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INTRODUCTION

Ben: Full guide to IELTS Speaking Part 1. Hello there, my name is Ben Worthington. In this tutorial, we are going to look at how to efficiently prepare for IELTS Speaking Part 1 and this is going to help you in your exam because we're going to look at not only tips-- I'm not a massive fan of tips. I prefer the fundamentals, but this would be good guidance and also, we're going to look at typical mistakes that are made during IELTS Speaking Part 1.



Now, if you are at home and in lockdown because of corona, then I just want to mention that we're all in this pretty much in the West at the moment and a lot of Asian countries have already gone through this especially China and we're in the middle of it now I think or even some countries are just beginning.

All I wanted to say is that it's not the end of the world and the smart ones amongst you-- which I imagine is probably the majority or I hope it's the majority-- the smart ones amongst you will realize that it's temporary, that things are going to get back to normal pretty soon and we've got to learn how to make the most of this situation and basically just see what advantages there are to this situation.

GET ORGANISED WITH A ROUTINE



So, maybe we've got to start being better organized with our routine. Perhaps we've got to take full advantage of just being in lockdown. Perhaps it's a good opportunity to shift all our media into English. It's basically up to you and how you deal with it. As I was listening the other day to a podcast, it's a famous saying. It's basically **it's not what happens to you, it's how you deal with it.**

I'll say that again because it's quite important. **It's not what happens to you, it's how you deal with it.** To be honest, I've been in a bit of a slump the last two weeks I'd guess-- I'd say. The lockdown was really getting me down and then I heard this and it's just a reminder. It's just a reminder that we're all going through this and different people are going to react differently to it.

There's going to be some that are just going to vegetate on the couch watching Netflix or watching garbage online and then there's going to be a few of us which are going to make the



most of this; that are going to say okay, this is a real opportunity to improve my language skills, a real opportunity to dig down into IELTS and pass when the centers open again.

I'm not saying that I was in the second group. I was at first and then I had a bit of a slump and now I'm back again. All right. So, give yourself a break if you are in the loser group at the moment and just realize that it's not forever. It's up to you to pull yourself out of it.

IELTS SPEAKING PART 1

Right. Let's get on to the IELTS Speaking Part 1. As you know, the whole exam is going to be between 10-15 minutes. The examiner is probably going to be burnt out. That's not obviously on the official website, but imagine you are the examiner and you're listening to your 20th student talk about themselves. So, just keep that in mind.



Have a little bit of empathy for this examiner. Try and make their job easy as possible. Smile. Go in there confidently. Sit up straight. Maybe slow down the way you're talking. Be aware. Are you just a nuclear bomb of ideas that's just blah, blah, blah, blah, blah or is it controlled effective automatic speaking? We're going to get to that in a minute.

So anyway, **Part 1**: 4-5 minutes about you and everyday situations. Part 2 we know is the cue card and Part 3: abstract questions related to what you were talking about before. Now, as you get into the test environment, you will see there's one examiner in front of you. They will be recording the entire session.

Now, a few students are caught off guard, but basically, having the whole situation recorded-- the whole test recorded is basically for you. So, if you feel that you've been hard done by, there's that recording which is there and you can go back and ask maybe for a re-mark and that



recording exists just to see if the examiner was doing their job correctly, which I think in most cases they will be doing.

Now, what should your approach be? Well, you've got to really develop the ability to tune into other examiners' accents. This is really important. This is a really important skill because imagine you've got an examiner who talks quite fast or maybe talks with a Scottish accent, it's your responsibility to be able to understand them.

Now, I imagine that examiners will be speaking slightly slower, perhaps speaking clearer. However, it could be halfway through the test day and they're a little bit tired or maybe they just got up on the wrong side of the bed and they just want to get through the day. Either way, it doesn't matter. It's up to you to be able to develop the skill to tune into accents quickly.



How do you do this? Well, you listen to a range of different materials and you get used to understanding people. Now, this happens a lot with me. When I go back to Spain and I speak with my friends in Valencia, it takes me a while to tune in, but once I'm tuned in, I can understand most of the people. So, get yourself warmed up before going into the test center.

And not just listening, you want to be speaking for a good hour if you can beforehand or at least the morning and this will just get you warmed up and it'll get you to the best of your ability, okay?

DON'T GO IN WITH PRE-MEMORISED ANSWERS

Next one: don't go in there with pre-memorized answers. Examiners can spot this a mile off and it's not going to help you, okay? Now, there is a difference between pre-memorized answers and



fillers. Fillers are fragments which are okay, but a whole memorized script isn't going to help you that much. Now, I'm going to get into that in more detail later on as well.

HOW IS IT MARKED

Now, how is it marked? Well, as you know, there's a 9-band scale and it's going to cover four aspects: fluency and coherence, vocabulary, grammar and accuracy, and pronunciation. It's up to you to decide or it's basically up to you to identify which area you're going to be working on when you're preparing.

I don't recommend working on all four at the same time. I honestly believe it's best to isolate a certain area out of those four that you're going to work on when you're preparing and if you've listened to those previous tutorials that we've done, there's different exercises we offer and



different guidance and maybe even phrases and different techniques and possibly even frameworks that you can use that will help you in each of those different sections.

Now, a big issue is stress. A lot of students-- and this is really unfair I think because if you're a student and you're talking with your friends, maybe you're speaking at a band 7, but then you go into the exam center and suddenly, you're at a band 5.5 and you're like hey, where did my English go? What's happening here?

If this is your situation, then it's up to you. It might sound like hey, this is a lot. This is an unfair and everything like that, but at the end of the day, it's up to you to step up and sort out this problem. So, if you find your English disappearing, then you need to get into more exam conditions and the familiarity of being in that situation, the familiarity of doing mock tests will help you gradually to become more confident in those situations.



You can also look on YouTube for confidence-building techniques. Maybe you could do diaphragmatic breathing. It's just a series of exercises that help calm you down. Maybe you can do some visualizations. Maybe you could just do 10 mock tests so you're completely familiar with it.

MINDSET APPROACH

Here's a little bit of advice as to the approach and the mindset. I always say you can approach it as if it's a job interview. Now, if you fall apart in job interviews, then obviously it's a confidence issue. So, you don't want to be speaking informally. You want to be speaking at a formal level, but not as stilted, not as formal as your academic.

As I've said before, do not try and correct yourself. When I'm say this I mean about phrases and dialogue. Don't try and go back in time and then restructure what you just said. If it's a small



pronunciation slip or a small grammar slip, then you can go back and correct it, but if you're trying to correct meaning, it can have the opposite effect of what you intended because as we all know, speaking as a spontaneous activity and going back in time often ends up more confusing.

So, just you say oops sorry. What I meant was and then go back, but only do it for pronunciation or small grammar issues, but the main issue here is just to keep moving forward.

Now, if you get stilted and nothing comes to mind, I know this is easier said than done, but you can start with a filler and then this will get the ball rolling and once you get the ball rolling, it's easier just to keep continuing rather than looking for that exact phrase that you want and getting uncomfortable with that silence.

Next piece of advice: embrace the questions. This is your opportunity to shine. How do you embrace the questions? Well, you listen, you interpret it, and then you plan your response. A lot



of students might get, as I said before, a nuclear bomb explosion of ideas. If that's your situation, then it's up to you to pick one or two to develop. Don't just blurt them all out.

The other extreme is that nothing comes to mind and as I just said, in that case, go with a filler just to get the ball rolling. What you'll find more often than not is that the ideas will come just as long as you get started. Second thing or final thing I want to say with this is if you are searching for a word and you cannot find it, then you've got two options. You can either replace it with the basic synonym or describe what you are saying.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Now, what you want to know with IELTS Speaking Part 1 is that it's going to be about familiar information questions about yourself; your background, your origin, your story, your



preferences, your hobbies. Now, there really are no excuses not to know some decent vocabulary for this section.

What I've said in my [online classes](#) when we were covering it was it's good just to write out a practice answer for each of these and as I said before, if you can put these into a Google Doc or some kind of grammar correction software, you'll often pick out a lot of errors. It'll spot them automatically and then you can correct what you've written out and now you've got a probably 85% 80% perfect piece of text just to look at.

The next thing you can do is go back and upgrade each of those vocabulary phrases or if you spot some basic vocabulary there, go back and upgrade it. Research it, but there's really no excuse. You want to find the details. For example, if your hobby is scuba diving, then it's good to know vocabulary such as flippers, snorkel, wetsuit, dive time. All of these topic-specific phrases



and words that will help you get a better score. Also, you're going to be better prepared and this is also going to boost your confidence.

Now, the reason why we start off with Part 1 and it being kind of trivial almost small talk stuff is two reasons. One, just to get you accustomed to the exam; get you accustomed to the situation, get you relaxed. This way, you're more likely to get the best score you want which leads to-- sorry, the best score possible which leads to a more accurate assessment of your ability.

Also, like I said a few minutes ago, it's a warm-up and this will get you up and running. We don't start off with Part 2 from the get-go because that would be extremely difficult and it's probably going to end up with a score lower than you deserve and then Part 3, we're looking at more abstract analytical questions.



A tip, by the way, for a Part 3 answer or for Part 3 training is to start describing processes, start giving instructions to people. You can tell them. If you give instructions for somebody on how to change the vacuum bag in your vacuum cleaner and they can't do it with your oral instructions, for example, then there are probably some flaws in your communication.

It's this level of speaking. Can you make good comparisons, abstract comparisons? Can you develop your answers? Can you almost as well argue? Can you debate with somebody? This is the level we're looking at. It's no longer your ability to explain what's on a cue card, your best childhood friend, or your best teacher. No, Part 3 is higher level.

Anyway, I'm going off-topic which is something that I tell you always not to do, okay? I'm going off on a tangent. So, back to Part 1. You want to collect relevant vocabulary about these topics. These topics include your country, your city of origin, your town, your village-- look on Wikipedia. Your daily routines; have you ever written out your daily routines? One thing is



being semi-conscious about them. Yes, I know what I do every morning. I go for a coffee and I pour my cereal, then I do this.

KNOW HOW TO DESCRIBE YOUR PROFESSION

Off-the-cuff, so to speak, you're probably aware, but being able to explicitly state what you do and the order that you do them and the specific vocabulary needed to explain that, you're probably not going to find these gaps in your vocabulary until you write it out and until you think about it. This is why it's insanely important when you're talking about work and employment that you can effectively and confidently explain your profession.

Just the other day in the online classes that we're now doing for students who are on the online course, I was talking to one student from Brazil and I asked him-- now, what was his name now-- Edu I think. Edu, what is your job and he was just like oh, I help people with physical sports



injuries and I was like a physiotherapist? And he was like yes, yes, yes, that's it and I was like Edu, you've got to know how to describe your profession. You've got to know the terminology in your profession.

So, as I said, although you might be aware of it, it's not until you write it all down that you can spot the errors, that you can identify the gaps in vocabulary that need to be filled.

Moving on. Other topics: background education and childhood, your family structure-- is your brother-in-law acting as your father-- these kinds of terms. If that was your situation, you've got to know how to say brother-in-law. You got to know how to say stepsister; all of this.

Public transportation: are there a lot of trams? Is it electric-powered? Is there a maglev? All these. Forms of building in your home country. I've just been reading a great book about Russia and I've discovered the term dacha. Dacha. I never knew about this and apparently, it's some



kind of country house outside of the city center. So, if I was Russian and in the summer I go back to my village and we go to our-- I could say to my house in the countryside or if I want to get points, if I want to get over to band 7, I'm going to say dacha.

Typical occupations in your home country. For example, here in Hungary where I am at the moment, there are a lot of dentists. This kind of knowledge I wouldn't know unless I was researching. Likewise in Manchester, the typical occupation-- I don't know actually. The typical occupation in Manchester probably something in the service sector. Now that the BBC has moved up there from London, I think there's a lot of talk about people working in media. So, I could easily say that, but anyway it doesn't have to be 100% accurate.

Moving on: typical landscapes and weather in your home country. Now, this is absolutely irrefutable and inexcusable. You need to know about the vocabulary of your area. I encountered this problem actually when I was living in Spain and I wanted to describe that Yorkshire-- where



I'm from-- has lots of moors, lots of hills. They are not mountains. They are hills and moor is a specific type of hill and everybody just kept understanding the Moors which are a group of people that came over from Morocco. So, you've got to be able to describe your specific situation.

Moving on: your personal likes and dislikes. Now, in order to take this to the next level, we don't want to say I like basketball and I like Earl Grey tea. No. We got to add some spice in there. I love Formula One racing. It makes my blood boil when the-- what are they called now-- a good example of this vocabulary escaping me. I'm a native English speaker. The officials-- for lack of a better word-- it makes my blood boil when the officials disqualify drivers in Formula One.

Do you see how much vocabulary was there? I'm talking about officials. I've got a nice collocation my blood boil; it makes me angry in Formula One. Disqualify-- more vocabulary-- the drivers. This is why it's good just to be aware. Jump in, do the research, write out your



answers, get some good vocabulary in there, test them with your friend, test them online, test them with a tutor and really just write them out. Enrich your answers. Test them out. Find more gaps in your vocabulary.

Moving on: preferences in reading, preferences in films, music, games. Also, another good reason to expand your vocabulary on likes and dislikes. Do you dislike opera or do you absolutely hate opera? Do you love looking after your cat or are you more of a dog-person?

Your hobbies, interest, pastimes; that's straightforward. We should be doing this with all of these: celebrations, holidays, festivals, languages, linguistic proficiency, and then once again, newspaper, media, and TV.

Now, the questions in Part 1 of the speaking exam are only going to be focusing on two of these. It could be family structure and then celebrations, holidays, and festivals. It's only going to be



two, all right? Now, what a lot of students might do-- and this is because they're not so familiar with the exam format-- is they try to squeeze everything into an exhaustive answer.

This was happening a lot in the online classes that we were doing. I'd ask a student about-- tell me a typical celebration in your country and I would get I would get ... okay, okay, okay, okay, I get it. I wasn't so rude, but afterwards I would have to say hey, that was good, but let's just do two sentences. That's sufficient. Your long answers come later. Save your energy for Part 3. That's when we want to be developing them.

Now, another good area to work on, as I said before, it's not only likes and dislikes and getting better and more precise at describing your feelings, your likes, what you hate, what you love, but you also want to work on your descriptive skills. You do this by collecting adjectives and phrases related to these topics that we mentioned before.



So, if you're from a sunny country, for example, you can say I'm from Spain. It's extremely bright and sunny and warm in August. It's almost unbearable. How much richer is that than I'm from a sunny country or it shines a lot in my country. So, some examples: we could say a cuddly cat instead of just a cat. We can say a compassionate neighbor, a considerate colleague, an eccentric neighbor. We can say there are sometimes sunny spells in England, but it's mainly grim and grey.

So, we don't want to overdo it, but on the other side, we don't want to make it bland. A very good example of bland is if you're using the word nice. I used to have a friend and she would say oh that building is so nice. Oh, that car is so nice. Oh, that bike is so nice. I was like you've got to enrich your vocabulary. We could say that building is culturally-- it is so artisan. It's so much richer than nice.



A few members in my family are always using nice and I used to try and correct them and get them to improve their vocabulary, which wasn't a smart thing to do. Never correct your mum with correct grammar or try to get your mum to improve her vocabulary. Don't do that, by the way. I don't think you would be as silly as me, but it doesn't usually end well.

So, this is why it's good to write out your answers and then you've got some distance from them and you can see them. Then you can go back and try and enrich them. The thesaurus is a wonderful tool for doing this.

Now, final points-- well, we've got a few more points actually. We're not on the final one. Now, I teach a technique when I'm doing my one-on-one classes and also when we've been doing the group classes and that is reflecting. Now, I teach this with a grain of salt, okay? On the one hand,



you want to identify the correct grammar used. On the other hand, you do not want to sound like a robotic parrot. So, it's a fine balance we've got to walk.

By the way, this technique also gets you moving when you can't think of anything. So, as I said before, if you sometimes find yourself like a deer in the headlights i.e. you are just frozen and you can't get started, this technique will help you, but you can't rely on this technique, okay?

So, I'll just briefly explain. If you get the question would you rather live in an apartment or a house in the country, the general idea is that you reply with I would rather. You reflect the exact question word-for-word, phrase-for-phrase, article-for-article, and this gets you off to a good start. However, as I've said before, you don't want to be doing this throughout the exam because you might sound like a robotic parrot.



However, if you are around a band 5.5 or 6 and you're going for a 7-- well, if you're going for 6.5, it could be a good technique, but if you're going for a 7 or over, what you need to do is use this technique, but enrich it and very briefly say-- So, if we get the question would you rather live in an apartment or a house in the country, we enrich it by reflecting it back, but we improve it. We say well, to be honest, I've never really thought about that. I think I'd probably prefer living in the countryside rather than stuck up in a flat.

So, this way we haven't done it word-for-word, but we have reflected the exact same grammar tense, but we've added I'd probably. We answered with a contraction there. It just all sounds much more natural, but we're staying on topic and we are totally staying focused on what has been asked on us-- of us, sorry. We're not bouncing around talking about different subjects. So, it is a very powerful technique and it's great to get you started, but don't rely on this, okay? Use it.



It's one of the many tools that you can get on the Speaking Confidence Course. I'm not going to go into how we can gain this skill at the moment because that's not the focus of this tutorial. The focus is mainly on Part 1. If you're in a rush and you need to get your speaking exam out of the way or if you just want some structure-- if you want some structure to your speaking practice then maybe the speaking course will help you there, okay?

Anyway, next point: pay attention to the grammar that is used in your question. Very similar to what we were saying before. How do we do this? Well, we can listen to mock exams. We can find out some mock answers and some mock questions. If you go back, some of our old podcasts were just purely a tutor going through the questions and this is really good because you can listen and we use different examiners.

We use a Scottish examiner, we use a Welsh examiner, and we got them all to ask different questions in different accents and different constructions. So, not only are you fine-tuning your



listening skills, which is essential but you're also getting used to different accents. You're also getting accustomed to different grammatical constructions in the questions.

This is a very, very common error that the student misunderstands the question. It happened quite a few times in the online classes actually. The reason is because we think we've understood the question, but what we've actually done is we've assumed the question was going this way and then we answered going that way when really it was going in a different direction and we didn't listen properly.

By the way, transcribing and doing maybe 10-20 minutes of transcribing every day is a good way to really fine-tune your listening skills; to fine-tune the accuracy in your listening skills.

Now, as I said, a solid answer, a good answer in IELTS Speaking Part 1 is one, you're not only going to embrace the question as in, not run with it but you're going to embrace it. What do I



mean? I mean you're not going to give a one-word answer. You're going to step up to the challenge and you're going to give one or two developed sentences.

For example, the question what responsibilities do you have at work? You could say a lot and it's very stressful and the examiner is going to be silently screaming inside. He's like I can't stand this anymore or you could give a well-developed answer like well, I must say I don't have that many to be honest and it usually depends on the circumstances. Typically, I'd have to make sure that the computers are working and that my manager has his inbox empty and that I've responded to all the inquiries from customers. Just two developed sentences. It's quite honest. I'm not exaggerating. I'm going into a little bit of detail. Just try keep that in mind.

Now, as I said, a very common error is that the answer is either too short or it's too long. You need to know what is your typical response. Generally speaking, I find that speakers in Eastern Europe are usually a little bit-- how would I say-- not curt but a little bit more direct. They give



shorter answers and they'll just give the answer because that's the culture. There's a very interesting reason behind that. I think it's to do with communism and people being-- I'm not getting into it.

Whereas people from Latin speaking countries; Spain, South America, Italy, possibly southern France, maybe Romania, these students usually give longer answers. I think it's similar for Asian students. My understanding is that it's a little bit more-- it's not a question of the length of the answer, but it's usually a question of nervousness and confidence. So, each country and each region usually has their own specific challenges and it's up to you to identify like okay, I talk too much. I've really got to develop this weird Anglo-Saxon obsession with small talk. I've got to really start developing my answers or I've got to at least start speaking a little bit longer and not fall into the habit of oh, my English is terrible. Don't do things like that. It's really immature.



Now then, if you can't think of anything to say, just bear in mind that Part 1 is always about you. It's always going to be about you. So, even if you get a question about tell me about the festivals in your village or your city or your country and if on the very, very, very small chance you're from a country that doesn't have any festivals, then you need to get out of there-- no, I'm joking.

If you're from a country that doesn't have any festivals or celebrations like that, then you can just say look, I'm sorry. Nothing comes to mind at the moment, but my uncle is now living in Boston and once a year, they have the Boston Marathon. He's told me about this a few times and this is a real extravagant way to have a marathon.

So, you've just got to work around that. It's up to you to develop this skill of working around it and likewise with IELTS Writing Part 2. I hear so many times that students hate writing about



economics or they've got zero interest in economics. It doesn't matter. You've got to learn about it or you've got to at least learn a little bit in order to be able to answer the questions.

Now, if you don't understand the examiner, you can ask them to repeat the question. That's fine, but try to really-- if you find this is happening to you then you have a tuning in problem. You have an accent recognition problem. It's up to you to develop this. As I said before, listen to a wide variety of sources.

If you listen to the news, then you're probably going to be a little bit biased because news presenters, like myself, they enunciate and they pronounce every word quite clearly and they put some effort in the pronunciation and the communication. They try make it as clear as possible. If you listen to radio shows on the other hand or conversational podcasts, then it's a different story. There's no emphasis there on being understood because they're probably all native English speakers and they understand each other and the audience are probably native English speakers



and there's no emphasis there. It's up to you to be able to respond and to understand these types of situations.

Now, what if you're unsure about your answer? Don't worry about it. The only wrong answer is if it's off-topic. So, there's a few different ways we can get around that. You can say something like well, I'm not sure what you mean, but there is a festival in my uncle's city that seems really amazing or I'm not sure if this is what your question was, but I used to have a friend with ginger hair, but I quickly ditched him. No, I'm joking.

So, you can orientate it, but don't make a habit of doing this. Only do it when it's absolutely necessary and this just protects you. If you think that you might be going off topic and you've already asked the examiner once or twice or a few times to repeat the question, then you can start using phrases like this, okay?



If the examiner asks you about festivals in your city or your country and you answer with I'm not entirely sure what you meant by that, but my dad recently bought a new Jaguar... then it's just like what! What! Get out. No, that's not going to happen, but what I'm saying is that if you are going to use that approach, obviously make it as on-topic as possible. So, a good way to do this as well is if you're struggling, an emergency situation could be just trying to figure out the key words in the question. It's usually a good start.

If you're struggling over how much you should say, err on the side of more. More is better. If you're going on and on and on, the examiner is going to cut you off and that's probably a good sign to start shortening your answers. If the examiner cuts you off once, then reel it in a bit. If the examiner is still cutting you off, then reel your answers in even more.

Now, a common question is can I tell lies? This is a difficult situation. Lies are okay. You're not going to fail your exam because you told a lie. However, I think it's more difficult because if



you're telling a lie, then you've not only got to explain the lie but you've got to assign some mental energy into inventing the lie.

We don't want to be in that situation. It's much better if we can just divert all our mental energy into getting what's in our head out into the open rather than not only inventing the story that's in our head and then also communicating that.

Now, one final thing. If you think you are stumbling and hesitating-- and also this is useful for those students who get an explosion of ideas-- if you think you fall into that bucket, then two approaches. One, fillers. Well, I've never really thought about that. Well, if I remember correctly... If my memory serves me well, I think... for example... You can use fillers like that.

I think a more powerful approach is to pause and possibly even lower your voice, but pausing is definitely the way to go. You put a second pause in there-- a one-second pause in there, sorry,



and what this does is it creates a tiny little bit of suspense. It allows you to collect your thoughts and it makes what you say sound more important. We've talked about this a few times before on the podcast, so I just wanted to remind you there.

So, we're finishing now. Thank you very much for listening. We've got some more podcasts coming up about the speaking especially Speaking Part 2: the cue cards, so keep an eye out for those and just one final thing. If you are struggling with your IELTS preparation-- I know that it's quite easy to get overwhelmed especially if you are in lockdown-- then assigning some structure to your day, assigning some structure to your study schedule, and even following a laid-out process, for example-- which is what we've got on the online course-- this will help you a lot. This will relieve a lot of stress and frustration.

If you've got a clear process to follow, for example, this is what we've got on the online course. We've got the instructions. You watch the first tutorial then you watch the second tutorial and



then we say okay, do this, this, and this. Then you send in your answers, we give you some feedback, and then we say okay, based on the feedback, you need to watch this, this, and this.

What we're doing is guiding you and giving you that feedback so you can improve faster and more effectively and it just adds a bit of structure. You've also got the examiners available-- sorry, not the examiners. You've also got our team to help you. So, if you say I'm struggling with my listening, we can give you resources and guidance to reduce your IELTS frustration. So, why not make the most of this lockdown?

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