



Research Partnership
for Professional Learning

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ROAR

Implementation Guide

An open-access assessment platform
grounded in ongoing research by the
Stanford Reading & Dyslexia
Research Program

In Partnership with



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FOREWORD

The Advanced Education Research and Development Fund (AERDF)'s Reading Reimagined program aims to “build field awareness of the decoding threshold and early research-based solutions.” Emerging research on the decoding threshold suggests that the positive relationship between decoding and reading comprehension only appears when older K-12 students are able to decode above a certain level of proficiency (i.e., Wang et al., 2019).

Foundational reading instruction is desperately needed in upper grades; in a recent report, grade 3–8 teachers reported that “44% of their students frequently have difficulty reading the instructional materials used in their classrooms” (Shapiro et al., 2024). Yet, upper grade and secondary ELA teachers are not trained to recognize the role of foundational reading skills in the tapestry of reading ability, let alone to deliver foundational reading instruction to their students. Often, advanced foundational skills, including word recognition, are not measured beyond the early elementary grades, leaving educators without key information about their students' reading development and the full scope of support needed to access grade-level text.

The Rapid Online Reading Assessment (ROAR), developed by Stanford University, is a validated measure of advanced foundational reading skills across grades K–12. It represents a potentially useful method for measuring advanced foundational reading skills across grade levels, and particularly in the upper grades, where foundational skills are not often measured. Equipped with a more complete understanding of students' literacy development, upper elementary and secondary educators and leaders can plan and implement interventions to address students' greatest literacy needs.

Table of Contents

Introduction **01**

Executive Summary **02**

Enabling Conditions 04

I. Design and Implement Professional Learning **05**

II. Build Understanding of Foundational Reading Skills **07**

III. Audit and Streamline Assessment Landscape **09**

IV. Develop or Refine Infrastructure for Interventions
and Tier 1 Instruction **11**

ROAR Implementation 13

I. Administer ROAR **14**

II. Analyze ROAR Data **16**

III. Intervene to Support Student Success **18**

References **20**

“There’s much more awareness that [teachers] need to do something, and an increased feeling of responsibility to do something.”

- PL Organization Leader

INTRODUCTION

Since 2021, AERDF’s Reading Reimagined research and development program has funded research on the decoding threshold and associated research-based decoding measurement tools and interventions. In SY2024–25, Reading Reimagined funded two professional learning (“PL”) organizations and their district partners to take the first steps toward tackling the decoding threshold in their schools and systems by piloting the Rapid Online Assessment of Reading (ROAR) assessment in grades 6–12 to identify older learners who could benefit from explicit instruction in foundational reading skills. PL Organizations supported their district partners in unpacking the decoding threshold research and potential implications, understanding the ROAR assessment of foundational skills and its role in their assessment landscape, training educators and leaders on the ROAR assessment implementation, and facilitating ROAR data analysis and intervention planning.

The Research Partnership for Professional Learning (RPPL) served as the research partner in this work, aiming to surface and codify learnings and recommendations during the ROAR pilot processes. Through document analysis, PL observations, surveys, and interviews, we explored how districts were introduced to and taking up the ROAR assessment.

This guidebook is the result of that work, produced for districts/systems implementing a foundational skills assessment measure in the later grades (3–12) and for the PL Organizations that support them. The condensed guidebook is organized as follows: Sections are organized around the key phases of implementation as identified by PL Organizations. Within these phases, we describe a series of implementation goals and the strategies that participants found to be most successful for achieving these goals. We end each section with a list of questions for PL Organizations to consider when working with districts in each area.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ENABLING CONDITIONS

Enabling conditions for ROAR begin with designing and implementing professional learning. Through thoughtfully designed PL, leaders, coaches, and teachers need to build and deepen their understanding of the foundational reading skills that ROAR assesses. Districts need to audit and streamline their assessment landscape to maximize impact and to develop the infrastructure for interventions based on assessment results. We believe this preparation is particularly needed at a system level: the U.S. public education system has not typically included foundational skills in assessments and instruction beyond grade 3, an issue that the decoding threshold research brings into question and refutes.

I. Design and Implement Professional Learning

PL must provide (1) content knowledge about the foundational reading skills that are assessed, (2) logistics for administering the test, (3) protocols for analyzing the data, and (4) concrete instructional strategies to use to address reading gaps that are identified.

PL Organizations face the challenges of balancing among competing priorities within limited time for PL, and deciding whom to include in learning experiences.

II. Build Understanding of Foundational Reading Skills

Educators understand why foundational reading skills are crucial to their students' success, and how they can implement instruction.

Secondary educators embrace the mindset that teaching reading is part of their role as a literacy teacher.

III. Audit and Streamline Assessment Landscape

Districts determine whether sufficient data exists measuring students' continued development of foundational skills, in addition to comprehension.

Districts determine how and when to best utilize their suite of assessments, to avoid over-testing of students and overburdening of teachers, while capturing the most useful and impactful data to inform instruction.

IV. Develop or Refine Infrastructure for Interventions and Tier 1 Instruction

Districts consider time for interventions, staffing and training of intervention instructors, curricular materials, and student placement and progress.

IMPLEMENTING ROAR

During ROAR implementation, districts complete between three and four cycles of administration, data analysis, and intervention.

I. Administer ROAR

Districts utilize powerful framing up front to support buy-in among school leaders, educators, and students.

Districts create smooth communication plans and realistic timelines to support multiple stakeholders to navigate the logistics of ROAR administration.

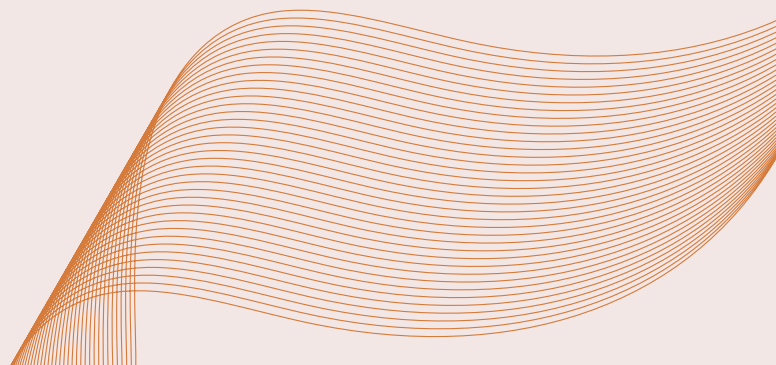
II. Analyze ROAR Data

Coaches lead analysis of ROAR data using data analysis protocols and scheduled, collaborative data analysis sessions.

PL Organizations are crucial partners when analyzing ROAR data over time and supporting data triangulation across multiple assessments.

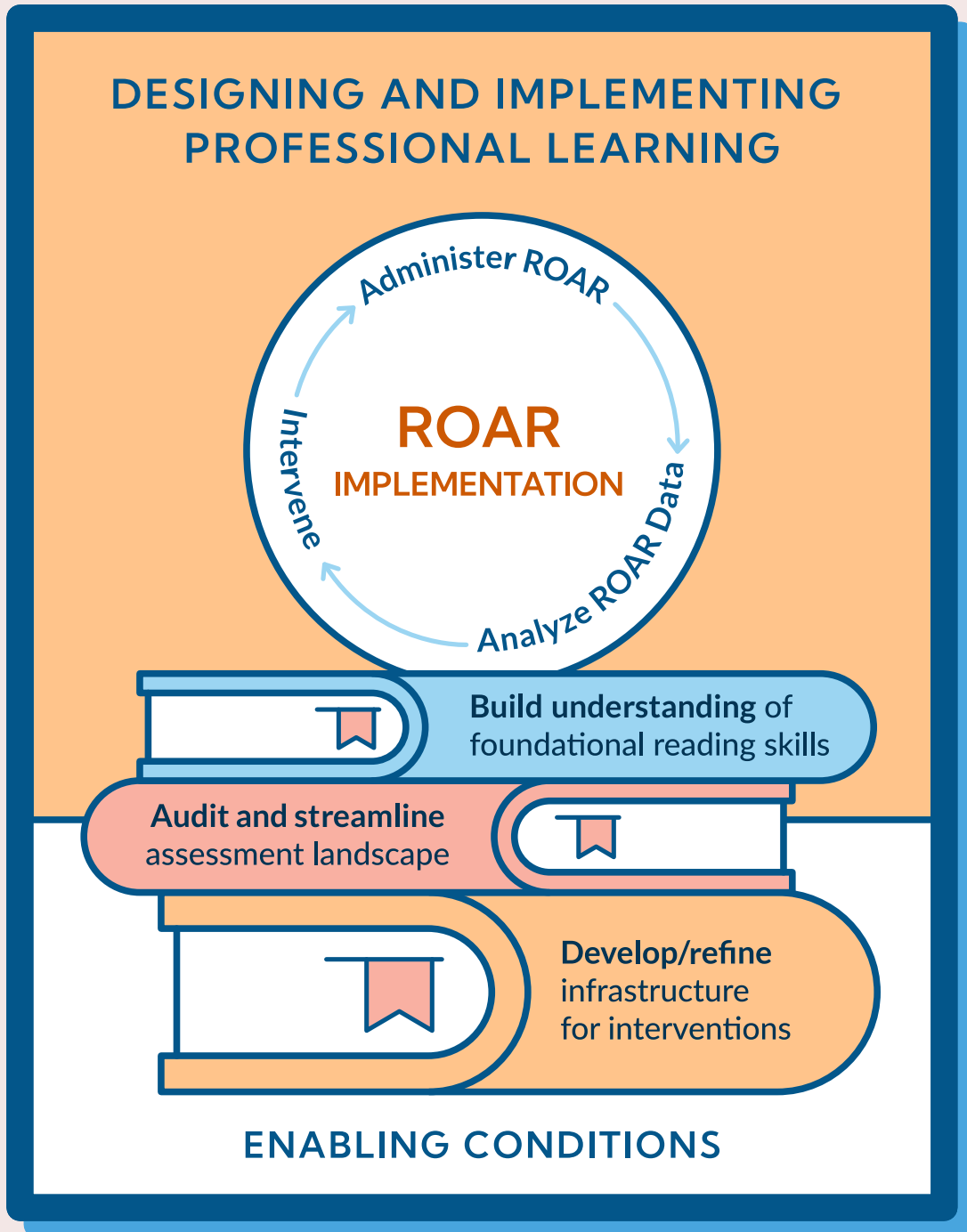
III. Intervene to Support Student Success

Results from the ROAR assessment drive data-informed decisions about tailoring instruction to student needs, considering specific skill learning needed by groups of students, and how and when that learning could be integrated into students' experiences/schedules (e.g., Tier I vs II settings, ELA classes vs intervention spaces vs content classes).



ENABLING CONDITIONS AND CYCLES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The figure below represents both the enabling conditions and the iterative implementation cycles that emerged during the pilot study, all supported by effective design and implementation of professional learning.



Enabling Conditions

- 
- A group of people are seated around a conference table in a meeting room. The image is overlaid with a grid pattern that tapers towards the top right. The scene is dimly lit, with a warm, orange-red color cast.
- I. Design and Implement Professional Learning **05**
 - II. Build Understanding of Foundational Reading Skills **07**
 - III. Audit and Streamline Assessment Landscape **09**
 - IV. Develop or Refine Infrastructure for Interventions and Tier 1 Instruction **11**

I. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Leaders, coaches, and teachers require effective professional learning experiences in order to prepare systems and teachers to administer the ROAR assessment and take instructional next steps based on the results. PL for ROAR implementation requires providing (1) content knowledge about the foundational reading skills that are assessed, (2) logistics for administering the test, (3) protocols for analyzing the data, and (4) concrete instructional strategies to use to address reading gaps that are identified. With multiple goals and limited time with educators, PL Organizations have to be strategic in their design and delivery of PL components. PL Organizations face the challenges of balancing among competing priorities within limited time for PL, and deciding whom to include in learning experiences.

Across the ROAR pilot year(s), PL Organizations worked with districts so that they could:

- Build an understanding of foundational reading skills.
- Audit and streamline the assessment landscape.
- Develop or refine infrastructure for interventions.
- Administer the ROAR assessment.
- Analyze the data.
- Intervene appropriately.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Combined school- or district-wide PL sessions with school-level and district-level coaching.
- Provided concrete instructional strategies during PL sessions.
- Worked in schools where the school-wide goals matched ROAR's capabilities (i.e., foundational literacy goals) to mitigate the impact of competing priorities.
- Included school leaders in PL.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring the design and implementation of professional learning to fit PL districts' needs:

- » What are the district's PL priorities, and how do they intersect or overlap with the ROAR assessment specifically, or building foundational reading skills more broadly?
- » To what extent can the district partner with a PL vendor to support capacity building and development across all of the areas required for successful implementation?
- » How will PL be differentiated for district leaders, coaches, core instruction teachers, and interventionists?



II. BUILD UNDERSTANDING OF FOUNDATIONAL READING SKILLS

Educators (teachers, school leaders, district leaders) require knowledge of foundational reading skills to support older students' literacy proficiency. With this knowledge of foundational reading skills, educators can begin understanding the relevance of the ROAR assessment for secondary students, and ultimately to inform instructional next steps that arise from the assessment results. Educators need to understand why foundational reading skills are crucial to their students' success, and how they can implement instruction in Tier 1, 2, and 3 interventions to support students in gaining these necessary skills. Moreover, secondary educators need to embrace the mindset that teaching reading is indeed part of their role as a literacy teacher. We note that this understanding is needed at a systemic level, as secondary teachers do not typically receive training on foundational reading skills.

PL Organizations worked with districts so that educators would be able to:

- Articulate what the decoding threshold is and how it applies to their students.
- Name, describe, and identify advanced foundational reading skills necessary to access grade-level text.
- Articulate the purpose of the ROAR assessment, its connection to the decoding threshold, and its relevance to their work with students.
- Shift their mindsets around reading instruction, to build a sense of responsibility to support all students' reading growth.
- Understand the social-emotional needs of older struggling/striving readers.
- Understand developmentally appropriate foundational literacy instruction for older students, and when and where during the school day this instruction might occur.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Provided background information paired with concrete strategies for addressing advanced foundational reading skills.
- Provided national and local data about the decoding threshold and its relevance to older striving readers.
- Provided testimonials from teachers/coaches within the same district who found success using the ROAR assessment and its resulting data to drive instruction.
- Provided a combination of whole group PL sessions and ongoing coaching to leaders and educators.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring PL to build districts' understanding of foundational reading skills:

- » When it comes to leaders, coaches, and teachers, what is their prior knowledge of and experience with foundational reading skills?
- » What are the existing mindsets and beliefs about secondary teachers' role in teaching reading to secondary students?
- » What are the existing mindsets and beliefs about students' reading abilities, and the causes of their struggles?



III. AUDIT AND STREAMLINE ASSESSMENT LANDSCAPE

Most districts utilize a multitude of literacy and reading assessments, such as i-Ready, MAP, STAR, and state assessments. Amidst a sea of sometimes overlapping assessments, districts require assistance navigating the landscape. If systems have not done the work up front to analyze what the existing data is telling them and any gaps that an assessment like ROAR might fill, the introduction of ROAR within schools can add to assessment fatigue and raise concerns about the extent to which the “juice is worth the squeeze.” Districts need support in determining how and when to best utilize their suite of assessments, to avoid over-testing of students and overburdening of teachers, while capturing the most useful and impactful data to inform instruction.

PL Organizations worked with districts so that:

- Leaders had a clear depiction of the literacy assessment landscape, what existing data told them (purposes for each assessment), and any gaps in literacy data, particularly around advanced foundational skills.
- Leaders and educators understood how ROAR fit into the assessment landscape and the value ROAR data would provide around students’ basic and advanced foundational skill development.
- Students’ literacy skills would be appropriately and comprehensively assessed (not over-tested)
- Educators would receive the “right-sized” amount of data about students.
- Districts would have codified guidance around the cadences for all assessments, complete with plans for data analysis.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Built understandings of the types of assessments and what they should be used for (i.e., summative/formative, screener/diagnostic).
- Created a schedule and cadence for all assessments, including administration and data analysis.
- Supported the development of streamlined infrastructure for collecting and housing all data in an easily accessible place.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring PL to help districts audit and streamline the assessment landscape:



- » What are the current literacy assessments in the district? What data is currently collected, and to what extent do they measure advanced foundational reading skills?
- » How might ROAR fit into the existing assessment landscape? Will it be used as a primary screener or a secondary screener?
- » What instructional programs are in place (i.e., Dual Language or ESL)? And how will that affect the assessment needs and language(s) of the assessment?
- » Who will take which ROAR subtests? When, and how often?
- » What additional diagnostic assessments will the district have available to follow up with students who have identified needs?
- » What is the overall assessment calendar for the district?
- » Where will the resulting data be housed?
- » When will the resulting data be analyzed? Who will analyze the data?

IV. DEVELOP/REFINE INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INTERVENTIONS AND TIER 1 INSTRUCTION

When preparing for ROAR administration and use of the resulting data, districts found that they needed to develop and/or refine their structures for intervention. While there is a need for coherence in instructional strategies across Tier 1 and Tiers 2–3, most of the instruction on foundational reading skills in secondary schools occurs in intervention spaces. Across both districts, time for interventions, staffing and training of intervention instructors, curricular materials, and student placement and progress monitoring emerged as important areas for consideration when building out effective structures for interventions.

PL Organizations worked with districts so that:

- They identified all students with foundational reading gaps and placed them in appropriate interventions, and had them exit interventions when appropriate.
- Intervention instructors would be qualified and prepared, including understanding the scope and demands of Tier 1 instruction.
- Master schedules allowed for co-planning between interventionists and core subject area teachers.
- Teachers had access to HQIM curricula AND appropriate instructional strategies .
- Students would be involved in progress monitoring (they know what they're working on and why).
- MLLs would have access to both appropriate literacy intervention instruction and language development instruction and supports.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Provided systems-level coaching to district leaders to assist with creating plans for intervention structures.
- Supported the district in restructuring schedules to incorporate interventions.
- Examined student needs holistically to provide appropriate services (i.e., foundational reading and language support separately to MLL students).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring PL to help districts develop and refine infrastructure for interventions and instruction:



- » Across schools in the district, when during or after the school day do Tier 2 and 3 interventions occur?
- » Who teaches intervention lessons, and what PL do they need to receive?
- » What curriculum or materials are used for intervention? Are the materials developmentally appropriate and rooted in effective foundational literacy skill instruction?
- » How do students get identified and placed into intervention? When and how do they move out of intervention?
- » How is student progress monitored? How is this data used for instructional decision-making for the intervention group?

ROAR Implementation

I. Administer ROAR **14**

II. Analyze ROAR Data **16**

III. Intervene to Support Student Success **18**

I. ADMINISTER ROAR

Building knowledge of foundational reading skills for leaders and educators, streamlining the assessment landscape, and developing infrastructure for interventions enable the success of ROAR implementation. Though both of our pilot study districts attended to these areas while simultaneously launching the ROAR assessment, PL Organizations agreed that having these pieces (at least partially) in place before launching the ROAR assessment would be beneficial to future district work.

We now turn to ROAR implementation, which includes cycles of ROAR administration, data analysis, and intervention. In our pilot study districts, these cycles occurred three or four times during the year. When schools are ready to launch the ROAR assessment, framing, communication, and logistics are crucial for successful implementation.

PL Organizations worked with districts so that:

- Teachers would be familiar with the technical/operational aspects of the ROAR (e.g., what is taken on, how students take the assessment, how to use the ROAR dashboard, etc.).
- Communication would be streamlined from district leadership and communicated to multiple stakeholders.
- Appropriate time would be allotted for administration.
- Students and families would understand the purpose of the assessment.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Built buy-in for teachers by framing the “why” of the assessment up front.
- Communicated effectively through multiple layers of the district (i.e., district leaders, school leaders, coaches, teachers, students, and their families).
- Prepared teachers for technical aspects and logistics:
 - » Ensuring accurate student rostering, so students take the correct subtests.
 - » Logging into platform(s) (i.e., Clever).
 - » Previewing student reports and dashboard.
 - » Preparing for troubleshooting.
- Prepared students to take the assessment:
 - » Building understanding of the assessment itself, understanding of the associated research, and buy-in.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring to PL districts so that they can administer ROAR:

- » During the initial ROAR launch, will participation be mandatory across the district? Or will the administration start with volunteers for early adoption?
- » What paperwork, including data sharing agreements (DSAs), must be in place before assessments can be administered?
- » What is a realistic timeframe for getting agreements in place?
- » Does the district have a plan for communication and logistics across school leaders and teachers?
- » How will teachers be prepared to administer the assessment?
- » How will students be prepared for the ROAR assessment?
- » How will families be communicated with?
- » What is a realistic timeframe for communicating with and preparing school leaders and educators?



II. ANALYZE ROAR DATA

For ROAR results to become actionable, the data needs to be analyzed effectively. Districts may find it useful to analyze trends at the district level, school level, and classroom level to inform decisions such as the provision of whole school professional development, student placement and movement in interventions, and tailored instruction.

PL Organizations worked with districts to:

- Identify district- and school-wide patterns of gaps in foundational reading skills.
- Identify which students were in need of additional assessments, and what those assessments are.
- Identify which skills need to be addressed by whom, at what time, and in which setting.
 - » Tier 1 and/or Tiers 2 and 3.
- Triangulate data across multiple literacy assessments.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Provided data analysis protocols for leaders, coaches, and teachers to unpack ROAR data.
- Walked through data analysis protocols with leaders, coaches, and teachers.
- Supported leaders, coaches, and teachers in drawing insights from the ROAR results.
- Connected ROAR results to foundational reading skills.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring to PL districts so they can analyze ROAR data:

- » When will data analysis occur for the ROAR results?
- » Who will support educators in analyzing ROAR data?
- » How will ROAR results be analyzed holistically among other literacy assessments and known student information (i.e., MLL status)?
- » How will students be included in the data analysis process?



III. INTERVENE TO SUPPORT STUDENT SUCCESS

Ultimately, the ROAR assessment’s value lies in its capacity to guide instructional decision-making to support all students’ reading development. Intervening to support students’ reading development requires educators to use data to make informed decisions about appropriate materials and instructional strategies, and to deliver those strategies across all tiers of instruction.

PL Organizations worked with districts so that they could:

- Choose and deliver appropriate instructional strategies that address student gaps across all tiers of instruction.
- Adapt and enhance Tier 1 instruction according to district- and school-wide patterns in the data.
- Place students in appropriate groups for interventions.
- Utilize and tailor appropriate Tier 2/3 intervention materials.

PL Organizations were most successful when they:

- Trained educators on instructional strategies that are developmentally appropriate for older striving readers.
- Utilized coaching to provide accountability and feedback to educators delivering instruction.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When tailoring to PL districts for successful interventions:

- » Who is responsible for placing students into (and exiting them out of) appropriate interventions?
- » When will interventions occur?
- » Who will be teaching interventions, and how will they be prepared?
- » What materials and/or instructional strategies will be utilized during interventions?
- » What does progress monitoring within interventions look like?



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