



# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS TEACHING WRITING IN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL PURPOSES TO STUDENTS-AT-RISK: AN INQUIRY

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## ABSTRACT

*This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences, teaching strategies, and insights of English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) teachers in teaching writing to students-at-risk in Senior High School. Participants included ten Senior High School English teachers, consisting of five who participated in in-depth interviews and five who took part in focus group discussions. The study identified key insights for more effective EAPP instruction for students-at-risk, recognizing the importance of language fundamentals, employing initiatives and strategies in teaching, displaying patience in teaching, and fostering intrinsic motivation. The findings of this study may inform English teachers, school leaders, and curriculum developers in designing responsive instructional interventions and policies to support the writing development of students-at-risk in Senior High School.*

**KEYWORDS:** English Education, Teaching Strategy, Students-At-Risk, English for Academic and Professional Purposes, Senior High School, Thematic Analysis, Phenomenology, Division of Panabo City, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) is an applied subject designed to develop students' communication skills for academic and professional contexts, with a strong emphasis on writing. However, the shift to distance learning during the pandemic led to a notable decline in students' writing proficiency (Into, 2024; NAEP, 2022). Students-at-risk were disproportionately affected, struggling to adapt to new learning modalities and experiencing disrupted instruction that further hindered skill development (Merga et al., 2021). These learners—identified based on emotional, psychological, physical, or home-related vulnerabilities—often fail to meet minimum assessment standards and show persistent underachievement, placing them at risk of dropping out and affecting their readiness for tertiary education (DepEd Order No. 18, s. 2015; ECS, 2017).

Post-pandemic writing deficiencies continue to impact learners' academic readiness. In Indonesia, Grade 11 students demonstrated frequent errors in spelling, capitalization, grammar, vocabulary, and punctuation when writing descriptive paragraphs, indicating gaps in foundational writing conventions (Korban et al., 2024). Similarly, in the Philippines, Senior High School students exhibit persistent weaknesses in reading and writing, largely due to limited academic writing experience, lack of topic knowledge, and inadequate writing strategies (Urbano et al., 2021). These deficiencies are compounded by reduced

engagement and the limitations of self-paced learning modalities during the pandemic, highlighting ongoing challenges in preparing students for advanced academic and professional writing tasks (Data, 2022).

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry was to understand and explore the lived experiences of English Teachers in teaching writing to Senior High School students-at-risk enrolled in the English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) subject in Panabo City, Davao del Norte. Further, this study intended to produce information that may assist teachers in developing pedagogical strategies for teaching writing to students-at-risk.

## Research Questions

1. What are the lived experiences of EAPP teachers in teaching writing to students-at-risk?
2. What teaching strategies and assessment methods do English teachers utilize for students-at-risk?
3. What are the insights of EAPP teachers from their experience of teaching writing to the students-at-risk?

## METHOD

### Research Participants

In this study, ten (10) EAPP teachers from public schools in Panabo City were chosen using the purposive sampling method.



In-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with the five (5) participants, and the other five (5) were conducted in Focus Group Discussions for triangulation of data.

To identify and select the participants, the researcher employed the following criteria: The participants a.) must be senior high school teachers in the identified research locale, b.) must be teaching the EAPP subject, c.) must have been teaching the subject for not less than 3 years and d.) must have experience teaching a student-at-risk in the EAPP subject.

### Data Analysis

The data that were acquired during the conduct of the study were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The initial step, based on the framework, is to become acquainted with the data. In this case, researchers read and re-read the dataset, marking their initial opinions. Next, the process of generating the initial codes involves the systematic identification of significant components and their subsequent classification. Patterns among the codes were identified and ordered into more general categories as one searches for themes. Themes were subsequently reviewed to ensure that the data is accurately represented and to make any necessary improvements or modifications. The essence and extent of themes can be comprehended by clearly defining and designating them. Ultimately, the report necessitates the compilation of the analysis, the selection of relevant studies, and the cone

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### The Lived Experiences of EAPP Subject Teachers in Teaching Writing to Students at-risk

Table 1: Essential Themes and Core Ideas

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Teaching Amid Language and Literacy Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being burdened by students' language gaps</li> <li>• Perceiving poor academic and professional futures for students due to weak basic language skills</li> <li>• Facing students' reluctance toward English-only writing activities</li> <li>• Recognizing students' writing skills as several years behind the expected level</li> <li>• Struggling to teach writing due to students' weak vocabulary and comprehension</li> <li>• Struggling to teach writing due to students' weak reading foundation</li> <li>• Struggling to express thoughts in English due to weak vocabulary and spelling</li> <li>• Struggling with writing due to a poor foundation in grammar and language</li> <li>• Seeing students-at-risk struggle in grammar, structure, and organization</li> <li>• Facing difficulty in teaching caused by weak vocabulary and poor critical thinking</li> </ul>
Realizing the Lasting Effects of Distance Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggling to assess students' authentic work due to modular distance learning</li> <li>• Experiencing students' reduced independence because of ADM practices</li> <li>• Assuming compromised development of critical thinking due to unguided modular learning during the pandemic</li> <li>• Receiving work without original effort due to limited teacher guidance during the pandemic</li> <li>• Having difficulty providing feedback during the pandemic which contributed to the writing skill gap</li> <li>• Showing little to no improvement upon returning to normal learning set-up</li> <li>• Noticing limited progress is linked to distance learning during the pandemic</li> </ul>
Struggling with Instructional Demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with time and energy demands</li> <li>• Seeing limited outcomes despite teachers' knowledge and efforts</li> <li>• Struggling with teaching to students-at-risk due to overly difficult and hastily prepared materials</li> <li>• Experiencing challenges from complicated subject content</li> </ul>
Providing Pedagogical Support for Students-at-Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessing reading to identify proficiency and group of students by needs</li> <li>• Providing differentiated activities to help students-at-risk build basic writing skills</li> <li>• Seeing the positive results of giving extra attention to students-at-risk</li> <li>• Requiring extensive scaffolding due to deficient writing foundations</li> <li>• Reinforcing basic grammar because of poor writing foundations</li> <li>• Use of mother tongue or simple words to support comprehension</li> <li>• Simplifying curriculum to match the abilities of student-at-risks</li> <li>• Giving step-by-step guides to lessen grammar-related discouragement</li> </ul>
Struggling with Student Engagement and Socio-Emotional Barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dealing with students' inability to complete take-home tasks due to work responsibilities</li> <li>• Noticing minimal effort due to low engagement and interest</li> <li>• Feeling the fear and hesitation of students-at-risk in writing due to low skills and pressure to perform</li> <li>• Receiving reduced participation from students-at-risk attempting to conceal skill gaps from peers and society</li> <li>• Considering a non-conducive home environment hinders students' learning</li> <li>• Experiencing emotional blocking that negatively affects writing performance</li> </ul>



Teaching writing in English for Academic and Professional Purposes (EAPP) becomes particularly challenging when students-at-risk are the focus of instruction. While EAPP aims to develop higher-order writing and academic literacy, its implementation is shaped by teachers' lived classroom experiences.

### Teaching Through Language and Literacy Limitations

Proficiency in language and literacy is essential for success in EAPP, which depends heavily on reading comprehension and writing skills. This study found that students-at-risk frequently lack foundational vocabulary, grammar, reading, and writing competencies, impairing their ability to understand prompts, process texts, and produce coherent academic writing.

Teachers reported that these learners struggle with idea organization, sentence construction, and formal expression, often relying on formulaic or informal language. Weak literacy skills further limit engagement and progress, a trend noted by Zorilla (2023) among senior high school students transitioning from modular to face-to-face learning. Instructional misalignment—where curriculum demands exceed learners' proficiency—compounds these challenges, supporting findings by Ismail et al. (2023) that competency-based approaches emphasizing foundational literacy, such as Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL), are more effective than rigid curriculum pacing.

### Realizing the Lasting Impact of Distance Learning

This study found that the shift to modular and distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic substantially disrupted the academic development of students-at-risk, particularly in writing and critical thinking skills required in EAPP. Teachers reported challenges in assessing authentic student outputs, as modular learning often involved excessive parental assistance or limited engagement, masking literacy gaps that became evident upon returning to face-to-face instruction.

These findings align with research documenting achievement declines following prolonged remote instruction, especially in high-poverty contexts where learning gaps widened (Goldhaber et al., 2022). Psychosocial stressors also compounded these effects; remote learning stress among Filipino students negatively impacted performance (Cahapay & Rotas, 2020). Teachers observed persistent deficits in independence, critical thinking, and writing proficiency, highlighting the need for sustained, targeted academic and psychosocial interventions to address pandemic-related learning losses.

### Struggling With Instructional Demands

EAPP is particularly challenging for students-at-risk due to the gap between curriculum demands and their English proficiency. Tasks like analyzing texts, synthesizing information, and producing formal writing often exceed learners' capabilities,

requiring teachers to slow lessons, adapt methods, and provide extra support. Learning modules are frequently linguistically dense and conceptually complex, creating barriers rather than instructional support.

These challenges are compounded by low language proficiency, confusion over lesson content, and reluctance to seek clarification, which limit engagement (Romero et al., 2023; Lumangyao et al., 2024). The complexity of instructional materials further impedes comprehension, underscoring the need for clearer, more accessible resources for students-at-risk (Aguilar-Abando et al., 2022).

### Providing Pedagogical Support for Students-At-Risk

In this study, students-at-risk were defined as those performing well below the class average in EAPP and needing additional support to address foundational language gaps. Teachers employed differentiated instruction, simplified directions, adjusted task difficulty, and targeted guidance, introducing complex concepts incrementally and integrating practical, real-world applications to enhance comprehension, engagement, and motivation.

These approaches are supported by research showing that focused instructional support enables teachers to meet individual learner needs (Talain & Mercado, 2023), flexible strategies improve outcomes (Rieg et al., 2007), dialogic scaffolding enhances academic understanding (Mannion et al., 2021), and relevant, applied content increases student engagement (Yazon et al., 2023).

### Struggling With Student Engagement And Socio-Emotional Barriers

The complexity of teaching EAPP is closely linked to students' low English language proficiency, particularly at the senior high school level. Romero et al. (2023) noted that limited language competence significantly intensifies instructional challenges and constrains learners' capacity to meet academic expectations. As EAPP requires higher-order thinking and academic discourse, insufficient foundational skills place students-at-risk at a further disadvantage, making mastery of writing tasks especially demanding.

These challenges are further compounded by "learning-content confusion," wherein students struggle to comprehend lesson content yet hesitate to seek clarification, thereby widening understanding gaps (Lumangyao et al., 2024). Moreover, the linguistic complexity and limited scaffolding of EAPP modules often exceed students' actual proficiency levels, making materials difficult to navigate and internalize (Aguilar-Abando et al., 2022). Together, these factors underscore how language deficits, learner disengagement, and instructional material design intersect to heighten the pedagogical demands of EAPP instruction.



### The Teaching Strategies and Assessment methods utilized by EAPP Teachers for students-at-risk.

**Table 2: Essential Themes and Core Ideas**

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Utilizing Familiar and Simplified Reading Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use familiar reading passage to engage students-at-risk</li> <li>• Choose familiar reading passage</li> <li>• Simplify complex EAPP reading text to suit students-at-risk's reading comprehension level</li> <li>• Give different reading texts to students-at-risk</li> <li>• Make sure to add definitions to words in the reading text that are hard to comprehend</li> <li>• Adapt materials with shorter texts to aid at-risk learners' understanding</li> <li>• Simplify module activities and texts for students-at-risk's better understanding</li> <li>• Adjust language use instead of enforcing English-only to support students-at-risk</li> <li>• Teach primarily in english, then provide bisaya translations</li> </ul>
Supporting Progressive Skill Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist learning to help students-at-risk</li> <li>• Increase the level of difficulty</li> <li>• Be dynamic in instructional approaches</li> <li>• Start with a simple sentence patterning for students to begin writing</li> <li>• Guide students with example that they can follow before writing</li> <li>• Use instructional support with examples to guide idea development</li> <li>• Assign capable students as leaders</li> <li>• Enable peer support and collaborative learning among students-at-risk</li> <li>• Use translation and assisted learning to support students-at-risk in understanding english texts</li> </ul>
Delivering Extended Instructional Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide extra lessons for students who need more time and support</li> <li>• Exert extra effort in preparing varied learning resources to meet diverse needs</li> <li>• Give extra time and encouragement to help students-at-risk</li> <li>• Listen to students' challenges and adjusting strategies to meet their needs</li> <li>• Use formal theme writing to level-up students from simple to compound sentences</li> <li>• Reinforce competencies repeatedly before moving to the next level</li> <li>• Use of translation approach to aid at-risk students' understanding</li> <li>• Provide one-on-one feedback to explain written feedback that is expressed in English</li> </ul>
Providing Individualized and Supportive Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide one-on-one, hands-on guidance to students-at-risk</li> <li>• Conduct one-on-one support sessions during free time</li> <li>• Provide supportive, feedback to motivate and avoid discouragement</li> <li>• Minimize homework and provide guided support</li> <li>• Do one-on-one consultation to give students-at-risk a supportive environment</li> <li>• Provide guided learning by combining direct instruction with independent practice</li> <li>• Give Feedback that is specific to what students-at-risk need to prioritize at the moment</li> </ul>
Monitoring Writing Development through Formative Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use formative assessments and classroom activities to detect students' writing difficulties</li> <li>• Focus on writing practices done in the classroom</li> <li>• Collect student outputs in a portfolio to assess writing progress</li> <li>• Regular writing activities to assess and track students-at-risk's progress</li> <li>• Use writing drills to address students-at-risk's errors</li> <li>• Use writing outputs to identify students' needs</li> <li>• Emphasize handwritten work to prevent copy-paste and to practice writing skills</li> </ul>

The teaching strategies and assessment methods employed by EAPP teachers reflect deliberate efforts to address the diverse needs of students-at-risk. Based on the participants' narratives, a range of instructional practices emerged that highlight how teachers adapt their pedagogy to support struggling learners.

#### Utilizing Familiar and Simplified Materials

The use of simplified and familiar materials emerged as a key strategy in teaching students-at-risk in EAPP, as standard texts often exceed learners' reading proficiency. Teachers addressed this by breaking down complex concepts, emphasizing key ideas, and aligning tasks with students' current skill levels to reduce cognitive overload and sustain engagement.



This approach is supported by Rets and Rogaten (2020), who found that text simplification enhances comprehension among low-proficiency L2 learners, and by Schmitt et al. and Bi (2020), who noted that learners must know 95–98% of a text's vocabulary for adequate understanding. Moreover, the strategic adaptation of authentic and teacher-created materials, alongside the integration of situational interest (Fitria, n.d.; Soemer & Schiefele, 2020), reinforces the importance of relevant, level-appropriate texts in fostering comprehension, confidence, and sustained engagement among students-at-risk in EAPP.

### Supporting Progressive Skill Development

To support students-at-risk in EAPP, teachers used adaptive scaffolding that addressed differences in readiness, pace, and confidence. Instruction combined step-by-step guidance, modeling, simplified directions, visual prompts, and gradual release, while writing tasks progressed from sentences to paragraphs and essays. Peer and group work further reinforced academic and socio-emotional support, building confidence and writing competence.

These practices are supported by research: structured, temporary support—including modeling, guided practice, and peer collaboration—promotes independence and confidence (Maftuna, 2025), while task simplification, cooperative learning, and formative evaluation enhance writing instruction (Zhou, 2021). Together, these findings validate adaptive scaffolding as an effective strategy for developing writing skills among students-at-risk in EAPP.

### Delivering Extended Instructional Support

Remedial interventions constitute a critical strategy for addressing learning gaps among students-at-risk in EAPP. Teachers employed individualized support and structured revision sessions, incorporating scaffolding and differentiated tasks—such as guided worksheets, journals, and formal writing exercises—to consolidate foundational skills prior to engagement with more complex tasks.

These practices are corroborated by research demonstrating that targeted, learner-centered remediation enhances literacy, engagement, and academic outcomes (Casinal, 2022; International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews,

2024). Collectively, the evidence underscores the efficacy of structured and adaptive remedial interventions in mitigating learning gaps and fostering sustained academic development among students-at-risk.

### Providing Individualized and Supportive Instruction

Individualized instruction is a key strategy for supporting students-at-risk in EAPP, offering personalized, scaffolded learning. One-on-one consultations provide immediate clarification, prevent discouragement, and create a safe space for discussing challenges, while guided practice addresses persistent issues in language use, sentence construction, and idea organization, enhancing writing competence and academic confidence.

Research supports these practices, showing that individualized support, simplified language, and content modification reduce cognitive overload and sustain engagement (Asri & Nuroh, 2023), while close teacher supervision promotes authentic learning, accountability, and independence (Lei et al., 2022). Collectively, these findings affirm individualized instruction as an effective approach for fostering sustained academic growth among students-at-risk.

### Monitoring Writing Development through Formative Assessment

Teachers highlighted regular writing drills as a key strategy for developing students-at-risk' writing skills in EAPP. Frequent in-class tasks assessed sentence construction, idea organization, and foundational skills, while repeated practice fostered gradual improvement and served as both skill-building and diagnostic tools. On-the-spot writing, compiled into informal portfolios, supported progress tracking, error identification, and targeted remediation.

Research supports these practices: low-stakes writing with timely feedback improves performance (Graham et al., 2023), portfolio-based assessment enables individualized instruction (Andrade & Heritage, 2023), and in-class writing provides authentic evidence of skill development while reducing academic dishonesty (Li & Zhang, 2024). Collectively, writing drills are effective formative tools for monitoring and enhancing writing in EAPP.



### Insights of EAPP Teachers from their Experience in Teaching EAPP to the Students-at-risk

**Table 3: Essential Themes and Core Ideas**

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Recognize the Importance of Language Fundamentals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Realize that developing reading competencies is crucial for improving writing skills</li> <li>Recognize that reading comprehension plays a key role in supporting students' writing</li> <li>Require strong comprehension skills to verbally articulate thoughts in writing.</li> <li>Develop groundwork for writing to be able to express text successfully</li> <li>Identify weak foundations to writing as impediments to learning</li> <li>Monitor written outputs that are below the expected standard</li> </ul>
Employ Initiatives and Strategies in Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prioritize students at risk through differentiation of attention</li> <li>Teach based on actual readiness rather than grade level</li> <li>Utilize peer tutoring for struggling students</li> <li>Develop interventions that are effective and efficient through experience</li> <li>Reflect on teaching to improve student understanding</li> <li>Extend reading beyond the classroom to promote the development of vocabulary and conceptual connections</li> <li>Align writing activities with student practical and professional needs.</li> </ul>
Display Patience in Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer the basic support and patience to help students overcome writing challenges</li> <li>Spend time and patience to observe and support students progress</li> <li>Model patience and flexibility in teaching students at risk to write</li> <li>Display empathy and forbearance in supporting students at risk</li> <li>Keep excitement and commitment to the teaching of writing</li> </ul>
Foster Intrinsic Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draw out improvements with motivating feedback in order to build confidence in students</li> <li>Foster intrinsic motivation - encouraging self- and learning instilling the real-life relevance of writing tasks to increase motivation</li> <li>Motivate students by localizing lessons and demonstrating the real-life relevance of the English language</li> <li>Create safe environment for self-expression</li> <li>Provide consistent support and encouragement</li> </ul>

EAPP teachers shared insights from their experience of teaching EAPP to the students-at-risk. Their insights focused on the factors to consider when dealing with this group of students. Teachers demonstrated their commitment to their profession and made efforts to spread the takeaways they acquired from their personal experience.

#### Recognize the Importance of Language Fundamentals

EAPP teachers identified gaps in students-at-risk's foundational literacy—especially in reading comprehension and writing—as key barriers to meeting subject demands. These learners struggle with advanced comprehension, structured writing, and mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction, limiting their ability to follow instructions and produce coherent outputs.

These observations are supported by research showing persistent difficulties in academic writing (Hass et al., 2021), the impact of low comprehension on information processing and retention (Lubaton et al., 2024), and the critical role of grammar, vocabulary, and syntax in developing academic writing competence (Herawati et al., 2024).

#### Employ Initiatives and Strategies in Teaching

EAPP teachers reported that varying academic skill levels, especially among students-at-risk, complicate instruction and activity design. To address this, they employ diverse strategies as scaffolds to bridge learning gaps and expressed growing confidence that accumulated experience enhances their ability to support similar learners.

These practices are supported by research recommending reinforcement of language fundamentals alongside subject-specific instruction (Dan Lu et al., 2001), peer tutoring to improve outcomes for students-at-risk (Wali et al., 2018), and professional collaboration to strengthen pedagogical competence and readiness for marginalized learners (Brownell et al., 2006; Akin et al., 2013).

#### Display Patience in Teaching

EAPP teachers observed that students-at-risk often struggle due to limited foundational language skills, requiring heightened patience, repeated guidance, and sustained support. Patience enables careful assessment of learner needs and selection of responsive strategies, while adaptability and resilience allow



teachers to adjust instruction, manage challenges, and maintain commitment across diverse classrooms.

These insights are supported by research showing that patience improves communication, classroom management, and task completion (Meriç, 2023; Morris et al., 2020), facilitates individualized support (Aiyuda et al., 2025; Fitri et al., 2025), and that adaptability and resilience sustain teacher effectiveness in demanding environments (Munezero et al., 2025), highlighting their importance in teaching students-at-risk.

### Fostering Intrinsic Motivation

EAPP teachers consistently observed low intrinsic motivation among students-at-risk, which hindered engagement, persistence, and learning. This lack of drive stemmed from negative perceptions of the subject, limited understanding of its relevance, and insufficient encouragement. Teachers stressed that learners require more than instructions—they need sustained motivation, relatable examples, and repeated practice in a safe, supportive environment. Strategies included connecting lessons to real-world applications, fostering confidence and self-expression, recognizing incremental progress, and valuing student ideas to promote engagement and persistence.

These observations align with research highlighting motivation's role in academic development. Pandey et al. (2025) reported that low motivation impedes handling complex texts, while Mohammed et al. (2024) noted learners rely more on extrinsic incentives than intrinsic interest. Alfassi (2023) emphasized that acknowledging small gains builds confidence, consistent with self-efficacy theory. Similarly, Robinson et al. (2006) and Juliani et al. (2024) underscored the importance of trust, respect, and teacher support in fostering engagement and meaningful participation.

### Recommendation to Future Researcher

This study explored the lived experiences of EAPP teachers in teaching writing to students-at-risk, highlighting key instructional challenges and pedagogical responses. While providing detailed insights into teachers' practices and perspectives, the findings are context-bound and should not be generalized beyond the participants and settings studied.

Future research could expand the scope by including diverse schools, rural and urban contexts, and larger participant samples to enhance transferability. Mixed-methods or quantitative approaches could measure the impact of specific strategies, such as scaffolding, remedial writing drills, and academic consultations, on student performance. Investigating students-at-risk' perspectives, motivation, self-efficacy, and emotional responses to writing could complement teachers' views for a more holistic understanding. Longitudinal studies and research on institutional support, curriculum design, and teacher professional development may further illuminate effective practices and policy-level factors that enhance inclusive and responsive EAPP instruction.

### Concluding Remarks

Across the essential themes, EAPP teachers emerge not merely as implementers of curriculum but as negotiators who bridge academic standards and learner realities through balanced rigor, flexibility, and sustained support. Ultimately, writing instruction in this context transcends academic compliance and becomes a transformative process that fosters confidence, agency, and resilience among students-at-risk.

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