

REFLECTIVE WRITING LANGUAGE GUIDE

Why write reflectively?

- to show what and how you have learnt
- to show what you have done or experienced
- to show how this learning and experience relates to the theories, concepts, and models you are studying

How is reflective writing different to an academic essay?

Traditional Academic Essay

- Theory
- Third person
- Past tense
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal Language

Reflective Essay- Academic

- Theory and personal experience
- First person and third person
- Tense: past, present, and future
- A thesis (line of argument) and a well organised structure
- Formal language

Can I use I?

I, ME, MY, MINE,
WE, US, OUR



Use **first person** when you are reflecting or describing your experience.

- *I used active listening well in the beginning of the counselling session; however, I listened less effectively in the second part.*
- For example *I* typified the role of middle child...
- *I* intend to improve my knowledge of

THEY, HE, SHE, IT



Use **third person** when reporting what other people said or did or summarising theory.

- *The client seemed to feel at ease during the session and she showed signs of...*
- *Smith (2017) defines empathy as... He explains that empathy helps to build the relationship with the client.*
- *Participants responded well to the treatment and said that they felt more positive afterwards.*

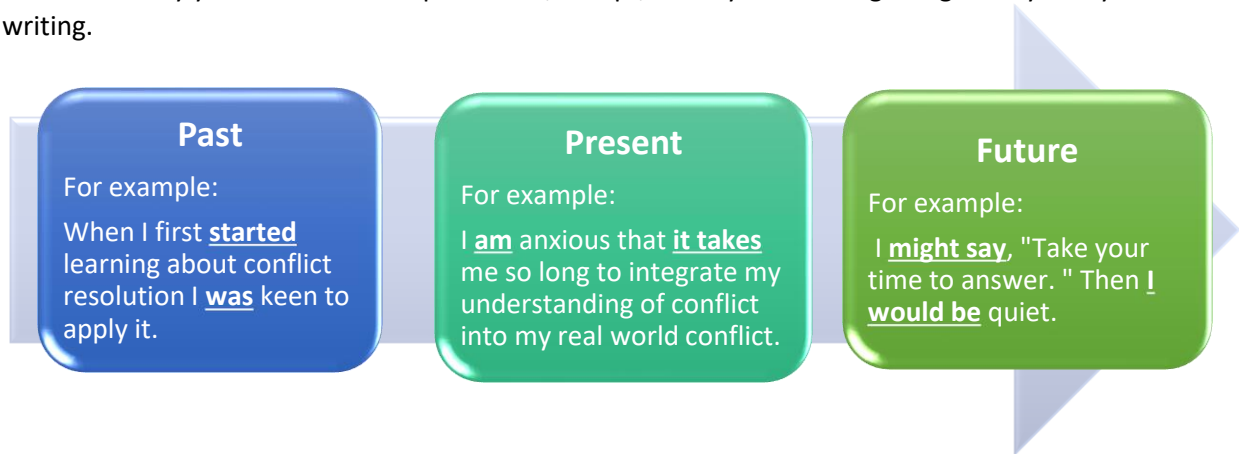
How do I write about the past and present?

When writing about your own experiences, you write in the past tense.

*During this time, I **observed** and **analysed** the client's behaviour and reactions.*

*For example as a child I **thought** and **felt** that I should be seen and not heard.*

You can write in the future tense when discussing what you would do differently next time. In an academic essay you would write in past tense, except, when you are integrating theory into your writing.



How do I write about theory?

We use the present tense (now) to talk about theory. For example Smith **argues/states/believes**.

*Rogers' theory (1959) **is** based on concepts of self, creativity and trust.*

*Corey (2005) **states** A key principle of cognitive behavioural theory **is to** change "faulty assumptions and beliefs" (p. 304)*

How do I reference theory and reflection?

Incorrect	Correct
The client moved into the acceptance stage (Axelrod, 2016). Axelrod did not comment on the client.	Axelrod (2016) states the acceptance stage of the grief cycle is typified by...
Reframing the situation might have helped my client (Boyes, 2013). Boyes did not comment on the client.	Boyes (2013) suggests that reframing situations may be helpful.
In my childhood I had unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al.,2012) Boden did not observe your childhood	An example of a faulty assumption or belief is maladaptive thinking resulting in unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al., 2012).

What does formal writing/academic style mean?

Even though you are expressing your own experiences, you must convey this information in an academic style. Try to avoid emotive or subjective terms: for example,

The client seemed so worried when she began discussing her heart-wrenching story.

The client was visibly distressed when she began discussing her situation.

The client was very unhappy at the start of the session.

The client was visibly distressed.

The teacher said that the class were really naughty.

The teacher reported that the students did not behave well in the class.

I remember feeling really worried when I started telling them stuff about what I did in the past.

I remember feeling very apprehensive when I began to disclose personal information about my past.

The supervisor said that the clothes I was wearing weren't a very good choice.

The supervisor said that my clothing choice was inappropriate.

I didn't know what to do.

I did not know how to handle the situation.

How can I structure my paragraphs?

Topic sentence: Introduce the main theory, skill or idea from the literature. This is also the main topic of your paragraph.

Explanation: You may need to give further explanation about this theory, skill or idea.

Evidence/example: Provide an example. This could be an example from your practice or experiences, depending on your assignment topic.

Linking sentence: Conclude the paragraph by summarizing the main idea and linking it to the main idea of the next paragraph.

Note: You may need more than one sentence for some of these parts. Also remember one main idea per paragraph.

Sample paragraph 1-Counselling/Social Work

Topic sentence: Alfred Adler's (2005) theory of the family constellation explains that humans are a part of larger systems including the family, the community and all of humanity.

Explanation: Adler's (2005) theory explains that the birth order, or position in the family constellation affect a person's lifestyle, but only through one's own interpretation of their birth position. Leman (2009) argues that the middle child may be characterized by feeling neglected within the family, being an excellent negotiator and very diplomatic.

Evidence/example: As the second born of three girls, I typified the role of middle child. Growing up, I felt neglected and was often overshadowed by my older sister's achievements. I developed negotiation skills by trying to keep both of my sisters happy.

Linking sentence: These characteristics have affected my relationships within the family and more widely.

Sample paragraph 2-Counselling

Starts with a topic sentence using present tense to talk about theory

Past tense used for past experience

A key principle of cognitive behavioural theory is to change "faulty assumptions and beliefs" (Corey, 2005, p. 304). An example of a faulty assumption or belief is maladaptive thinking resulting in unhelpful behaviours (Boden et al., 2012). **For example**, as a **child I thought and felt that I** should be seen and not heard. This led to a lifetime of being shy and anxious around people. **Consequently**, **I avoided parties and social functions**. **Therefore**, **my thinking** could be seen as maladaptive. As an **adult I want to be a** better role model to my children. **I realise I have been developing** social anxiety and cognitive based therapy may be worthwhile for me in order to change. **For example** Boyes (2013) suggests that reframing situations may be helpful, **and** this is what **I would like to** learn to do.

Vocabulary for making suggestions

This example shows how the theory relates to life experience

This could be a link to the next paragraph.

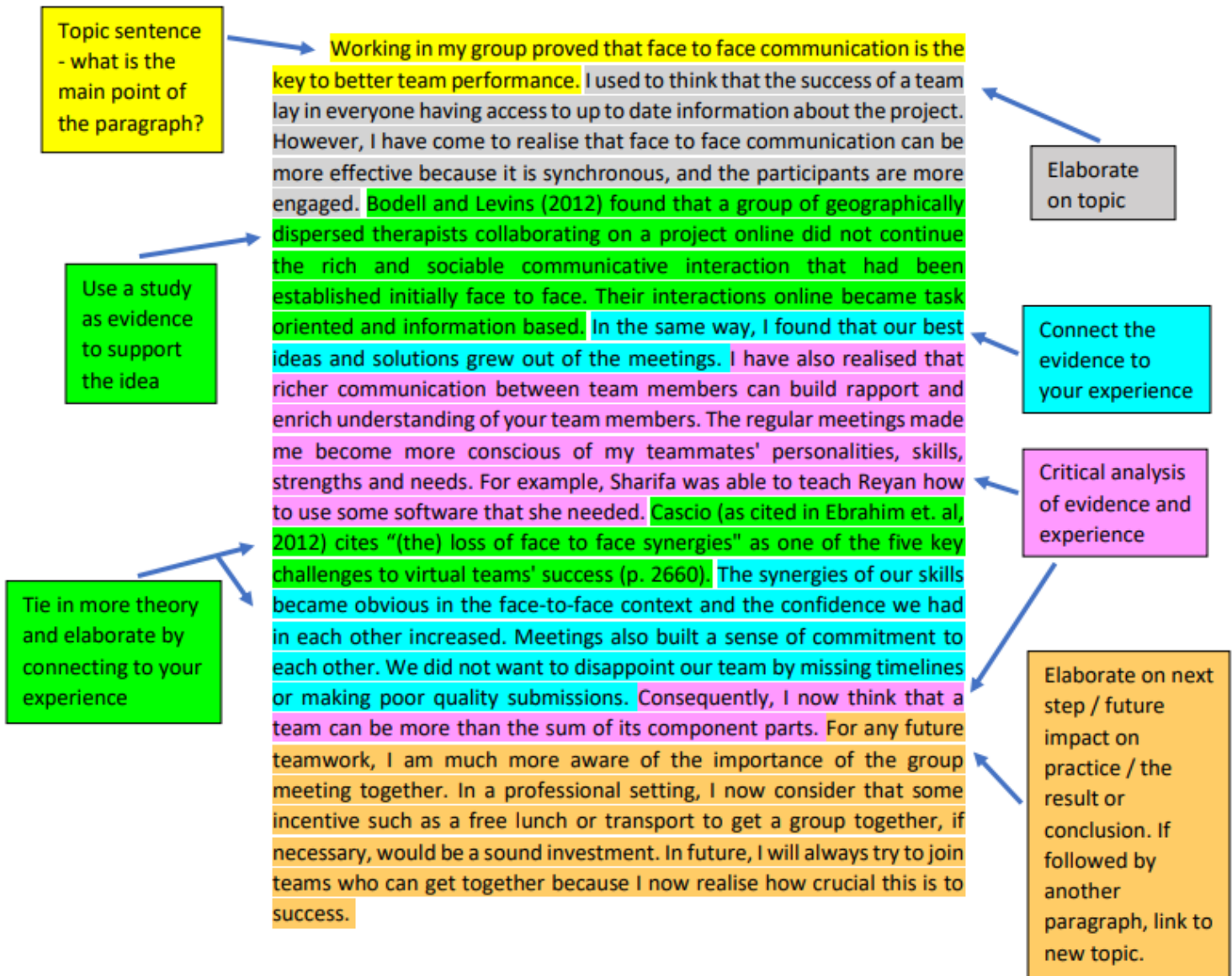
Note:

Theory: Doesn't use I and is written in third person using present tense.

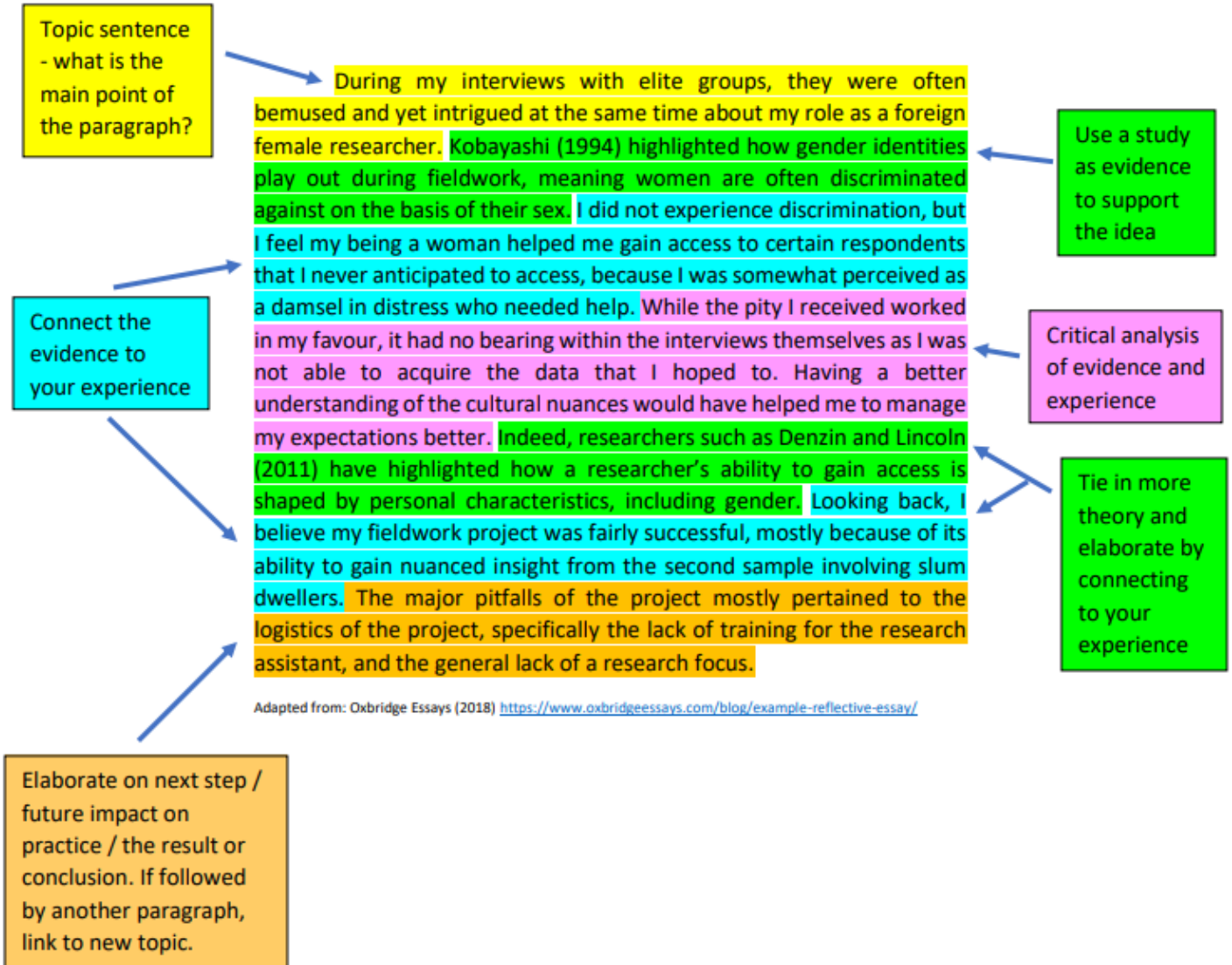
Reflection: uses I and tense varies depending on sentence.

Linking words

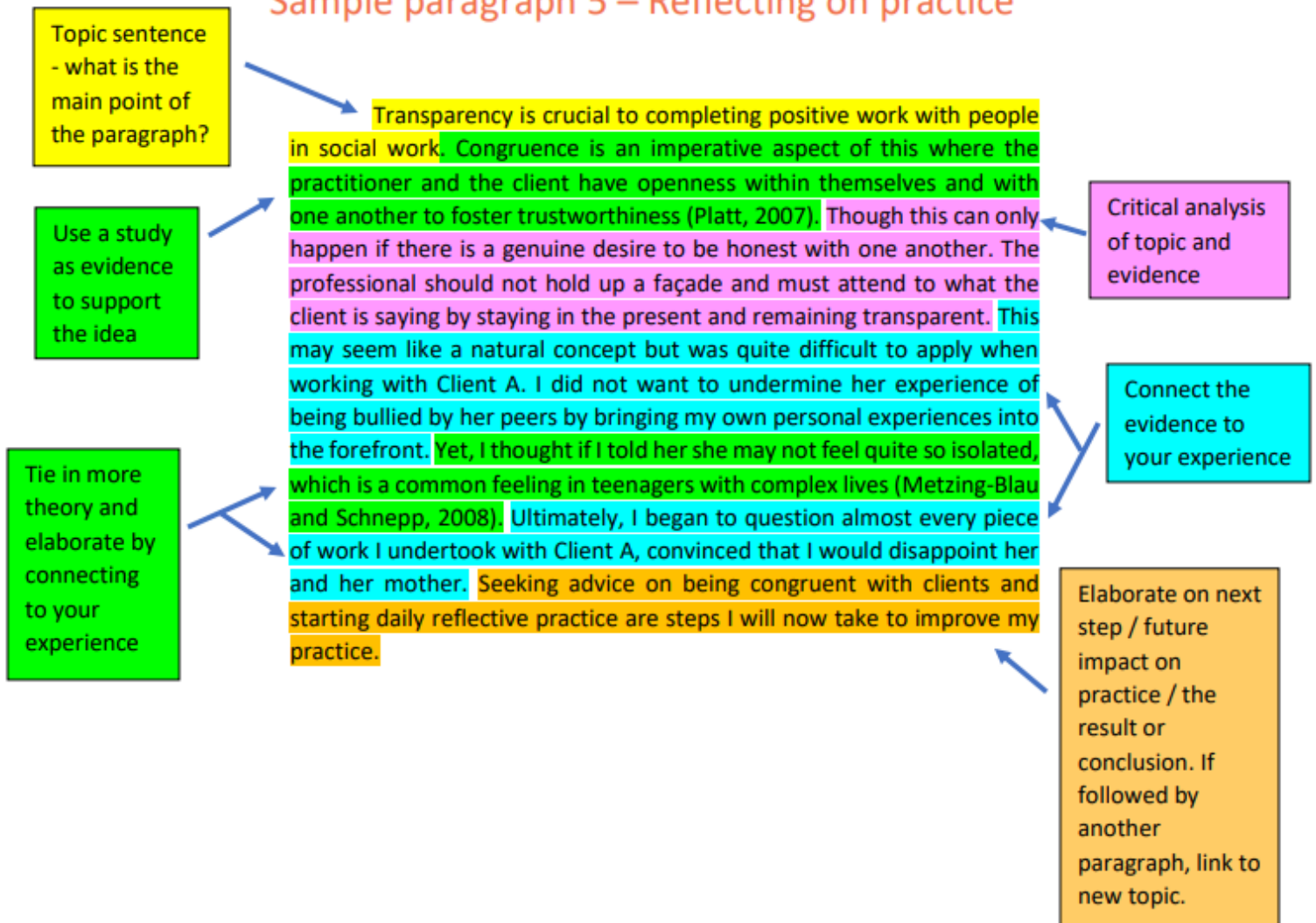
Sample paragraph 3 – Reflecting on group work



Sample paragraph 4 – Reflecting on research



Sample paragraph 5 – Reflecting on practice



What are some vocabulary and sentence structures I can use?

For me, the [most]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> important meaningful significant relevant useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> aspect(s) idea(s) experience(s) issue(s) element 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> was (were)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Previously, At first, In the past, 	I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> thought (did not think) felt (did not feel) noticed (did not notice) questioned (did not question) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> happened when... resulted from... arose from...
This	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> might be is perhaps could be is probably 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> because of... due to... explained by... related to... 	
Having	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> analysed... applied... noticed... felt... discovered... observed... reflected... discussed... experienced... learned... read... 	I now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> feel... know... question... understand... realise... think... wonder...
I now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> realise... think... understand... 		
As a result I have	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> developed adapted changed learned realised improved 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> my skills in... my understanding of... my knowledge of... my ability to... 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This knowledge This understanding This skill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is could be will be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> essential important useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to me in the workplace because... to me as a practitioner [because...]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As a next step Next 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I will now need to... I aim to... I want to... I need to... 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> develop... learn... improve... adapt... change

Have I remembered everything?

Technique	Completed Y/N
The paper is written into clear and concise paragraphs with 1 topic per paragraph.	
The paper uses first (for reflection and my experiences) and third person (for theory) throughout	
The paper support points with relevant theory drawn from coursework	
Good quality resources and research throughout the paper are used throughout.	
APA 7 th referencing style, both in-text and in the reference list, are used correctly throughout	
Formal academic language is consistently used	
The writer has answered the assessment task accurately	
The paper is easy to read and has a logical flow	
The writer has used critical reflection in their paper	
The writer has checked the spelling and grammar accurately	

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