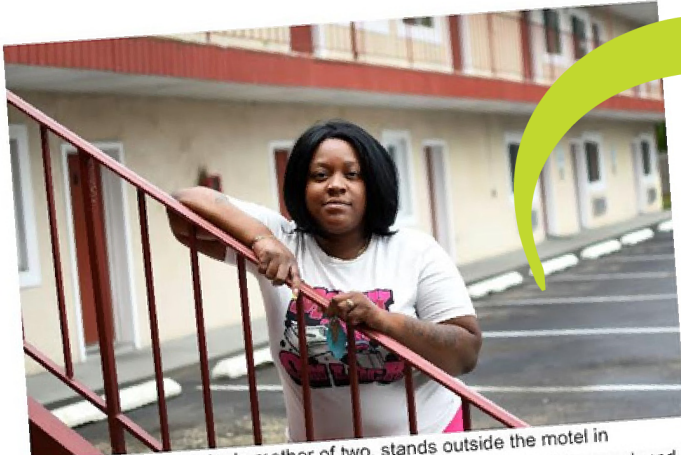
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What is impact? It's how this column led to this one.

OPINION

Single mom can only afford to live in a motel. Now, new rule is forcing her out. | Calavia-Robertson

Updated: Jul. 09, 2023, 11:14 p.m. | Published: Jul. 07, 2023, 9:00 a.m.



Jasmin Morrison, a single mother of two, stands outside the motel in Absecon where she and her young children live. Jasmin's family was placed there through an Ocean County temporary housing program but will soon have to move. "There's a new ordinance in Absecon that limits hotel stays to 28 days," she said.



By [Daisy Calavia-Robertson](#) | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com
Jasmin Morrison is dreading the idea of having to move again. But soon, the former Seaside Heights resident will have no choice: A new

OPINION

6K desperate people applied for 12 affordable N.J. homes. How one single mom got lucky. | Calavia-Robertson

Published: Sep. 15, 2023, 7:30 a.m.



Jasmin Morrison sits with her children Zach, 2, and JT, 4, inside their new home in Mays Landing on Monday, September 11, 2023. Morrison and her children were living in a motel in Absecon and secured the home with help from Glen McDonald, the director of an Ocean County-based nonprofit affordable housing developer.



By [Daisy Calavia-Robertson](#) | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com
An unexpected knock on the door of the cramped Absecon motel room, where she and her two young children were living, changed everything for Jasmin Morrison. On the other

By [Daisy Calavia-Robertson](#) | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com

An unexpected knock on the door of the cramped Absecon motel room, where she and her two young children were living, changed everything for Jasmin Morrison. On the other side of the door: Glen McDonald, the director of nonprofit [Homes for All](#), an Ocean County-based affordable housing developer.

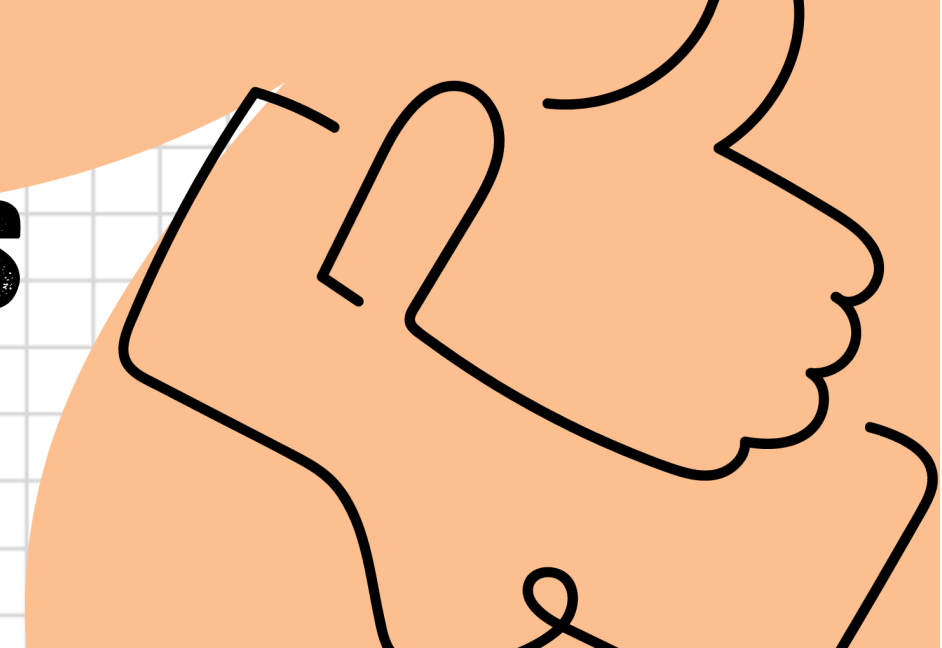
It was mid-July and the town had recently passed an ordinance limiting hotel and motel stays to 28 days to prevent them from becoming permanent housing. The 36-year-old single mother was beside herself, dreading the possibility that she and her two sons — one is four and the other two — would soon get kicked out. "We could end up living in my car," she told me worriedly. "We have nowhere else to go."

As a mother to two young children myself, my heart ached for her. And I told her so. What neither of us knew then, however, was how many other people in New Jersey would also feel deeply moved by her situation. She and nine other tenants had been displaced to temporary housing when the rundown Seaside Heights apartment building where they lived was suddenly sold. Months later, Jasmin and her kids were "still bouncing around," from motel to motel and town to town, living in constant fear of being displaced again.

After [my column sharing Jasmin's story](#), I received many emails from readers who expressed their concern for her, listing off housing resources and asking if there was a Gofundme or some other way they could contribute money to help her.

Glen took it a step further. He showed up at her door, handed her some cash and vowed to help her find a "safe, stable and permanent" home. He told her his group, which was founded in 1986 and receives funding through federal, state and county agencies, is dedicated to helping area residents in need of affordable housing.

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My Jerusalem leather bag symbolizes that illusive peace | Shamsi-Basha

Updated: Oct. 12, 2023, 12:26 p.m. | Published: Oct. 12, 2023, 12:05 p.m.



SUBSCRIBER

Where are you world? The people of my Syria are crying out | Shamsi-Basha

Updated: Oct. 09, 2023, 7:13 a.m. | Published: Sep. 25, 2023, 12:51 p.m.



In this photo released by Suwayda24, people stage a protest as they wave the Druze flags in the southern city of Sweida, Syria, Friday, Sept. 15, 2023. The protests in the Druze-majority city have been ongoing for more than three weeks, initially driven by surging inflation and the war-torn country's spiraling economy but later widening to calls for the fall of the Assad government. (Suwayda24 via AP) AP

SUBSCRIBER

Springsteen fans' humanity brought me to tears at my 1st Bruce show | Opinion

Updated: Sep. 01, 2023, 9:29 a.m. | Published: Sep. 01, 2023, 7:00 a.m.



New Jersey might be the home of Bruce, but it's now my home as well. Ken Hendrzak



1,509 shares

SUBSCRIBER

I just tried scrapple for the 1st time. Here's my honest review.

Updated: May. 31, 2023, 7:01 p.m. | Published: Apr. 04, 2023, 12:00 p.m.



I gathered every bit of courage possible to sample scrapple, alongside New Jersey's food aficionado Pete Genovese. Karim Shamsi-Basha

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My Jerusalem leather bag symbolizes that illusive peace | Shamsi-Basha

Updated: Oct. 12, 2023, 12:26 p.m. | Published: Oct. 12, 2023, 12:05 p.m.



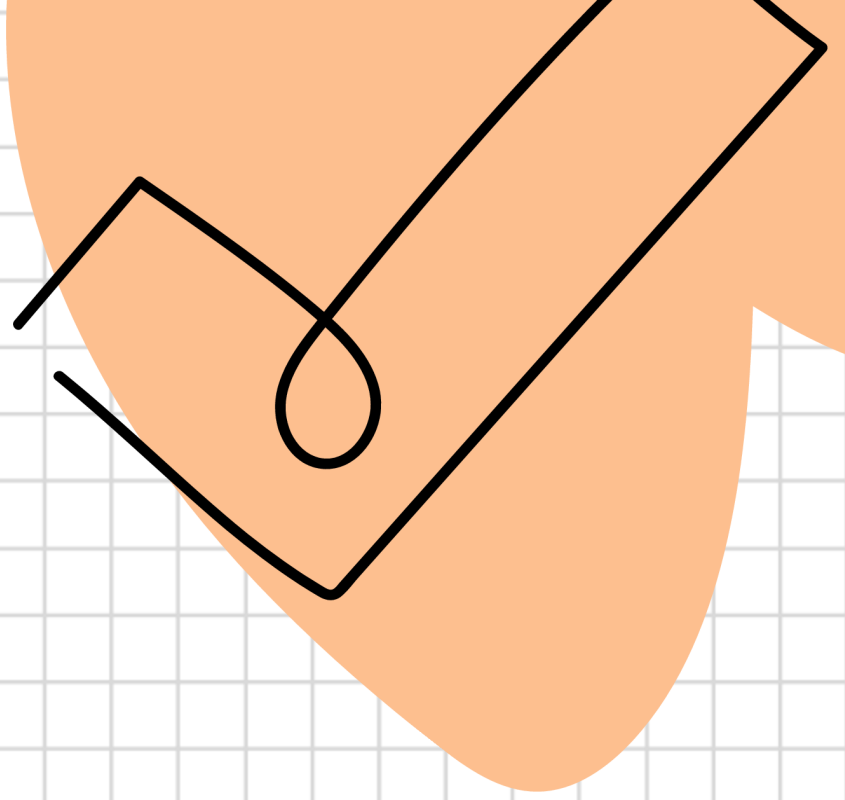

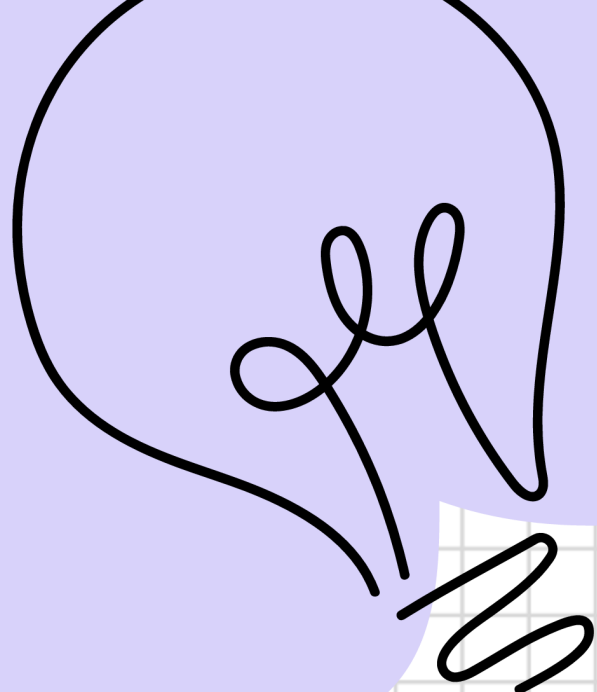
Today, I sit in the peaceful comfort of my Cranford home, sipping a cup of coffee and watching the sunrise. Then, I get in my car and head to the coffee shop to write. On the way, I listen to NPR and another death toll from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

My leather bag is next to me on the passenger seat.

A different perspective

Growing up in Damascus, Syria, I watched the century-old issue through an Arabic prism: Israel is the aggressor. Israel is the criminal. Israel kills our people. I witnessed what the West never sees: The bloody results of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

After the 1973 war, when Israel took the Golan Heights from Syria, most conversations centered around that crime. I was 8 years old, mostly concerned with how much candy I could consume in a day, playing soccer with my friends on our street in the Abu Rommana neighborhood, and not doing my homework.



Have Q's about first-person writing or
Opinion journalism? That's great! Pls, feel free to

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