

# ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF QUILLBOT-MEDIATED INSTRUCTION IN ENHANCING EFL STUDENTS' PARAPHRASING SKILLS

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## ABSTRACT

Paraphrasing skills have reportedly been challenging for EFL learners due to limited linguistic exposure, which hinders their language development and academic growth. This challenge necessitates effective learning strategies, such as artificial intelligence (AI)-mediated tools, which have the potential to improve writing skills. Therefore, QuillBot, an online paraphrasing tool, was experimented with in this study to investigate its effect on developing students' paraphrasing skills at university. The quasi-experimental method research design was followed to achieve the study objectives. Thirty students enrolled in Technical Writing were recruited. A test and a semi-structured interview were employed for data collection. The QuillBot-mediated instructional program highly benefited students' paraphrasing skills in Technical Writing. Also, students were satisfied with using QuillBot as it helped them improve vocabulary, sentence structure, the substitution of grammar units, and comprehensibility. In addition, the EFL students perceived QuillBot as user-friendly, simplified, and adaptable. The current findings contribute to the role of AI tools like QuillBot in improving students' paraphrasing skills; therefore, teachers should incorporate AI tools in teaching writing.

**Keywords:** *QuillBot, University Students, Paraphrasing Skills, EFL Writing.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners due to their limited linguistic exposure. This challenge impedes their overall language development by making it difficult for them to paraphrase a text. Furthermore, their inability to write effectively is impacted by their poor paraphrasing skills. The study assesses the potential of Quillbot as an intervention tool to address the language competency gap and improve EFL students' paraphrasing proficiency. EFL students usually do not feel motivated to write, especially in academic writing subjects [1] [2] [3]. It becomes even more challenging when combined with creative techniques like editing, summarizing, and paraphrasing, as they require a more in-depth

understanding of the target language. To address this challenge, a variety of cutting-edge instructional methods are used, such as incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) mediated apps: Prepotseo, Paraphrasing-Tool, and Quillbot. Quillbot is a paraphrasing tool that employs cutting-edge artificial intelligence to paraphrase any text. Zou and Thomas [4] state that paraphrasing is a very important skill that EFL students need to develop. Na and Nhat Chi Mai [3] state that to acquire this talent, one needs to have a firm grasp of both the fundamentals of English writing as well as how a paragraph or essay should be structured. The ability to relate the concepts properly and logically in sentences, paragraphs, and essays makes paraphrasing a crucial talent for academic writing. Moreover, the tech-based tools that let users change the words in

a piece of writing without changing the original meaning are known as paraphrase tools. Fitria [1] broadens this concept by adding that the goal of paraphrasing tools is to substitute specific words, phrases, sentences, and even entire paragraphs with different versions of the content without changing the overall meaning of the text. Additionally, the use of this skill makes EFL students stay away from plagiarism [1] [5]. According to [1], EFL students are required to use a variety of techniques when paraphrasing, such as synonyms, rearranging the words in a sentence, reformulating phrases, and switching active to passive sentences and vice versa. Xuyen [2] notes that it is difficult for students to master this skill due to the confined lexical resources and grammatical range and precision. It is also worth noting that students are required to paraphrase different components of writing: active to passive, changing verb to noun, noun to verb, synonyms, word choice, etc. Moreover, they are not motivated for the same. Many of the students do not bring the textbooks to the class. Nevertheless, almost every student had a tab, a smartphone, or a touchpad. As most students prefer to study through tabs, smartphones, and touchpads, researchers have attempted to find a solution to overcome paraphrasing skill difficulties through technological sophistication [6] [7] [1] [8] [9] [10]. Artificial intelligence-based technology is a prominent recent trend in language schools, particularly in writing sessions [7]. One of the most widely used free online paraphrasing tools, Quillbot, uses Artificial Intelligence (AI) to suggest paraphrases. Quillbot's technology uses artificial intelligence to make ideas for paraphrasing, grammar, summarizing, and even plagiarism detection. Many researchers, including [11] [12] [13] [14] [15] affirm that Quillbot can help students by preventing plagiarism, paraphrasing, and auto-correcting writing. There is a plethora of studies investigating how online paraphrasing tools assist in EFL writing. However, little is known about the use of Quillbot in improving the paraphrasing skills of EFL learners at PY Najran University. This study is significant since it contributes to improving the paraphrasing skills of EFL students, which are considered one of the most difficult areas due to the complexity of its nature as it deals with multiple topics related to language, such as grammar, syntax, mechanics of writing, etc. It is also assumed that the use of Quillbot will be satisfactory for teachers as it, during the instructional sessions, helped them deal with the issues of cutting-edge technologies in the

classroom. Students are expected to be exposed to a variety of structures and vocabulary using Quillbot to assist them in learning to experiment with different aspects of paraphrasing skills. Hence, this study investigated how Quillbot helped EFL students develop paraphrasing skills.

1. To investigate the impact of using Quillbot in developing students' EFL paraphrasing skills

2. To explore students' experiences learning paraphrasing using Quillbot.

3. To discover the challenges of using Quillbot in learning paraphrasing skills and possible solutions.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous researchers have looked into the usage of Quillbot in academic writing. For example, Fitria [12] analyzed a study to evaluate the Quillbot as an Artificial Intelligence (AI) tool system for students' paraphrasing and rewriting of English writing employing descriptive qualitative methods. The findings demonstrated that Quillbot's text-paraphrasing capabilities employ a variety of techniques, such as employing synonyms, modifying word forms, using active or passive sentences, and changing the order of words in sentences are all examples of paraphrasing. In addition, Fitria [1] used observation as the primary data collection tool in a descriptive qualitative study to evaluate the employment of Quillbot to paraphrase students' scientific writing to minimize plagiarism. According to the findings, students can utilize Quillbot to rewrite any text or as an alternative tool when they are unable to paraphrase manually. Similarly, Rakhmanina and Serasi [5] investigated a study to examine the influence of Quillbot utilizing observation as the primary data collection method. The findings highlight several beneficial aspects of Quillbot, such as how it automatically substitutes alternative terminology and rewrites sentences. It also provides other paraphrasing alternatives that are not automatically but manually included. The best feature of this tool is that it paraphrases both sentences and words. Avoiding plagiarism is a benefit of paraphrasing in written work. Likewise, Sulistyaningrum [6], through a quantitative study, explored the problems of mechanical engineering vocational education students in paraphrasing in academic writing courses as well as the usage of online paraphrasing tools to overcome those obstacles. According to the study, numerous online paraphrase tools such as paraphrasing-

tool.com, quillbot.com, prepotseo.com, and spinbot.com assisted students in changing synonyms, structures, vocabulary, parts of speech, etc. Also, Kurniati and Fithriani [13] investigated Quillbot as a digital tool for English academic writing in a qualitative study with 20 post-graduate students specializing in English teaching. A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to collect data to investigate the participants' viewpoints. According to the findings, the post-graduate students in this study responded favorably to utilizing Quillbot to help them improve the quality of their writing. Besides, Khabib [16] investigated AI-based digital writing assistants to help teachers write scientific articles using a sequential explanatory mixed methods study. The instrument used a survey. The results suggest that AI-based digital writing assistants may be able to provide an alternative method for teachers to compose their scientific articles. This tool could help to reduce errors and enable more efficient writing with greater accuracy. Additionally, the feedback suggests that AI-based tools could aid in improving students' engagement and interest in writing.

Through the review of previous studies, it is evident that EFL learners lack writing skills due to their limited linguistic exposure which hinders their paraphrasing skills, including communicating ideas, posing challenges for academic endeavors. The available literature affirms that Quillbot is of great use in helping EFL students overcome paraphrasing challenges. Although there have been several studies dealing with different aspects of Quillbot as an online paraphrasing tool, there has hardly been any experimental research that assessed the use of Quillbot in developing EFL students' paraphrasing skills, especially in Arabic-speaking countries. Therefore, this study's problem was formulated in the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of using Quillbot on developing students' EFL paraphrasing skills?
2. What are students' experiences learning to paraphrase using Quillbot?
3. What are the challenges students face while using Quillbot in learning paraphrasing skills and their possible solutions?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Research Design

The study employed the quasi-experimental method research design with one treatment group.

The data was collected through a test and a semi-structured interview.

#### 3.2 Population and Sample of the Study

The study population included students of the Technical Writing course at PY in the third semester of the academic year 2023. The study sample included one group of 30 students. They were chosen by the purposive sampling method to achieve the study objectives. The students, all Saudi nationals are aspirants in medical, engineering, and computer science and require a PY certificate. Their age group ranges from 16 to 22 years. They join PY After graduating from higher secondary schools and meeting the requirements for admission to Najran University. The study exclusively included the male section as the population of the study. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the university and the reference number assigned is 011078-024177-DS. Students were explained the whole process of the research before obtaining their consent. They were asked to voluntarily participate in the research study. Even if they agreed to participate, they could withdraw or refuse to answer any question at any time. In addition, they had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. It was also explained to them they would not benefit directly and/or indirectly from participating in the research. They were assured that all information provided for the study would remain highly confidential and would not be used other than the research purposes. They were also told to contact any of the researcher(s) involved in the study to seek further clarification and information.

#### 3.3 Tools of the Study

The researchers used a test and a semi-structured interview to collect the data to answer the research questions. The test and interview were self-developed items based on the researchers' teaching experience and in reference to the literature review. The test was divided into five major themes: active to passive, passive to active, synonyms, sentence structure, word choice, changing nouns to verbs, and changing verbs to nouns. The test was developed by the researchers based on their teaching experience and the literature review [17] [18] [19] [20]. The average time to complete the test was approximately 45 minutes. In addition, the semi-structured interview, in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, the substitution of units of grammar,

substitution of units of comprehensibility, its user-friendliness, simplification, and adaptability, was conducted to report on students' experiences using Quillbot to enhance EFL students' paraphrasing skills. The interview questions/contents were prepared based on the researchers' teaching experience and consultation with previous studies [21] [1] [12] [6]. A teacher who volunteered to conduct the semi-structured interview right after the post-test interviewed the participants. The interview duration was approximately 5-10 minutes. The semi-structured interview questions are as follows:

1. What are your experiences of using QuillBot in terms of vocabulary?
2. What are your experiences of using QuillBot in terms of sentence structure?
3. What are your experiences of using QuillBot in terms of substitution units of grammar?
4. What are your experiences of using QuillBot in terms of the substitution units of comprehensibility?
5. What are your overall experiences of QuillBot's user-friendliness, simplification, and adaptability?

### 3.4 Validity

The study tools (test and interview) were validated by a jury of experts (no 7) who specialize in technology-assisted language learning and teaching and have a very long teaching experience. The jury checked whether the tools could collect data to answer the research questions and thus achieve the study objectives. In addition, the jury maintained issues of language and wordiness. After assessing the tools, the jury confirmed that the tools could answer the research questions and presented some changes related to language wordiness as follows:

1. It was suggested passive to active should also be included in addition to active to passive.
2. It was suggested changing verbs to nouns should also be included in addition to changing nouns to verbs.

In addition, the test's internal consistency was checked by applying it to an exploratory sample (no. 20) from outside the main study sample. Then, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated between the questions and the total score. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Between Items With The Total Score

No.	Question	Correlation coefficient	Sig.
1	active passive	.601**	.005
2	passive active	.637**	.003
3	synonyms	.654**	.002
4	sentence structure	.503*	.024
5	Word choice	.771**	.000
6	Changing nouns to verbs	.535*	.015
7	Changing verbs to nouns	.706**	.000

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows that Pearson's correlation coefficients between the items with the total score were statistically significant at the significance levels of (0.01) and (0.05). The correlation coefficients between the items with the total score of the scale ranged between (0.503 \* - 0.771 \*\*). These values indicate the test's validity to achieve the study objectives.

### 3.4 Reliability

The reliability coefficients were calculated on the total score of the test through Cronbach's alpha equation and test-retest methods on a survey sample consisting of (20) students. Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients.

Table 2: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient And Test-Retest Coefficient On The Total Score Of The Tool

No.	Domain	Test-retest	Cronbach's alpha
	Total	0.85	0.80

Table 2 shows that the reliability coefficient by the test-retest methods was (0.85), and the reliability coefficient by Cronbach's alpha was (0.80). These values indicate that the study tool is reliable.

### 3.5 Instructional Program

QuillBot, an online paraphrasing tool, was used by teachers teaching technical writing for more than (4) years. It was employed in the third semester starting from Feb 2023 and ending in May 2023. A pre-test was conducted before the program. As the performance of students was not good in the pretest, the researcher developed an instructional program that followed the following steps:

1. The researchers first provided a training workshop to students and teachers. They were explained the advantages of using the QuillBot and how it could be operated.
2. They were explained which modes they could use free of cost. They could use

- only standard and fluency modes, as the rest of the modes were the paid ones.
- Students and teachers were provided with ten sentences that focused on changing from active to passive, passive to active, synonyms, sentence structure, word choice, nouns to verbs, and verbs to nouns.
  - Students and teachers were asked to type each sentence and then press the 'paraphrase' button, which automatically paraphrase the sentences. Students and teachers were enthusiastic about using QuillBot as it saved time for both of them.
  - Teachers were asked to devote 20 minutes at the end of each class. During this time, teachers taught the unit dealing with active to passive, passive to active, synonyms, sentence structure, word choice, nouns to verbs, and verbs to nouns through the QuillBot.
  - Students were pleased to devote the last 20 minutes to using online paraphrasing tools.
  - Teachers were asked to continue the same practice for three months.
  - After three months of classes through QuillBot, a post-test was also conducted to measure the program effect.
  - It was observed that students dramatically improved their performance in paraphrasing skills.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

The researchers used SPSS version 23 to analyze the data. Pearson's correlation coefficients were extracted to check validity, and Cronbach's alpha was used to check reliability. Also, the t-test for paired samples was used to show the significance of the differences between the mean scores of the experimental group members on the pre-and post-test. In addition, the effect size of the statistically significant differences was extracted (effect size equation =  $t / \text{square root of the sample size}$ ). Finally, the data from the interview was content-analyzed following [22]'s model for analyzing qualitative data. The following steps were followed in analyzing qualitative data:

- The data collected was read carefully,
- themes were generated from the collected data,
- themes were reviewed to ensure they reflect their experiences with the paraphrasing online AI tool,
- themes were defined and named, and
- their exemplars were located.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Results of the Research Question 1: What is the Impact of Using QuillBot on Developing EFL Students' Paraphrasing Skills?

Table 3 depicts the t-test results for paired samples to show the students' performance before and after the instructional program.

Table 3: Paired Samples Statistics T-Test For The Significance Of Differences Between The Mean Scores Of The Experimental Group On The Pre-And Post-Test

Question	Test	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Effect size	Level
Active passive	Pre	1.60	1.163	-2.361	29	.025	0.43	small
	Post	2.22	1.023					
Passive active	Pre	.68	.815	-4.979	29	.000	0.91	Large
	Post	1.72	.868					
Synonyms	Pre	.95	.813	-10.995	29	.000	1.84	Large
	Post	2.53	.754					
Sentence structure	Pre	.15	.511	16.745	29	.000	3.05	Large
	Post	2.70	.726					
Word choice	Pre	.05	.201	-8.536	29	.000	1.56	Large
	Post	2.10	1.335					
Changing nouns to verbs	Pre	.60	.712	-5.105	29	.000	0.93	Large
	Post	1.78	1.096					
Changing verbs to nouns	Pre	.50	.670	-4.977	29	.000	0.91	Large
	Post	1.75	1.081					
Total	Pre	4.13	2.323	10.601	29	.000	1.93	Large
	Post	14.87	5.257					

According to Table 3, there were statistically significant differences at the significance level of (0.05) between the mean scores of the experimental group members on the pre-and post-test. The results came in favor of the post-test. The effect sizes of the test questions and total scores were high, except for the first question, which was small. This result means that the instructional program using QuillBot highly benefited students' paraphrasing skills in Technical Writing.

### 4.2 Results of the Research Question 2: What Are Students' Experiences Learning Paraphrasing Using Quillbot?

The study's objective was to directly interview students to record students' first-hand experiences regarding the use of QuillBot to develop paraphrasing skills. The data collected was divided into five main categories students' experiences regarding the use of QuillBot in terms of vocabulary, sentence structure, substitution units of grammar, substitution units of

comprehensibility, and their overall experiences with QuillBot, such as its user-friendliness, simplification, and adaptability. The contents were carefully examined and classified into distinct themes. The major themes were then identified by highlighting the major topics. Students responded positively as QuillBot improved their vocabulary, sentence structure, the substitution of units of grammar, substitution units of comprehensibility, and their overall experiences with QuillBot, such as its user-friendliness, simplification, and adaptability. The following excerpts show the participants' views:

(S1) *"it improved vocab. Vocabulary is important in paraphrasing. QuillBot help me improve my words."*

(S3) *"I learnt words and phrases from QuillBot, and it helped me increase words."*

(S5) *"I learnt new expressions which will help me improve my English skills particularly writing."*

(S6) *"It guided me how to write a sentence."*

(S8) *"It teach me to use verb correctly and use correct grammar."*

(S7) *"it assisted how to express yourself in the form of written communication."*

(S9) *"It help me understand the unit of grammar and change them from noun to verb, verb to noun, active and passive and passive to active"*

(S10) *"how to write words, phrases, clauses, etc."*

(S12) *"It helped my comprehension."*

(S13) *"QuillBot guided write comprehension different sentences, words, and paragraphs."*

(S15) *"It is user friendly and very simple."*

(S17) *"Did not face much problem in practicing with QuillBot"*

(S19) *"easy to use"*

(S22) *" learn how verb change in passive."*

(S24) *" learn how change is in active."*

(S23) *" taught many nouns".*

(S27) *" help in pronoun".*

(S30) *" learn adjectives".*

4.3. Results of the Research Question 3: What challenges do students face while using QuillBot in learning paraphrasing skills and their possible solutions?

The analysis's findings showed that students faced some challenges too while using AI-based paraphrasing tools. It was not something students were used to. For most of them, it was a novice experience. Many students never used smartphones or tabs to search for something in English. They usually used their mother tongue while searching. A shift from L2 to L1 was not easy for many students. Some of them were bored because they could use only limited modes as other ones were paid ones. Therefore, it did not

provide them with complete exposure to the tool. Some students had internet issues. It was difficult for some students to digest so much information. Three versions of the same sentences were confusing for some of the students. The following excerpts show the challenges students faced:

(S2) *"internet not good. Coming and going. Loss of connection."*

(S4) *"not interesting in English, better use Arabic. English understand difficult. "*

(S6) *"not understand grammar. Word not seen. So many sentence."*

(S9) *"not use all QuillBot option. Wanna use more. Not free all."*

(S12) *"so many word. Different. Difficult"*

(S16) *" mobile hanged. Not sav my file".*

(S20) *" tiring".*

(S23) *" boring".*

(S27) *" not understand everything".*

(S30) *" word confused. Long words. Big sentences".*

## 5. DISCUSSION

The results showed that the instructional program using Quillbot highly benefited students' paraphrasing skills in Technical Writing. The reasons for these findings may be attributed to the fact that QuillBot nowadays is used as part of the integration of IT in educational institutions. Another reason is that almost all the students possess smartphones or tabs that make it convenient for them to use paraphrasing tools. Similar reasons have been presented in research by Sulistyaningrum [6] who asserts that students used various online paraphrasing tools, such as paraphrasing-tool.com, quillbot.com, prepotseo.com, and spinbot.com, indicating that the students were already familiar with this type of tool and could choose one among many that they thought was easier and more convenient to use. In addition, the findings of the study are in line with Fitria [1], who proclaims that Quillbot is a timesaving tool that can assist in improving the text's clarity and finding appropriate synonyms. It makes things easier for students. Also, the findings of this research align with another research by Syahnaz and Fithriani [23], in which students found Quillbot to be highly helpful because of the language it employs to paraphrase their writing, such as transforming active statements to passive ones. The findings also support another study's findings by [24], who states that by utilizing the paraphrasing tool, students can improve their understanding of the context of a text, learn new vocabulary, and

increase the overall quality of their writing. Likewise, the results are consistent with another study by [6], which confirms that online paraphrasing tools assisted students in overcoming challenges with academic writing in terms of content, structure, language use, and paraphrasing technique. They help users modify source text words and parts of speech, and reinforce the use of the appropriate discourse markers, appropriate tenses, and modified words from the original text.

Additionally, the paraphrasing tools assisted in rewriting the source text's sentence structure, changing active sentences into passive ones, and vice versa. The findings correspond to a study by [13] on post-graduate students where they felt that the employment of Quillbot was effective in enhancing their academic writing. It was also observed that students were quite relaxed while using Quillbot. They were not very stressed. It was a new finding during the study. It is in line with [2] and [13] that reveal that Quillbot has positive effects on reducing their anxiety and boosting their confidence in paraphrasing skills. The findings of the study support another study by [1] that proclaims Quillbot is a timesaving tool that can assist in improving the text's clarity and finding appropriate synonyms. Similar findings are reported in a study by [2] asserting that Quillbot paraphraser modifies the original sentence, allowing authors to easily edit and alter the source material. The study's findings are consistent with another study by [25], which claims that many EFL students use the online paraphrase tool (Quillbot) to get around paraphrasing difficulties including coming up with synonyms, combining sentences, and changing sentence structures.

However, the findings of the study contrast with a study by [10] that discovered that both postgraduates and undergraduates failed to write appropriate texts. The reasons for this included not having formally learned online paraphrasing tools and failing to transfer paraphrasing knowledge to writing due to a lack of experience and practice. Another study by [10] does not support the findings of the study as they found that EFL learners struggle to make paraphrases to satisfy their writing expectations, and there has been little study on establishing automatic reference aids to assist learners' paraphrasing skills for better writing quality. The reason for the difference might be owed to the level of learners as the present study focuses on the beginner level.

The results may be different when the AI tool is implemented on advanced learners.

Some students also reported during the semi-structured interview that they faced many problems like internet and connectivity issues. It is to be ascertained that the internet provided by the university works well. However, it happens only sometimes due to technical glitches. It was also a new experience for many of them. Lack of understanding of the English language was also one of the difficulties students faced. They faced difficulties in grammar and spelling as the tool presented many new words and grammatical structures which were unknown to students. The study aligns with another study by [26] conducted on Indonesian EFL university students that reported that students were having difficulty dealing with grammar and spelling errors while paraphrasing. It was difficult for some students to switch from their mother tongue to the target language. This issue will be resolved if students practice the tool regularly. Some brilliant students also felt bored by repeatedly using the same modes. They wanted to experiment with the new modes of the paraphrasing tool which were part of a paid subscription. Moreover, it was also confusing for some students as there was too much information on the AI tool. They could not understand every concept. They were unable to understand long sentences as paraphrased by the Quillbot. The result contradicts another study by [27], which claims that using paraphrase tools makes writing long sentences easier. It reveals that students should be assigned only one task based on a particular theme. Once they understand the concept well, the next topic should be considered.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study aimed to investigate the use of QuillBot in developing students' EFL paraphrasing skills. The findings affirm that QuillBot was quite effective as it helped students improve their command of the language, especially paraphrasing skills. They learned how the difference in verb forms plays a role in forming active to passive and vice versa. Students were also exposed to several different words that made their vocabulary strong, and they could make better word choices. QuillBot helped them learn how a sentence can be differently structured without changing the meaning and helped students acquire a variety of sentence structures

not possible in an offline class. This study recommends that EFL instructors incorporate this tool into their classroom instruction, specifically within the writing classroom. The researchers also suggest that the university should provide free access to QuillBot premium features to the students and teachers. Certain parts of the syllabus should also be designed to support technological integration into the writing classroom. The study is limited to a selected population of PY, Najran University. The results might vary if it is implemented in different contexts and levels. Due to the limited scope of this study, such as context, gender, and other variables, it is suggested that future research focus on other aspects of QuillBot not investigated in the current study, such as summary, essay writing using grammar checker, plagiarism checker, citation generator, translator, etc.

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