

A STUDY OF READING GENRES AND QUESTIONS IN THAI AND ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR O-NET EXAMINATIONS

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Abstract

Reading is one of English skills that students have to learn since in primary school until university. However, the result of the national examination in Thailand for English subjects seems unsatisfied, which reading part occupies the largest portion. This study aims to find out the differences and similarities in reading sections of English textbooks and O-NET and GAT examinations in terms of genre and type of questions. Reading passages and questions were analyzed based on Derewianka's linguistic features of genres and Nuttall's taxonomy of questions. Text organization and linguistic features were shown in each text on the right and left respectively to identify the genres. The findings show the dominance of information report in the textbooks and examinations. Although literal comprehension questions are dominant in the textbooks, reinterpretation questions also appear in the examinations. Therefore, materials writers should develop materials to help students improve their ability in reading a range of texts for their future education and functional roles in their lives.

Keywords: Reading, English, Textbooks, Genres, O-NET and GAT examinations

Introduction

Thai government and the Ministry of Education promote learning English because, nowadays, English plays an essential role in everyday life and its importance is emphasized as part of ASEAN Economic Community or AEC 2015. With this integration, there are attempts to enhance and improve the English language of Thai people in academic settings to be more competitive in the region (Baker 2009). However, English proficiency in Thailand is ranked 55 out of 60 countries around the world.

The main focus is on reading of O-NET and GAT examinations, which reading part occupies one third of the whole examinations (30 per cent). This portion has implied that reading skill can be very important in learning. Moreover, in many textbooks, there is at least one section on reading passage and questions.

According to Saiyasomnut, S & Siam Voices (2012), many students mention that questions in most of the subjects are too vague and difficult. Some are never taught in schools, and Multiple Choice Questions have more than one choice, which is very close to the correct answer, misleading the students. Whenever students has guess, scores then do not show whether they understand or not. In addition, textbooks provide a narrow range of genres, which may not be varied and useful for learners' future. There is a need to reform materials in teaching of reading in terms of texts and tasks.

The possible reasons are varied. The problem can be involved with shared assumption of students and exam writers (Nuttall 1982), influence from the first language. Aebersold and Field (1997) note the differences in grammatical and discourse knowledge in L1 and L2. In addition to the mentioned factors, the researcher found that role of genre can be one of the causes for difficulty in reading. It involves with what genres appeared in the textbooks and what kinds of passages which are presented in the examinations. According to Hyon (2002), the results show that knowing genres help students improve and tackle reading passages easier as it helps them know how texts are constructed. In addition, with good questions, they are also connected to the passages to help promote and develop comprehension or understanding of reading passages. The next section will be discussed about theoretical framework used in this study.

Literature Review

According to Derewianka (1990), the functional approach is concerned with texts and their functional purposes. A text not only comprises linguistic features, but also contexts, situations, purposes and text organization in order to construct meaning and fulfill purposes which for the intended audience. She suggests six genres, starting from argument, explanations, recounts, instructions, narratives, information reports, explanations, and argument.

- I. Argument: Sometimes, it is called "exposition" that involves analysis, interpretation and evaluation of a certain topic. The main purpose of augment is to take a position and convince readers to believe in the writers' points of view. In an argumentative text, thesis statement will be introduced at the

beginning of the text to tell the position of the writers. To persuade the readers, writers must present arguments supported by evidence. Lastly, the writers need to summarize their arguments again to reaffirm their position. For language features, readers normally see generalized participants, variety of verbs in present and past simple tense forms, connectors and emotive words.

2. Explanations: Texts tell readers how something works or reasons why something happened. The information is mainly involved with scientific texts. It focuses on the process of how something happened rather than the thing itself. At the beginning, it might raise questions about the topic to the readers and then the reasons are presented in the next stage in logical order. The subjects or topics are about non-living things. The use of nominalization, time sequences, cause-and-effect relationship, and active and passive voice in present tense.
3. Recounts: A recount provides the readers a series of events in the past to tell what actually happened. It starts with an orientation to tell the readers the details of participants, places, and time of the story. Then, series of events will be introduced in a chronological order to make it easier for readers to understand. Sometimes, at the end, personal comments or responses towards the topics might be included. In general, some features, for example, specific participants use of past tense, action verbs, using of first and third –person pronouns, passive voices, and words that link to the time sequences, are seen in this type of text.
4. Instructions: an instruction, which is also known as procedures, tells readers how to do or complete a particular thing steps by steps. Its organization starts with goal or target that readers want to achieve in headings or topics. Lists of materials, then, will be introduced and the next stage is methods showing to how to achieve the target. In this stage, comments on reasons of doing something or tips might be added in remind or warn readers. Numbers and photos are normally seen to make the text itself easier to understand. Most of the time, subjects are not left out and general participants, word concerned with time relationship, and present tense are seen.

- 5. Narratives: The purpose of narratives is mainly to entertain, to teach readers' with a moral lesson, and to extend their imagination. A narrative begins with an orientation to introduce the readers' details of main characters, places, timing, personality and relationship of the main characters. The story is moved by the incidents in which main characters have to deal and solve the problems to achieve their purposes. For resolution, it can be a happy ending or sad ending. The features normally include specific participants both human and non-human with details of appearance, personality and personal information, variety of verbs in past tense form, words related to time, dialogue, and descriptive language.
- 6. Information Reports: This type will provide factual information of a topic by describing, which are widely referred to as factual reports of living and non-living things, news, or weather forecasting. Normally, opening statement will be discussed at the beginning to define or report an incident in summary. The rest of text will be details and aspects of the topic, not opinions or comments. The topic is described by using present simple tense, types of verbs, descriptive and comparing language, and generalized participants.

The following table is the summary of all genres with their text organization and language features that are presented in each genre.

Table I Text Organization and Language Features of Genres.

No	Text Type	Text Organization	Common linguistic features
1	Argumentative	Statement of position	Generalized participants
			Variety of verbs such as action, verbal, and mental verbs
		Argument	Simple present tense
			Use of passive voices
			Use of normalization (Transform action to thing)
		Summary of the position	Connectors showing reasons and results
			Emotive words
2	Explanations	Phenomenon	Generalized participants

		Explanations	Action verbs
			Simple present tense
			Time-relationship words for explaining how
			Cause-and-effect relationship to explain why
3	Recounts	Orientation	Specific participants
			Simple past tense
		Series of events	Action verbs
			Time-relationship words
		Personal comment	Descriptive details
4	Instructions	Goal	Generalized participants and specific participants
			Time-relationship words
		Materials	Simple present tense
			Detailed, factual description of participants
		Methods	Focus on "how"

No	Text Type	Text Organization	Common linguistic features
5	Narratives	Orientation	Specific participants
			Action verbs
		Complication	Simple past tense
			Time-relationship words
			Dialogue
		Resolution	Descriptive details
			Use of first or third person pronoun
6	Information Reports	General statement or Orientation	Generalized participants
			Action verbs
			Linking verbs
			Simple present tense
		Facts or Aspects	Descriptive details
			classifying, comparing and contrasting words
			Technical words

According to Nuttall (1982), types of questions include comprehension, reorganization or reinterpretation, inference, evaluation, personal response and interpreting.

1. Literal comprehension: Answers can be clearly found in the text to understand the main events of the story. The main purpose of this kind of question is to check the readers' understanding of what is going on in the text. It can be who, where, when, what and why.
2. Reorganization and reinterpretation: Although the aim is to check readers' understanding, the answers cannot be found in the text in a direct way. Hence, students have to find information from the text and connect them to answer the questions.
3. Inferential: Deal with read-between-the-lines questions which learners have to understand what is going on in the passage as a whole. The messages or answers are hidden implicitly, which requires learners to connect a piece of information from the text and connect to his or her background knowledge in order to answer questions.
4. Evaluation: Involves with opinions of readers. The readers are expected to judge and provide responses in terms of the writers' intention, and purpose of the message. Examples normally involve with the writers' feeling or writers' intention. Moreover, to answer this type of questions, readers have to provide evidence to support their answers.
5. Personal response: Deals with readers' reaction after reading a title, for example, feelings after reading story. The readers or learners need to explain why they feel in that way for the story based on accurate understanding of the text. Therefore, all responses are still based on text and added personal ideas from the readers, for example, the questions might be "If you were this character, after being blamed, how do you feel and react to those words?"
6. Interpretive Questions: this type of questions focuses on how the writers say what they mean. This means it involves more with how they construct the text to be meaningful. Readers need to use some strategies when handling with texts to interpret and find out the answers, especially in terms of syntax and cohesion within the texts. The aim of these questions is to raise an

awareness of word-attack and text-attack skills to ensure that they know what strategies or skills should be applied when reading.

In the next section, research questions, data and methodology for this study are presented and discussed.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant types of reading texts and questions in English textbooks?
2. What are the dominant type of reading texts and questions in English *O-NET* and GAT examinations?

Data and Methodology

Textbooks and English examination paper

ICON2 (Freeman, Graves, and Lee), Mega Goal 2 (Dos Santos and O' Sullivan), Moving up Critical Reading 2 (Fotheringham), Reading Adventures with Writing 2 (Lieske and Menking), and Weaving it Together 2 (Broukal) are used by Thai students in Mathayomsuksa five. All the materials are supervised to be used in school since 2008 by the Office of the Basic Education Commission of Thailand, which is one of departments under the Ministry of Education.

The selected English examination papers are used for Mathayom 6 students who want to study in university. These examination papers are under supervision of The National Institute of Education Testing Service. The two tests that are selected are *O-NET* (*Ordinary National Education Test*) and *GAT* (*General Aptitude Test*), which are examinations that Thai students who want to enroll in the higher education are required to take and use the result as one of measurement. Examination papers from 2008 to 2010 are included in the study because of the availability for download.

Data have been obtained from English textbooks, three *O-NET* English exam papers in academic year of 2008, 2009, and 2010, and two GAT exam papers from 2009 and 2010. From the textbooks, the total number of reading passages is 76 while 635 questions are presented in all five textbooks. For O-Net and GAT examinations, 21 and 123 are the total number of reading passages and questions found in all examinations respectively. All reading passages and questions were analyzed to find out the

dominant genres based on Derewianka’s (1990) for analyzing text organization and linguistic features of genres. Later, the reading questions in textbooks and examinations were analyzed by Nuttall’s taxonomy of questions (1982). The differences and similarities of genres and questions between textbooks and *O-NET* and *GAT* examinations were discussed in the end.

Findings and Discussion

Findings of five English textbooks

To summarize the reading genres and questions found in the textbooks. The tables below summarize the genres and questions in the five textbooks.

Table 2 Summary of Genres found in all five textbooks in percentage

Genres	Argu ment	Explanati ons	Recou nts	Instructi ons	Narrati ves	Informati on Reports	Tot al
Book#1	0	0	50	8.3	0	41.7	100
Book#2	0	8.3	25	0	8.3	58.4	100
Book#3	0	25	10	5	0	60	100
Book#4	0	6.25	18.75	6.25	12.5	56.25	100
Book#5	0	18.8	31.2	0	6.2	43.8	100

From Table 2, the two dominant types of reading texts in the five textbooks are information report and recount. However, the most dominant genre, in average of number of occurrence in these five English textbooks, is information report. This percentage indicates that the textbook does not only focus on information report, but also recount, it can be concluded that textbooks focus more on helping students gain knowledge and information. However, there is only one text type that is never presented in any of these five textbooks. It is argument texts, which help students to be more critical and interpretative because, apart from understanding the passages, they have to give opinions to state their own position on controversial issues and problems.

Table 3 Summary of Types of questions found in all five textbooks in percentage

Text of questions	Literal Comprehension	Reorganization	Inference	Evaluation	Personal Response	Interpretative questions	Total
Book#1	40	8.3	11.7	0	40	0	100
Book#2	62	0	1	0	37	0	100
Book#3	68.6	20	7.9	3.5	0	0	100
Book#4	54.5	23.2	6.2	0.9	15.2	0	100
Book#5	55.6	0	2.2	0	42.2	0	100

As seen in Table 3, the two dominant types of questions found in the five textbooks are literal comprehension and personal response questions. However, the most dominant type is still literal comprehension. In addition, another type of question found in all the textbook is inference question. However, the number of questions is low. Moreover, interpretive questions are not found in any of the textbooks.

Major Findings

For these textbooks under the supervision of Ministry of Education, the desirable outcomes after learning are students have to: look for details; infer the purpose of writers and main ideas of passages; organize and order ideas in sequences; differentiate facts and opinions, and similarities and differences; think, analyze, interpret and summarize important points from the passages; and finally share opinions towards passages to the class. However, the majority of the genres and questions are information report and literal comprehension questions, which aim to test readers' basic understanding from the passages. The students are taught how to find where the exact words or phrases are or replace the incorrect ones rather than focusing on testing students' thinking, analyzing, and interpreting texts. Questions of reorganization, inference, and evaluation are rarely found although they can help students think and analyze the incidents, themes, characters, points of view, and behaviors, which can enable them to be more imaginative and analytical. Unfortunately, narrative and argumentative texts and questions of reorganization, inference, and evaluation are rare in the textbooks. Therefore, the learners know how to find information, but not be able to think, analyze, criticize, and connect the ideas to their lives. In the

next section, the research will present summary of findings in the examinations.

Findings of five English examinations

To summarize the reading genres and questions found in the examinations. The tables below summarize the genres and questions in the five examinations.

Table 4 Summary of Texts Types found in the examinations in percentage

Genres	Argume nt	Explana tions	Recou nts	Instructi ons	Narrati ves	Informat ion Reports	Tot al
ONET51	0	0	0	0	0	100	100
ONET52	0	0	25	0	0	75	100
ONET53	0	0	0	50	0	50	100
GAT52	33.3	0	0	0	0	66.7	100
GAT53	0	0	0	16.7	16.7	66.6	100

The dominant genres found in the five examination papers are information report and instruction. However, information reports occupy at least 50 percent among examinations. Recount and instruction texts tend to be used as passages for examinations more frequently than argumentative and narrative texts. However, it is possible that students will face all the genres in the examination.

Table 5 Summary of Types of questions found in all five English examinations in percentage

Text of questions	Literal Compre hension	Reorganiz ation	Infere nce	Evaluat ion	Person al Respo nse	Interpr etative questio ns	Total
ONET51	43.3	43.3	10	3.4	0	0	100
ONET52	33.3	46.7	20	0	0	0	100
ONET53	43.3	26.7	30	0	0	0	100
GAT52	26.7	46.6	20	6.7	0	0	100
GAT53	27.8	55.6	16.6	0	0	0	100

For the questions, even if the most dominant type is reorganization question, especially in GAT 52 and 53, the percentage of literal comprehension questions is still high when compared to other types of questions. Interestingly, in academic year of 2010, the number of inference questions increased from 13 per cent in year of 2009 to 30 per cent. On the other hand, questions of personal response and interpretations do not appear in the examinations.

Major Findings

According to Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008), *O-NET* and *GAT* are designed to measure the students' knowledge in terms of thinking, analyzing, and interpreting of various types of authentic text. Some passages, therefore, are taken from news, articles, advertisements, or comic strips. Argumentative texts, which students have never experienced in the textbooks, is taken to be one of the passages for the exam because this type allows the readers to think and find out information whether to argue or support a given topic, which helps them be more analytical and critical. Furthermore, reorganization, inference, and evaluation questions are put in the examination to test the learners' thinking and interpreting skills. However, from the results, the number of evaluation question is very low and literal comprehension is still high in the *O-NET* examinations. Unlike *GAT*, literal comprehension is not the main focus in *GAT*, which responds to its objective that wants to measure students' potential in studying in the university.

Discussion

Table 6 Summary of Types of reading passages and questions found in all five English textbooks in percentage

Text Type	No. of Occurrence in Percentage				
	Textbook				
	1	2	3	4	5
Argumentative	0	0	0	0	0
Explanations	0	8.3	25	6.25	18.8
Recounts	50	25	10	18.75	31.2
Instructions	8.3	0	5	6.25	0
Narratives	0	8.3	0	12.5	6.2
Information Reports	41.7	58.4	60	56.25	43.8

Type of questions	No. of Occurrence in Percentage				
	Textbook				
	1	2	3	4	5
Literal Comprehension	40	62	68.6	54.5	55.6
Reorganization	8.3	0	20	23.2	0
Inference	11.7	1	7.9	6.2	2.2
Evaluation	0	0	3.5	0.9	0
Personal Response	40	37	0	15.2	42.2
Interpretive Questions	0	0	0	0	0

Table 7 Summary of Types of reading passages and questions found in all five English examinations in percentage

Text Type	No. of Occurrence in Percentage				
	Examination				
	1	2	3	4	5
Argumentative	0	0	0	33.3	0
Explanations	0	0	0	0	0
Recounts	0	25	0	0	0
Instructions	0	0	50	0	16.7
Narratives	0	0	0	0	16.7
Information Reports	100	75	50	66.7	66.6

Type of questions	No. of Occurrence in Percentage				
	Examination				
	1	2	3	4	5
Literal Comprehension	43.3	33.3	43.3	26.7	27.8
Reorganization	43.3	46.7	26.7	46.6	55.6
Inference	10	20	30	20	16.6
Evaluation	3.4	0	0	6.7	0
Personal Response	0	0	0	0	0
Interpretive Questions	0	0	0	0	0

From the analyses of textbooks and *O-NET* and *GAT* examinations, it is evident information report is the most dominant text type. The percentage of information reports is over 40 per cent in the textbooks, and at least 50 per cent in the examinations. Thus, students are capable of reading this type due to their experience. Therefore, students might not be able to deal with the genres including narrative, instruction, and argumentative in the exam due to lack of experience.

Literal comprehension questions are dominant in the textbooks and in the examinations. Therefore, learners will be able to answer the questions due to their exposure. Another similarity found across textbooks and examination is the presence of inference questions. Although inferential questions are found, the difference lies in proportion in the examinations. The percentage of inferential questions in the textbooks is around 6 per cent on an average whereas the average is 17 per cent in the examinations. Even though literal comprehension questions are found in all these materials and tests, the dominant type of question in the examination is reorganization or reinterpretation.

Another difference between the textbooks and examinations is about techniques used for the questions. In the examinations, there is only one technique shown, which is Multiple Choice Questions. On the other hand, students have chance to answer questions in different formats, such as True or False, Short Answer, fill-in-blanks technique, ordering texts or information given.

The dominant type of question is still reorganization question. The materials and tests are based on Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551, that aim to develop students not only their understanding of the passages, but also their thinking, analyzing, interpreting, and inferring skills from the materials. Therefore, the materials and tests should help learners deal with real use of language in diverse cultural contexts. However, the textbooks tend to focus on basic understanding of the passages. Students need to only look for the details rather than use the message to think and interpret. Even there are 40 per cent literal comprehension in the materials, most of the questions in the *O-NET* and *GAT* are reorganization questions, which represent up to 60 per cent and inference questions around 10 to 30 per cent.

There is no argumentative text in the textbook while it is found in *GAT52*. This possibly causes a problem because students would not have explored this text type in the classes. With no presence of argumentative and narrative texts in the materials, the students are unlikely to interpret because these two genres allow students to interact, connect to their lives, and express ideas through questions. Unfortunately, narrative and argumentative texts are rarely seen in the textbooks and examinations. Moreover, Multiple Choice Questions are used in all the examinations. When this technique is selected and combined with literal comprehension questions, students possibly find words or phrases that match with the given answers rather than think and select appropriate answers. Therefore, they are likely to stop thinking and reduce their choices, which prevent them from activating their schematic

knowledge, and thinking and interpreting skills. For using MCQ techniques in the examinations, most of the teachers might possibly pay less attention to other techniques used in the textbooks and train students to deal with MCQ because they may want their students to pass the examinations. Furthermore, short answer questions elicit personal responses. The lack of short answer questions and other types of questions may not help students understand, think, organize and connect pieces of information. Students tend to have limited opportunity to think, connect their ideas and express their thoughts due to lack of encouragement from their teachers, which is influenced by the materials. The result may encourage students to guess the answer rather than think and find out suitable answers for the questions.

In conclusion, the similarities between English textbooks and examinations are only about the most dominant genres, which is information report. For the questions, the most dominant type in the examination is reinterpretation, which does not match with literal comprehension that students normally learn from the books in the schools. Moreover, genres in the examinations cover all six types while one type is missing in the textbook. Besides, the format and organization of texts the test tends to be more varied than what they actually learnt in the schools. Lastly, the techniques used are also different. The examination questions are limited while the writers of textbooks are more open in using different techniques even though some seems to be not helpful enough for students to learn because students still can copy or guess the answers rather than use information and think in order to come up with the ideas used as the suitable answers for those questions. With these differences, learners obviously have chances to face some difficulties when they do the examinations due to the fact that they lack experience in dealing with various genres and questions.

Recommendations

1) Other genres or genres such as narratives, argumentative, and explanations should be added to encourage Thai students to read in order to expand their background knowledge and develop their thinking and interpretation. All of these skills seem to be essential for them in studying at the university because basic understanding from passages is insufficient to enhance their critical thinking. Therefore, the textbook writers and test makers should be aware of various genres of reading and design materials to help learners develop their skills.

2) Reading questions in the textbooks and tests need to be considered

as well. The number of literal comprehension items is still high when compared with other types, for example, inference and evaluation questions. Not only reorganization question, but also inference, interpretative, evaluation and personal response questions are useful for Thai students to improve their critical thinking, connecting and treating texts as the whole picture, and problem-solving skills when they are asked to be a part of messages. These questions allow them to search for information, words, or phrases to rearrange, connect, and support their thoughts. Therefore, the questions that only check understanding in textbooks need to be changed in order to practice high-order skills while literal comprehension questions in the examinations can possibly be reduced and the other types can be added, especially questions of inference and evaluation.

3) Questioning techniques used in the textbook should be reconsidered to maximize students' knowledge in dealing with real situations they are likely to encounter in their future. Multiple choice questions and True-or-False items need to be reduced due to the fact that small number of choices allows students to guess answers. Ordering tasks, short answers, transferring information or summarizing might be applied to test Thai students' understanding so that teachers can really assess their students and provide accurate suggestions from them to improve their skills. However, these techniques require careful attention and revision because, sometimes, the writers tend to ask the students explicitly from the texts which, instead of thinking, they tend to copy the answers. In exam papers, test makers should add writing section to test learners' understanding and critical thinking by reading their answers rather than checking from the choices they chose in computer sheet. Due to the fact that answers in computer sheet cannot really indicate whether learners really understand passages or just guess, writing sections will help test makers know and evaluate students' performance more accurate. The questions in writing section should not be focused too much on basic understanding, but should encourage learners to think, organize and apply their ideas to be the most suitable answers for questions.

4) In terms of formats, there is a limitation for students to access different formats such as news, advertisements, articles, or brochures. The passages tend to be written by textbook writers. With the combination of contents that seem to be based on western cultures, Thai students are limited to a particular format and content which cause them to sound unfamiliar with other formats. Therefore, the textbook writers should try to add more formats, for instance, news, comics, brochures, signs, advertisements and others found in reality in addition to passages that are possibly written by the writers themselves. Students, subsequently, should have opportunities to

explore real contents and encounter in reality to prepare and develop them to be more interpretative and critical with reasonable supporting ideas. Moreover, contents need to help the students activate knowledge and connect to their own experiences, which can encourage or motivate them to learn English.

Limitations of the study

1) Textbooks: The five textbooks approved by Office of the Basic Education Commission to be used in Mathayom 5. However, O-NET and GAT examinations aim to assess the overall knowledge of Thai students from grades 10 to 12. However, selecting only one or two textbooks from each grade cannot represent all textbooks.

2) Limited access of updated information: The five examinations were downloaded from NIETS' website. However, the academic years that are available for downloading are limited to three years from 2008 to 2010 only. The researcher could not access the tests from 2011.

3) Access to classroom data: This study mainly focuses on the textbooks and tests. Apart from materials, the data of classroom such as the studying time in each semester, the number of students in class, or lesson plans and course curriculum, might be factors that affect the ways in which reading passages and questions are designed for teaching. However, these are not discussed in this study.

4) Access to teaching data: The selected textbooks are only sources approved by Ministry of Education. However, the researcher did not observe classrooms. Teachers might provide other materials used from other authentic sources in the class apart from textbooks or assign extensive reading to help explore various genres and genres if necessary in order to prepare them for further education. Therefore, interviewing teachers might possibly help access more data to have a clearer picture of genres used in teaching.

5) Access to data of students: Students in the classroom might share different schematic knowledge and previous educational background. Some might transfer from other schools where course curriculum tends to be designed differently. Some students might not have an opportunity to study at tutoring schools to gain more knowledge. These factors might influence their reading, thinking and interpreting skills.

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