

***Creative Writing Workshops - by Marjorie H Morgan
to be used alongside the podcast***

Sessions

Week 1

Introduction to Creative Writing, Writer's Toolbox and character development

Week 2

Flash Fiction and short stories

Week 3

Poetry - written and performance

Week 4

Blogs and journaling

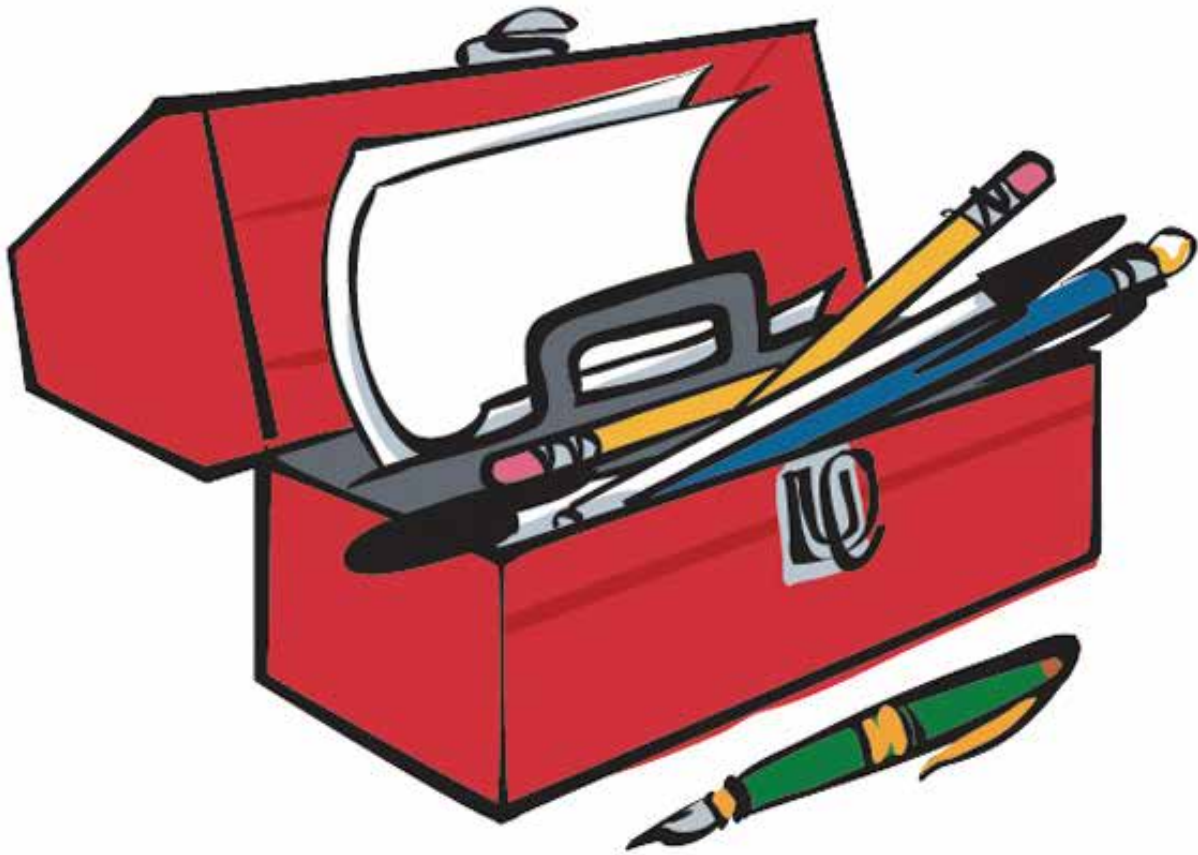
Week 1

Introduction to Creative Writing, Writer's Toolbox and character development

10 Rules of Writing

- 1) ***Read. Read. Read.***
- 2) ***Write.***
 - Write what you know - your POV***
 - Write interests what intrigues you***
 - Write what you don't know***
 - Write - don't be perfect, just write (the way you write)***
- 3) ***Listen.***
 - Listen to your writing***
 - Listen to other people talking***
 - Listen to dialogue***
- 4) ***Have a story.***
 - Protagonist***
 - Antagonist***
 - Build drama - suspense***
 - Show, don't tell***
- 5) ***Edit.***
 - Read you draft ALOUD***
 - Do not be afraid to change what you have written***
- 6) ***Share.***
 - Constructive criticism***
- 7) ***Practice.***
 - Take/make time to write***
 - Make it a regular habit***
- 8) ***Go for a walk.***
 - Inspiration - narrative triggers***
 - Keep human - see people, go places***
 - Make notes - writer's notebook***
- 9) ***Finish what you are writing.***
- 10) ***Be honest. Tell the Truth.***

What's in the Writer's Toolbox?



Toolbox

Vocabulary

Grammar (dialogue)

Words / sentences / paragraphs

Experience

Observation

Plots

Settings

Characterisation - internal/external worlds

Style

In these pandemic times, and beyond, it's useful to remember to use SOAP. This is key for health as well as writing:

- S **Senses:** sight, sound, touch, and taste
- O **Onomatopoeia:** words that sound out loud the same as was they are describing (splash, bang, thud)
- A **Alliteration:** using the same sound to start words that are close together.
- P **Personification:** giving human qualities to something that isn't human (the tree cried in the wind)



Writing exercise:

**Write a short story, play or poem using S.O.A.P -
Write a minimum of 200 words (no maximum) from a particular character's point of view. You create the character and setting using the questions:**

**Who?
What?
When?
Where?
Why?**

If you write a play, produce a 3 minute monologue; if you write a poem, use poetic language.

More for the toolbox ...

Adjectives and adverbs: describing words for nouns and verbs (she runs quickly)

Imagery: creating a word picture using vivid vocabulary (the rapid and stealthy approach of the silent shark)



Similie: saying something is like or as something else - his temper was like a volcano

How do you start? How do you hook the reader?

Set the scene.

Describe using similes and metaphors. ***Show don't tell.***

Focus on:

Time

Place

Topic

Person

Face

Hair

Eyes

Hands and fingers

Body

Personality
Name
Age
Occupation
Passions
History
Likes/Dislikes

Use mysterious details

- a character whose clothes are too big/too small
- a character who never smiles/always grins
- a character who only speaks a few words
- a character who sleeps during the day and comes alive at night

Write your own mysterious character.

Writing exercise:

Object

choose one (or more) of the following objects (narrative triggers) and write a story about a situation, a person, a place



a wallet
a safety pin
a collection of train tickets
a crumpled up receipt
a tangled set of headphones
a champagne cork
a super malt bottle top
an empty tablet strip
a compass
a ribbon
international bank notes
a small brown bottle

Things to remember:

1) **Build the tension**

mood
feelings
connotations
atmosphere

2) **Climax**: dramatic - describe mood and atmosphere: tragic, creepy, cheerful.

3) **Solution or test**: a turning point

4) **End**: cliffhanger more tension or all is well.

5) **Release tension**

When you write ... Interview your character

The writer must give answers that reflect the characters' personality and that are relevant to the plot. Develop a series of questions that require you to draw on the characters' personality and the events in the plot.

Create a character profile

Face, Hair, Eyes, Hands and fingers, body, etc

Physical appearance

A description of a character's physical appearance might include the following vocabulary as in this description of Alvin's grandfather in the story 'Victim' by Adrian Tilley. ***The old man was slumped close to his plate, shovelling the rice in clumsily with his shaking hands. Alvin took in the details he knew so well. The pink shiny head with the greasy strips of hair stuck to it like wisps of string. The thin wrinkled face, the squashed, pitted nose. The eyes glassed over with age, always watering but always watching. Alvin hated the way he was always watching. The slack, distorted mouth, twisted to one side after last year's stroke. The thin arms, bulging veins... he couldn't look at him anymore. He thought he could smell him though - a waft of stale piss.***

'Somebody-Wanted-But-So' (SWBS) is a useful strategy to summarise a story in one sentence using this pattern: *Somebody wanted something, but there was a problem so it must be resolved.*

Writers need to focus on the various elements of the story:

- 1. Somebody - Who is the main character? (Character)*
- 2. Wanted - What does the character want? (Goal/Motivation)*
- 3. But - What stops the character from getting what he/she wants? (Problem/Complication)*
- 4. So - How is the problem resolved? (Resolution)*

*Example: **Somebody Wanted But So** Cinderella (somebody) to go to the ball (wanted) her evil stepmother wouldn't let her go (but) her fairy godmother sent her to the ball where she met the prince (so).*

Week 2

Flash Fiction and Short Stories

What is flash fiction?

Flash fiction is a brief story, with a word count from 5 to around 1,500 words (maximum 2,000). The focus of flash fiction is movement - each word and line must progress the story and reveal more about a character.

Twitter has a daily flash fiction challenge. Search #vss365 for regular writing prompts (vss - very short story); #sixwordstory or #6wordstory; also #100words and #microfiction.

See some examples here: <https://bookriot.com/2018/06/18/flash-fiction-stories/>

See 500 word short story Moleskin at the end of this workbook.

Write a piece of flash fiction using the elements of every story:

Character
Setting
Plot
Conflict
Theme

Plot example:

Consider the following mini-plot:

- 1) Jasmine fell ill.
- 2) She died.
- 3) She had no friends or relatives.
- 4) Only one person came to her funeral.

How would you express them in a piece of flash fiction or a short story? Statements 1,2, & 4 are events. Statement 3 is a stasis statement of description. How can that be expressed in fiction?

Elements of a Short Story

Character

human, animal, or a.n. other being
central to the story and major events

Setting

landscape, scenery, buildings, seasons, weather

Plot

series of events or character actions
beginning, middle, end

Conflict

struggle between two people or things

Theme

central idea

Characters

Get to know your characters

Know them inside out

Know how they want the world to see them **OUTSIDE**

age, gender, job, place they live
hobbies, holidays, musical choices
films, sense of humour
romantic preferences

Know what keeps them awake at night **INSIDE**

what haunts them?
what don't they want to face?
do they bury their fears? how?
do they lie to themselves?
pessimistic or optimistic about the future?
what is their internal vision of themselves?

Situational personality

Prisoner - trapped by life

Pirate - rebellious, troublemaker

Participant - Doer. Striving to reach a goal

Passenger - Swept along by events

Projecting to different people

personality changes dependent on character hierarchy

Reacting to a crisis - the unknown character

who does the character become in a crisis?
what happens if the character is alone?
what happens if the character is with other people?

What is a story?

A sequence of events. A chronicle.

What is a plot?

Story + causation

E.M. Forster's example -

story: The king died and then the queen died.

plot: The king died and then the queen died of grief.

The difference is inferred through ordinary presumptions about the world; these will differ according to each reader's world and experience.

A narrative without a plot is a logical impossibility: **things always change**.

Narratives are like puzzles - they need resolutions, a sense of problem solving.

What is a narrative / narration?

The techniques and devices used 'tell' the story to the reader.

e.g. POV, literal visual perspective, first-person narration (I ...), third-person narration (the narrator remains outside of the action - 'The child was small, even for a small child, and remained close to the ground no matter what music was played. There were no discernible indications of the child's gender. It was small, and seemingly helpless.'

Marjorie H Morgan

Internal vs External

Restricted knowledge vs Unrestricted knowledge

What is the question of your narrative?

What is the response to that question?

What variety of chance events occur to formulate the question or delay the answer?

What will happen? How?

Revelatory plots tend to be strongly character-oriented, concerned with the infinite detailing of existents, as events are reduced to a relatively minor, illustrative role e.g. Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* vs Clarissa Dalloway in *Mrs. Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

Stages of Writing

- 1) **Pre-writing / Planning.** First choose a topic. Then plan and organise what you are going to write.
- 2) **Drafting.** Write a rough draft of your ideas. Do not worry too much about making mistakes. You can correct them later. Just write!
- 3) **Revising.** Get other readers' responses to what you have written. Make revisions based on their comments and your own ideas to improve your draft. Think about what to add, what to cut and what to change.
- 4) **Proofreading / Editing.** Read your revised draft carefully and look for mistakes in grammar, spelling, capitalisation and punctuation. Correct any mistakes that you find. Then get other readers to help you find errors that you have missed.
- 5) **Publishing / Presenting.** Complete your final copy. Share it with others by publishing it or presenting it.

Start: hook the reader. Set the scene.

Describe using similes and metaphors. Show don't tell.

When describing a character's feelings, skilful writers do not just 'tell' the reader how the character feels. They 'show' the reader by using imagery. Imagery is language that paints a vivid picture in the mind of the reader, often by appealing to the five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Look at the following sentences:

Tell:

1. Joey missed his father.
2. Alvin hated his grandfather.
3. Old Mr Chan was hot and tired.

Show:

1. [Joey] hadn't seen his father for a long, long time – not since he was in kindergarten. He couldn't remember his father's face very well. But at night, he could still hear him say, "Good night, Joey. I love you."
2. Alvin hated his grandfather. Alvin hated the way [his grandfather] was always watching. The slack, distorted mouth, twisted to one side after last year's stroke. The thin arms, bulging veins... he couldn't look at him anymore. He thought he could smell him though – a waft of stale piss.
3. Old Mr Chan was hot and tired. [Old Mr Chan] used a tissue to wipe the sweat from his face. He got ready for the slow, steep walk up the stairs. "Every day, it's the same," he thought.

When you read another writer's story/text look for

- 1) **Time**
- 2) **Place**

Text can provide a sense of place in two main ways:

- a) descriptive - the setting
- b) language - the way characters speak; this is because of the connections we make between distinctive properties of voices (accents and dialects) and the places with which they are associated. e.g. RP “A beautiful home” vs “A bootiful gaff”

There is **imagery** in different voices in text.

3) Topic

4) Character

5) Setting - *landscape, scenery, buildings, seasons, weather*

6) Plot - *series of events or character actions: beginning, middle, end*

The events of the story are traditionally said to constitute an array called a ‘plot’.

Aristotle defined plot ‘mythos’ as “the arrangements of incidents”

The events in a story are turned into a plot by its discourse, the modus of presentation.

Events are either actions (acts) or happenings.

Events are changes of state.

An action is a change of state brought about by an agent or one that affects a character.

The order of presentation may not be the same as that of the natural order of the story.

The author arranges the incidents according to what / how / when she wants to highlight.

6) Conflict

struggle between two people or things

7) Theme

central idea

Writing exercise:

Write a short story (more than 2,000 words) using one of the images at the end of the workbook. Select a main character, give them an issue (social / political / personal), and a main emotion or mood (anger, love, fear, excitement)

Week 3

Poetry

Written and Performance

Poetry - should create the unexpected.

Poetry - is with us from the beginning of life e.g. baby's first word play 'ma-ma and 'da-da'.

***'Every man will be a poet if he can.'* H.D. Thoreau**

What is a poem?

I) A piece of writing in which the expression of feelings and ideas is given intensity by particular attention to diction (sometimes involving rhyme), rhythm, and imagery - using metaphors (*commonly used to mean something like speaking of X as though it were Y e.g. a woman is called a rose*).

II) A piece of writing in which the words are arranged in separate lines, often ending in rhyme, and are chosen for their sound and for the images and ideas they suggest, and in which the sounds of the words when read aloud often follow a particular rhythmic pattern

III) Poetry is the regular pattern of alternating long and short syllables.

IV) A **poem** is a piece of writing in which the words are chosen for their beauty and sound and are carefully arranged, often in short lines which rhyme.

V) A composition in verse, usually characterized by concentrated and heightened language in which words are chosen for their sound and suggestive power as well as for their sense, and using such techniques as metre, rhyme, and alliteration.

VI) A literary composition that is not in verse but exhibits the intensity of imagination and language common to it.

VII) Anything resembling a poem in beauty, effect.

VIII) An arrangement of words written or spoken: traditionally a rhythmical composition, sometimes rhymed, expressing experiences, ideas, or emotions in a style more concentrated, imaginative, and powerful than that of ordinary speech or prose: some poems are in metre, some in free verse.

Poem; Popular songs; Hymn

Parts of poetry that have an overall effect:

Phonemic (sound) patterns

Choosing and using words - organisation

Stress, rhythm, and metre

Rhythm

The pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in writing.

Metre consists of two components:

1. *The number of syllables*
2. *A pattern of emphasis on those syllables*

Alliteration

*Alliteration is the **repetition** of the same consonant sounds at the beginning of words that are in close proximity to each other.*

E.g.

- Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
- She sells seashells by the seashore.

Assonance

Same vowel sounds

*e.g. For men so old as we to keep the peace. (**Romeo and Juliet**).*

Consonance

The recurrence of similar-sounding consonants in close proximity, especially in prosody. "the abrupt quality of the sound is echoed in the final 't' consonance of 'discreet' and 'shut'"

E.g. 1. Pitter Patter, Pitter Patter-repetition of the "t," and "r" sounds.

Lines into forms - stanzas

Free verse

The poem on the page

Society, culture and the poet

See:

* Robert Pinsky's - The Sound of Poetry, a brief guide.

* <https://www.poetryinternational.org/pi/poem/22171/auto/0/0/Dorothy-Porter/TROUBLE/en/tile>

* Button Poetry

Writing exercise:

Create a poem / song / verse / lyrics using a newspaper headline from this week.

Week 4

Blogging and Journaling

- **Blogs** - a regularly updated website / page. Style is usually informal or conversational. Like a personal, yet public diary. It can be a series of stream of consciousness entries or a blog dedicated to a passion such as photography or motorcycle maintenance ... anything that you are passionate about.

●

- **Why Blog?**

- Create Something You're Proud Of
- Attract an Audience
- Establish Authority
- Build Rapport and Engagement
- Create Opportunities - a calling card (online CV/ business card)
- Organise Your Thoughts and Learn
- Tell Your Story - you are your own media company
- Stand Out
- Gain Confidence
- Validate Expertise
- Make Money

How to create your own blog

- Choose a theme / topic
Research
Choose a headline to inform and hook the reader
- Use images
Use humour
Edit. Edit. Edit.

Blog examples:

From Blog to Book Salam Pax - ***The Baghdad Blog***

(A web diarist telling the story of the war in Iraq from inside the country, whilst avoiding the censorship of Saddam Hussein in 2002)

Julie Powell - ***Julie & Julia - Mastering the Art of French Cooking (also a film)***

PostSecret - ***Postcard Secrets***

Christian Lander - ***Stuff White People Like***

Fail blog.org - ***Fail Nation: A Visual Romp Through the World of Epic Fails***

The Microblog: Twitter Wit - ***Twitter Wit: Brilliance in 140 Characters or Less***

Reni Eddo-Lodge blog - ***Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race***

Walter Lamond - ***The Advice Blog: 1,001 Rules For My Unborn Son***

- *Various platforms: Blogger, Wordpress, Wix, Tumblr, Squarespace, Joomla, Weebly, Ghost, Instagram*

Journaling

Is it more than a private blog?

Useful for reflection

Establish future plans

Problem solving

Self-dialogue

Catalogues your successes and development

Improves your writing skills

Personal growth

Helps you to navigate your own thoughts, especially through change and/transitions.

Write what you are thinking / feeling.

It helps you to remember. What you remember is valuable to you.

Remember anything, and everything that matters - sounds, smells, pain, laughter, silence.

It's all part of your story.

Your story matters.

Share your truth - even if right now it's just with yourself.

Why journal?

Where? Will you choose paper or electronic journalling?

When? What time of the day? First thing in the morning, last thing at night, between classes, when the children go to bed, after a run?

What? Options as above ... write YOU!

Well known journal / diary writers:

Virginia Woolf, Anne Frank, Nigel Benn MP, George Orwell, Samuel Pepys, Audre Lourde, Malcolm X, Louisa May Alcott, Jimmy Boyle, Richard Burton, Marie Curie, Emilie Davis, Kurt Cobain, Frida Kahlo, Queen Victoria, Alice Dunbar-Nelson

Blog / Journal writing exercise:

Write a journal entry / blog post about words.

Journal entry - in your own voice, without censure. e.g. Write a letter to your younger self.

Blog entry - Words.

Analyse the different manifestation of words as text (***on paper***), speech (***spoken word***) and thoughts (***words inside our heads***). Think about the images (***in our heads***) that thoughts and external words create. Think about the sensations (***feelings in our bodies***) that text, speech and thoughts create.

Additional Writing Exercises:

First line exercise: Select a first line from a previously published work that appeals to you--the sentence can be one that is gripping or one that simply presents opportunity. Begin a short story using this starting point.

Second person exercise: Develop a short story told entirely from the second person point of view. Discuss the advantages, which include producing a sense of immediacy or urgency and intimacy with the reader born of the direct address form.

Do the same exercise using first person and third person point of view.

Six-sentence paragraphs: Write a six-sentence paragraph without repeating any word twice. This includes contractions, such as "do not" and "don't." The paragraphs must make sense and not be a random mixture of ideas. Read your piece aloud.

Craft a story based on a news item: Find a story that interests you from the news, compose a short story that uses the news item you have found as a springboard. You may add or delete from the story as you wish, make a story that is reflective of who you are.

Use another story as a springboard: Think of a story or novel you have read and write your own story using a similar theme or in the same style as the original story e.g. science fiction, horror, romance.

Use a poem as a springboard: Read a poem, e.g. a Shakespeare sonnet or a Benjamin Zephaniah poem, or a piece by Hollie McNish, then compose your own poem in the same style as a response to the original piece.

Reimagine this title into a story: "Things we worried about when I was 10" by David Rabe.

Playwriting: Playwriting is a great way for writers to really play with both language and imagery. Write a play using alliteration, by focusing on a word chosen at random from the dictionary, e.g. crater or by setting it in an unusual place, e.g. recycling centre. Write a 2 - 5 minute play - there are several free to view plays by National Theatre Live on YouTube and television at the moment. Watch them to learn about developing characters. Think about what makes you and people you know unique and assign those characteristics to your characters.

Monologue or letter to a loved one: Write about your feelings to someone you are unable to see. The loved one can be a deceased relative or friend, or someone who moved away and lives in another state or country; all that matters is that the person is special to you as the writer, and that you have something important to say. Write freely, expressing whatever you want to say to that person.

Pet Story: / POV View the world from a different perspective. Write a story about a typical day at home but write what the day looks like through the eyes of your family pet. Include details about how the pet views the family members.

Other examples include POV from a toothbrush, door handle, broken bike, window, key, dressing gown, bra, jock strap, mirror in a house full of people.

Playwriting:

Write a 1 - 3 minute stage play about either a piece you have written already or a clip from a TV show. Describe the scene and focus on the dialogue. Show, don't tell.

Use images as writing prompts:

All images

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Moleskin

“Oh. Hello Klay.”

The surprise hung on each word. They hadn’t seen or heard him enter the room. They looked at each other silently wondering if he had heard anything they didn’t want him to know.

Klayton stood still and watched them. He did not respond to their greetings. His eyes were the only things to move, they rapidly scanned both faces that were now looking intently at him. He read indecision in her and anger in him. Nobody moved for a few minutes. The three of them became like breathing statues.

Ever since they had abruptly moved to this new house, just ten months earlier, he had registered an increase in their tightness: faces, bodies, speech. Everything was closed up. Just like their old house and the memories that they had left there.

He had his own secrets now. Scrawled late at night into his moleskin notebooks. One for each month. They thought he was studying, but he had learnt the craft of deception at his own kitchen table.

The last time they had heard him speak was two months after they set up their version of life in this new home. It was a Wednesday afternoon when he just stopped talking to them. His fears had found some grounding that day. He merely looked at them, and since that day Klayton occasionally communicated with sign language or he wrote a note. Mostly he would text or email them, even when they were sat at the same table. The ‘no technology at the table’ rule had been suspended in the hope that they could still connect.

However, his muteness did not extend further than the two of them. His therapist Nancy reported that she had intricate and lively conversations with him in his weekly sessions. They knew she would stop her feedback to them when he reached his eighteenth birthday.

Like origami the truth of who his parents had been was folded away from him whenever he happened upon them together. The first time it happened was after Masie had gone. There was no explanation, just silence and furtive glances. They had a routine, always the same routine. That was his only certainty in the newly unfamiliar house.

Klayton had finally decided to call the police because he had figured out what was about to happen.

They had a routine, always the same routine.

Twenty minutes after he entered the room, when they were both led away in matching handcuffs, they swivelled their heads in unison as they detected his unfamiliar voice touch their ears. Klayton whispered, “I always knew there was something you were hiding from me. Now they know as well.”

He handed the retrieved notebooks full of evidence to the officer who was standing by his side in the doorway.

From the police car windows his parents could see his lips moving rapidly. The dam had finally been breached.

Looking directly at them Klayton noticed an open emotion as she smiled wryly and he cried.

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