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# Writing Up and Presenting Criminological Research

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## Introduction

The final stage of any criminological research project is writing up and presenting findings. However, writing up, which follows a number of phases through formulation, data collection and analysis, is not just a technical exercise but also a space for the further development of the research. It is the opportunity to bring the distinct elements of the research together, to re-read the notes, literature review and data sets, to further analyse and theorize, and to begin to make a clear and sophisticated argument. Successfully writing up and presenting your research can be a very rewarding experience that brings with it a great feeling of accomplishment. It can also be a demanding, frustrating, nerve-wracking and, at times, tedious task.

Forms of reporting available to social researchers today include conventional and alternative possibilities, all of which involve particular processes requiring careful consideration and planning in terms of structure and style (Thody, 2006). Written and oral presentation remain the most common forms of dissemination in the social sciences, both of which comprise of conventional and unconventional styles. In recent years, however, new methods of dissemination have begun to appear. In criminology, for instance, the recent 'visual turn' has paved the way for an increased use of images in criminological research, with photographs (see Carrabine, 2012), illustrations (e.g. Stephens Griffin, 2015) and documentary film (e.g. Redmon, 2005) growing in popularity.

This chapter focuses on writing up and presenting criminological research. While the primary focus is on writing up, the chapter also explores various other dissemination techniques. The chapter begins with writing up, outlining the traditional method and structure that can be followed by university students writing

up a dissertation/thesis or research report. This is followed by discussions of oral presentations and emerging visual and virtual forms of presentation. It finishes by offering some ‘top tips’ that might be of help during the process.

## Writing Up

This section focuses on the process of writing up criminological research. As Matthews and Ross suggest, ‘[a]ll academic writing starts with the same thing – *planning*’ (2010: 436, original italics). Essentially, the plan should set out the purpose of the piece of academic writing and break it down into manageable sections. One of the first decisions to make before writing up is which particular sequence these sections should follow. Jotting down an initial plan with a list of headings can help with this process. Although a number of sequential formats exist and the chosen format may change during the process, particularly if an alternative presentation style is chosen, laying out a basic structure that orders the sections in a typical sequence can still be worthwhile, especially during the initial planning phases of writing.

### A basic structure

The following is an indicative structure for a university dissertation/thesis or research report with a brief description of what should be included in each section:

1. Title page

This page includes the title of the study alongside the writer’s name and the date. The title should include the most applicable keywords that reflect the main purpose and findings of the research. The writer should choose keywords that can be easily searched for online. Researchers regularly include a subtitle to clarify the basic purpose of the research. It is often a good idea to revise and finalize the title and subtitle at the very end of a research project.

2. Abstract

The abstract follows the title to summarize the overall content of the research and the researcher's basic argument. It should be no more than 250 words in length and include an introduction to the research problem, key findings and conclusion. It is often best to write the abstract at the end of the writing-up process.

### 3. Introduction

The introduction outlines the field of study and the research question to be investigated before summarizing the content and structure of the dissertation and its main arguments. It is also important to include a contents page and a list of tables and figures between the abstract and the introduction. This should be done at the very end and not in the initial planning stages because the order of the contents may change a number of times in the process of writing up.

### 4. Literature review

The literature review provides the context for the dissertation and evidences the researcher's background knowledge of the field. It can comprise of one chapter or a number of chapters. The aim is to review and critically discuss existing work in the field that is relevant to the study. It should also include a discussion of the main theories and concepts that will eventually frame and attempt to explain findings. Depending on the nature of the research, some dissertations also include a separate chapter in which the theoretical framework will be established and explained in detail.

### 5. Methodology

The methodology section includes an account of how the researcher aims to answer the research question/hypothesis. This involves outlining and justifying the appropriateness of the chosen methods of investigation, as well as their limitations. The section should discuss both theoretical and practical methodological issues – from epistemological and ontological considerations to sampling and access. Research ethics are also an essential part of the discussion in this section.

## 6. Findings

This section presents a discussion of the main findings of your research. Findings and the relevant data on which they are based can be presented in various ways that depend on the methodological approach (see discussion below). This section might take up more than one chapter and, depending on the chosen approach and structure, can overlap with the discussion section.

## 7. Discussion

In this section, the researcher weaves together the data and the theory, relating the main findings to the theoretical and/or policy discussion in the literature review. This should include a critical evaluation of the findings and how well they answer the research question. The discussion should answer the following questions:

- Has the research question been adequately answered?
- Have the aims and objectives of the research been fulfilled?
- How has the research filled gaps in the current literature?

## 8. Conclusion

The conclusion is an opportunity for a succinct summary of what the researcher has found, an outline of the main points and arguments and a brief discussion of their implications for the field of study, which might be theoretical, methodological, policy-oriented or some permutation of the three. The section can include specific policy recommendations that are supported by the research findings. The section often finishes with suggestions for further research.

## 9. Appendices

The appendices should include any supplementary material that is important to the research but which was too detailed to include in the main body of the text. This can include raw data, drawings, supplementary

evidence relating to research participants, graphs and maps. Researchers should be sure to signpost and reference appendices correctly in the text.

## 10. Bibliography

The bibliography is a list of all of the sources referred to in all the previous sections. References should be included and correctly matched in the text (in-text citation) and the final bibliography. There are different ways to reference, therefore it is important to use the accepted style. Follow university guidelines and, if necessary, refer to the booklet *Cite Them Right* (Pears and Shields, 2016).

## Guiding principles

Alongside the format, there are a number of crucial factors to consider in the processes of planning and writing up. Some of these may seem obvious but, as Matthews and Ross (2010) point out, they can be easily forgotten. Important questions researchers should ask themselves as they write a research paper or essay include:

- What are the aims of the research and are they clearly outlined in the paper?
- Who will make up the audience?
- Does the paper include an appropriate introduction and conclusion?
- What is the word limit and has an appropriate amount of space been taken up by each section?
- Have relevant and clear signposts been included to break up different sections?
- Is the literature review adequately comprehensive and critical?
- What methods have been adopted and are they clearly outlined in the paper?
- Is the presentation of data appropriate and comprehensible?

- Is the argument reasoned and does it follow a logical sequence?
- Have appropriate links been made between data and theory?
- If images, tables, figures or graphs are presented in the text, are they formatted correctly?
- Have existing standards or guidelines been followed (e.g. university guidelines)?
- Have referenced source materials been cited accurately and consistently throughout, including both in-text citation and the final bibliography/reference list?

Thody (2006) offers a useful framework of principles to guide the selection of writing and presentation styles, which are summarized in the context of criminological research below and explain in more detail some of the crucial factors listed above. She begins by suggesting a dialogue with data that involves careful planning alongside writing from the start of a project. It is worth bearing in mind that, although the most significant chunk of writing comes at the end of the project, the writing process will have commenced during various earlier stages of the research. Writing the proposal – which includes an overview of the methodology – conducting the literature review, and note-taking during data collection and analysis will have involved some aspect of writing up. This leaves the researcher with a number of sources to draw on and incorporate into the final presentation. In other words, the researcher is not starting from scratch and will have been writing up various aspects of the research throughout the process (Chamberlain, 2013). According to Thody (2006), the main principles to consider during the writing and presenting stage include:

*Whether or not to follow precedent.* There are a number of conventional and alternative writing formats available to researchers. However, the choice is usually pre-determined by the type of project on which the researcher is working. For example, undergraduate dissertations and chapters for edited collections usually have a required format, whereas a PhD thesis or research monograph can provide opportunities to break free from convention. It is often worthwhile consulting an experienced colleague, supervisor or book editor before an innovative approach is taken. As a general rule of thumb, it is important to follow the required rules and customs associated with a chosen form and style of written work, whether

conventional or alternative. Consulting existing guidelines is therefore advisable before commencing the final write-up.

*How much of your personality as a writer/presenter to admit.* Reflexivity, autobiography and emotion are seen as increasingly significant in criminological research. The researcher must decide how much of her voice should appear and where those reflections should appear in the presentation and analysis of findings. Too much can seem self-indulgent and lead to the researcher/writer appearing as a dominant voice rather than the researched. However, there are occasions where this is necessary. For instance, Wakeman's (2014) autoethnography of drug use and drug dealing and Owens' (2012) prison survival guide provide examples of criminological researchers directly drawing on their personal histories and biographies as they reflect on crime, deviance and the criminal justice system. Moreover, when adopting an in-depth qualitative approach commonly found in the ethnographic method (see Hall, Chapter 17), the views and actions of the researcher become intertwined with those of the researched in quite complex ways. On these occasions, the researchers' voices and reflections on the process – personal commitments to the research, positionality, epistemological and ontological frameworks – can become indispensable to the text, adding richness and authenticity to its final presentation. Examples of pieces benefiting from an increased appearance of the researcher's voice include Hobbs' (1988) ethnography of criminal entrepreneurship and working-class life in the East End of London; Adler's (1993) six-year exploration of an upper-level drug-dealing community in Southern California; Bourgois' (1995) study of street-level dealing in East Harlem; Winlow's (2001) covert ethnography and discussion of his insider status as a nightclub doorman researching violence and professional crime in north-east England; Fleetwood's (2014) reflections on her time in Ecuadorian prisons interviewing and observing female drug traffickers; Fraser's (2015) experience as a youth worker and researcher over a prolonged period of time examining Glasgow's youth gangs; and Ellis' (2015) in-depth study of male violence in an English town.

*The practicalities including time spent and word limit.* Everyone begins writing up a project with the best intentions, and then things get in the way. Dealing with the practicalities of writing and being realistic about your own strengths and weaknesses can be difficult to manage. Realistically, when considering the



time required for each stage of the writing process, or the word limit, it is worth knowing that more than the initial estimates will usually be required. However, when struggling to manage it is important that researchers try not to panic, because with help and consultation most find they can adapt to any given situation. If writing up is taking much longer to complete because of other work and family commitments, ask for an extension and, if possible, renegotiate a submission date, and make a note to plan work more effectively in the future and try not to take on too much.

*Valuing and assessing readers and audiences.* Alongside the methodological approach, the choice of the style of presentation depends on the target audience. Whether the audience is the examiners reading the dissertation or thesis, practitioners and policy makers reading a report prepared for a governmental agency, the general public reading a newspaper piece or watching a documentary film, or reviewers of the academic journal targeted for publication, considering who the target audience is and how best to present the research to suit their needs is of the utmost importance (Chamberlain, 2013). For some authors, their research aims to reach beyond academic, policymaking and practitioner communities. The methodology and subsequent presentation of research findings can therefore take on different and more accessible forms that are sensitive to the needs of general, non-specialist audiences. For instance, the purposeful use of everyday language in published work can benefit a broader audience outside of academia. However, for students, whose audience is a dissertation/thesis examiner, following university guidelines and academic regulations and complying with the rules of vocabulary, punctuation and grammar are both of the utmost importance (see Thody, 2006: 39).

*Thinking about the overt and covert purposes of the presentation.* If the format has been chosen and the researcher is ready to begin the process of writing up, it is advisable to revisit the data, methodological approach and theoretical framework and clarify the overall purpose of the piece. The researcher might be aiming to test an idea, enhance understanding, share information, gain acceptance, or simply to achieve a good result in an assessment in order to progress to the following year. Depending on the aim, there a number of considerations that are important to think about, which include how to weave together data and theory in the text, and whether the chosen approach better suits analytical prose or narrative text. Different

schools of thought in the social sciences emphasize different aspects of the research and require varying amounts of writing dedicated to the underlying aims of the research and the approach to it. Clare and Hamilton's (2003) collection on writing research offers chapters dedicated to linking data to text from feminist, interpretivist, poststructuralist and positivist-analytic approaches, among others. More recently in criminology, additions to the field include narrative criminology, which, drawing on symbolic interactionism, emphasizes the importance of storytelling to the lives of perpetrators and victims of crime (see Presser and Sandberg, 2015). Another is ultra-realism, which combines advanced ethnographic methods and networked data gathering with new philosophical and psychosocial conceptual frameworks (see Hall and Winlow, 2015). Adopting specific approaches such as these impacts not only on methods and theory, but also on the writing process and final presentation of the research. For example, if following a narrative approach, enough time should be spent introducing the research participants whose stories are being told. From the ultra-realist perspective, for instance, a sufficient amount of time should be spent contextualizing the data and theorization in the broader and deeper political, economic and psychosocial forces, processes and structures that underlie the criminal/harmful phenomena being examined.

*The arts and craft of producing written work.* As Thody points out, 'there's no magic formula and no choices about starting to write' during the final write-up stage (2006: 60). Therefore, the researcher can get started by writing anything. In other words, make a start, no matter how insignificant it may seem. The actual schedule can vary from person to person. Some might benefit from setting daily writing tasks (including word or paragraph limits) or by writing during predetermined times each day. Some find it more productive to write at weekends, in the evenings or during holidays, during the working week, or some combination of the above. The same is true when the researcher reaches the end. At some point, the writing must finish and the researcher must let go of the whole project. This can often be just as hard as beginning the process. It is extremely important to calculate roughly how long it will take to write various sections and stick to your own deadlines, so that the project can be completed to the required standard. As you develop your writing and presenting technique, try to work out and remember what works best for you at each stage of the writing process. Alongside the formula for beginning and finishing a piece of written

work, style and tone are also significant issues. There is no space here to fully explore style and tone – appropriate language, correct tense, choice of voice, and so on – but useful overviews can be found in Thody (2006), Bryman (2012) and Kara (2015). Finally, the process of constantly refining writing to a high standard is important, therefore a sequence of drafts is essential. There is no set number but a polished piece of academic writing will most likely have been drafted at least three or four times. As the work moves through the drafting stages – from first draft through middle draft(s) to final draft – not just the writing but the argument can be developed. Drafting presents an opportunity to review, evaluate and refine the research’s themes and concepts and how they are presented. It is important to establish a flow from paragraph to paragraph using transitional devices, which are summative phrases at the beginning and end of paragraphs that tie together and signpost the overall argument, and clearly introduce theory and data where necessary in order to support interpretations. A final copyedit is also essential, which allows the researcher to check the structure, flow, grammar, spelling, word count and referencing before the final proofread and submission.

It is often only during the final write-up stage that a researcher fully endorses the argument they are trying to make. This follows constant reformulation and refinement throughout the numerous stages of writing and rewriting. Bearing this in mind, Ward makes the important point that the researcher should ‘think about the dissertation process as a series of loops rather than a straight line’ (2014: 157). This allows for additional feedback, reflection, literature and theory to be integrated into each section of the dissertation throughout the process. For example, sections of the research can be revisited and additional literature can be read and concepts integrated into the analysis as the writing up progresses and the argument develops. As Ward adds, this makes room for a ‘series of iterations’: leaving space for editing and moving text, images and figures in the document (2014: 158). This is necessary because, alongside text, written work in criminology often includes the presentation of data in various forms.

## **Data presentation**

Data can be processed and presented in a number of ways in criminology, just as it can in social research more generally. The best way to present data depends on the audience, the methodological approach to the data collection and analysis, and the overall purpose of the research. Whether the approach is qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods, a number of considerations should be taken into account as the data is presented in the text. Tables, graphs, charts and figures are often used to enhance clarity and accessibility. Other techniques include the summarizing of findings and using stories, which can include the use of quotes and observations edited from field notes and transcriptions. Moreover, since the establishment of the visual turn in social science, images and extracts from media sources appear more regularly in criminological research. During the write-up, the researcher should think about where the data can be best placed in the document; for instance, in the main body of the text or an appendix. How best to weave together theory, analysis and data – which is essential if the argument is to make sense to the reader – in the text also requires careful thought and refinement in drafts. Whilst analysing the data and organizing thoughts around it, many choose a thematic approach, which is often also the best way to begin the process of presenting the data in the research. Thorough introductions to data processing and analysis can be found in Matthews and Ross (2010) and Chamberlain (2013).

## **Oral Presentations**

Criminological research often involves oral presentations. These can be extremely daunting experiences. In a similar way to written work, there are a number of useful guiding principles and techniques the researcher can adopt during the process. The essential aspects to focus on as an oral presentation is planned are what the researcher wants to achieve from the presentation and how best to communicate this to the audience. An audience is different to a readership – the former can only hear the talk and read the slides in real time. It is therefore extremely important to be clear and concise in order to communicate the points and the overall argument effectively. Sometimes it is worthwhile handing out the paper the talk is based on. Whilst keeping in mind the overall purpose of the presentation and the audience, *brainstorming* is often a

useful way to approach the topic. This involves randomly noting down the key points the oral presentation covers. This can be followed by a process of *organizing*, where the presentation is drafted as the researcher thinks about structure and what is to be said in each section. This includes the preparation of any visual aids such as PowerPoint slides, handouts etc. *Summarizing* the presentation's key points concisely and clearly in an appropriate way that can be presented or distributed (on a notepad or notecards) is the next stage. Finally, *rehearsing* the presentation is important, if possible in front of an audience, which will give the researcher the opportunity to practise the approach and the timing and receive feedback. Timing is very important: don't try to fit in too much because this will only result in panic and a rushed presentation. On the day of the oral presentation, be sure to check the ICT and any other equipment needed in the allocated room.

## **Visual and Virtual Turns: Contemporary Forms of Presentation in Criminological Research**

Two important trends in criminology in recent years are the so-called visual and virtual turns (see Carrabine, 2012; Yar, 2013). Both visual and virtual methods have been explored in previous chapters. This section briefly discusses these developments in criminology and offers some key examples in the context of writing up and presenting.

As Carrabine (2012) suggests, our mediatized culture is saturated with images of crime; something that calls for the further analytical and presentational use of the image in criminological research. Indeed, media analysis in criminology is not new. Various examples can be found that analyse TV and film (see Campbell, 2016; Linnemann, 2016; Wakeman, 2017 for recent examples). However, criminological researchers now increasingly draw on images that they have both retrieved and produced – distinguished as natural or contrived/elicited data – as part of research projects conducted in various environments. This is evident in the growing use of photographic methods and the presentation of photographic material in

texts. Notable examples from the field include Carrabine's (2014) historical work on criminology and photography, Young's (2016) groundbreaking book on street art and graffiti, Kindynis' (2017) images of recreational trespass and Linnemann's analysis of police trophy shots in the USA (2016).

In many ways, the increasing use of visual methods and forms of presentation in criminology has occurred in conjunction with the advancement and enhanced accessibility of various information and communication technologies, particularly the internet, since the inception of user-generated content and participatory networking online and the widespread use of high-grade cameras and handheld devices. Consequently, there is often a strong relationship between visual and virtual methods. This is clear in the recent work of scholars who have analysed images derived from social media: Hall and Antonopoulos (2015, 2016) on the supply and demand of illicit pharmaceuticals online, Wood (2018) on Facebook fight pages, and Vitis and Gilmour (2017) on the 'dick pic' phenomenon and female resistance to online harassment are just some examples of this new approach.

Taking the production of images in criminology a step further into the domain of the audio-visual is David Redmon, a criminologist and documentary film-maker who has produced films alongside his written work. Redmon's documentary film *Mardi Gras: Made in China* (2005) and his accompanying book *Beads, Bodies, and Trash: Public Sex, Global Labor, and the Disposability of Mardi Gras* (2014) follow the commodity chain of Mardi Gras beads and the different meanings attached to them as they move through space and place, from production in China to consumption in New Orleans. These are exceptional examples of his developing body of work. The production of images in criminology can also be seen in a number of plays commissioned by arts and criminal justice organizations. One example is *Key Change*, an award-winning play commissioned by Open Clasp Theatre Company (2016) and devised with inmates of HMP Low Newton, a women's prison in England. The production aims to use the power of the image to represent prisons and prison life and to give a voice to those who have served prison sentences. Furthermore, illustrative presentations including graphic novels (Morris, 2012) and comics (Stephens Griffin, 2015) can be used as ways of creatively communicating research findings, analysis and theoretical explanations to an audience.

There is no space here to offer a thorough discussion of the processes involved in presenting all the types of research briefly outlined above (see Kara, 2015 for a practical guide). Instead, the purpose has been to draw the reader's attention to different and emerging ways of presenting research in criminology. It is important to point out that if the researcher plans to present visual data, careful consideration of the formatting, quality and placement, as well as copyright issues and ethical issues, are of utmost importance. In terms of copyright and ethics, approval should be sought for the use of images, or alternatively images should be appropriately anonymized, before they are published (see Carrabine, 2015). However, to reiterate an earlier point, when considering an alternative method and form of presentation, seek guidance and approval from supervisors or editors beforehand.

## **Top Tips**

Researchers can encounter many obstacles during the presentation phase. For many, no matter how experienced and confident they might be, writing up includes the experience of writers' block, a common condition that can rear its ugly head at any moment during the process. Oral presentations can also be nerve-racking. In consideration of this, the following section outlines tips and techniques that can help during the process of preparing research for presentation.

*Spark your interest.* One of the most important tips for a criminological researcher – something some have learned the hard way – is to research and write about subjects that genuinely capture your interest. Choosing a topic of interest is not always possible from the outset. However, it is usually possible to adopt an approach that is interesting and at least of some value to future work. For example, a researcher might be writing up the final essay for an undergraduate module, having struggled to engage with the material, or starting out on a funded PhD initially written by the supervisors with their own research interests in mind. Although at first these tasks might seem uninteresting or difficult, adopting a carefully considered methodological approach and theoretical framework that spark your interest not only makes the task more interesting but also gives value to the development of your future research and writing.

*Manage your time.* The process of writing involves a number of stages that each require sufficient time to be set aside for. Recognizing how much time you need and giving yourself enough time to complete the writing up to the best of your ability will, more often than not, facilitate a less stressful experience and produce a better end product. As this chapter has shown, planning, drafting and copyediting are fundamental stages of the writing process and they require sufficient time as you approach a deadline. You should also bear in mind the time it will take to complete the abstract, referencing, tables and figures and any other additions to the piece beyond the substantive text.

*Make a start and save everything.* Once a project starts, write from the very beginning. Create a file and begin to write down anything you can and save everything that you write. It could be brief notes about ideas for the project in bullet points or more substantial notes that you can use during this or future projects. Revisiting notes made during past projects can jog your memory and inspire you.

*Prepare.* Preparing sufficiently is crucial for building confidence and improving presentation technique. Think about the periods in the day, the week and the month when you write and prepare for presentations most effectively, and factor this into the process. Finding a rhythm and being efficient help a lot. Prepare PowerPoint slides for a presentation well in advance, leaving time to revisit and reformulate them if necessary. The worst feeling is a last-minute rush to finish something when you are tired and frustrated. Try your best to avoid this situation as much as possible.

*Sleep on it.* If you're struggling, do something else that is important, or sleep on it and come back to your work the following day with a clear mind and fresh eyes. This is what is commonly referred to as a draft stop: leaving your writing for a day or two before returning to it feeling refreshed. This is another reason to leave yourself plenty of time during the process; you want enough time to take a break from writing, if necessary, before returning to it with the aim of improving on what you have already produced.

*Practise, practise, practise.* Developing your writing technique takes time and hard work. An increasing number of academics use social media, including blog posts, as a means not only of testing their ideas but also as a way of sharpening their thinking and improving their writing technique. Others set up writing retreats and support groups with fellow students and colleagues.



*Seek feedback.* Ask a friend or colleague to read (or watch) and review a draft of your work. Another set of eyes often works wonders and can highlight issues you may have missed yourself.

*Manage the stress and anxiety.* Learn how to express frustrations productively: make a to-do list; break down large pieces of writing into manageable chunks; organize your notes and/or documents on your computer; prioritize your time effectively; and work in a team if possible.

*Learn from your mistakes.* At the end of each project, think about which aspect you have struggled with most during the writing up and presenting stages and make a note of areas for improvement. Writing is a craft; everyone starts somewhere. Feeling out of your depth at times is natural. English may not be your first language, or you may not have been taught English particularly well in earlier education. Another tip here is to note down areas for improvement that are highlighted by reviewers and copyeditors to work on during future writing projects. Furthermore, if a style or format is not working well for you, try a new approach (see discussion of alternative techniques above).

## **Summary and Review**

This chapter has focused on important processes and issues that researchers will encounter when writing up and presenting criminological research. The first section dealt with writing up, providing an indicative dissertation/research report structure and offering some guiding principles and techniques that researchers in criminology can adopt as they plan and carry out their final write-up. This was followed by a brief discussion of oral presentations, again offering some guiding principles and techniques. The next section discussed emerging visual and virtual forms of presentation. The aims here were to provide recent examples of work based on the presentation of images and to outline the most basic issues to consider when presenting visual or virtual research. The chapter ended with some ‘top tips’ that can be used by criminological researchers during the writing up and presenting stages of their projects. Giving these processes and issues some attention when writing up research can help to increase confidence, enhance the experience and increase the quality of the end product.

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