

# HOW TO DEBATE CONFIDENTLY AND COURTEOUSLY

*"Debate is masculine, conversation is feminine."* ~Amos Bronson Alcott,

American Philosopher & Teacher

Well, well, well.

This could be an excellent topic for a debate.

I can see tempers flaring and fingers flying.

I can smell controversy and a war of words from afar.

I can hear fierce arguments and heated disagreements.

It would be something to watch.

Would I want to participate in such a contentious debate?

No.

Why?

Because I don't like debating in the first place. I hate arguing with people. I like staying away from conflicts.

What if the debate were in a school or an office setting? It could be nice.

No.

Why?

Because I don't like debating at all. It's not my cup of tea. I would rather do something else.

I think it's nice to share your opinions with different types of people. So why are you teaching us how to debate anyway?


Because debating is an art that everybody should know, just in case.

In case of what?

Well, you see. This can go on and on forever. Often, arguments are never-ending stories. For them to be enjoyable and enlightening, they have to be structured and peaceful.

**Your Turn:** If you debate, what type of debates do you readily engage in? If you don't debate, what are your reasons for not doing so? What would make you change your mind? Prepare your answers and record yourself using a mobile phone.

## Adjectives for Describing Debates

			
Nice Cool Interesting Bold Engaging Lively Pleasant Convincing Decisive Original Dynamic Logical Rewarding	Rough Agitated Boring Fearful Unappealing Lifeless Unpleasant Unconvincing Insignificant Standard Static Illogical Unrewarding	Great ★ Excellent Deep Outstanding Meaningful ★ Wonderful Powerful Brilliant Fierce ★ Peaceful Diplomatic Friendly Structured	Mediocre Poor Shallow Unexceptional Meaningless Awful Weak Lacklustre Lethargic Contentious Tactless Violent Unstructured

For some people, the format of the debate matters the most.

Debates are not just the formal, structured kind that you encounter in an [academic setting](#).

You can also debate at home with your siblings, parents or children, at work with your colleagues or online with total strangers.

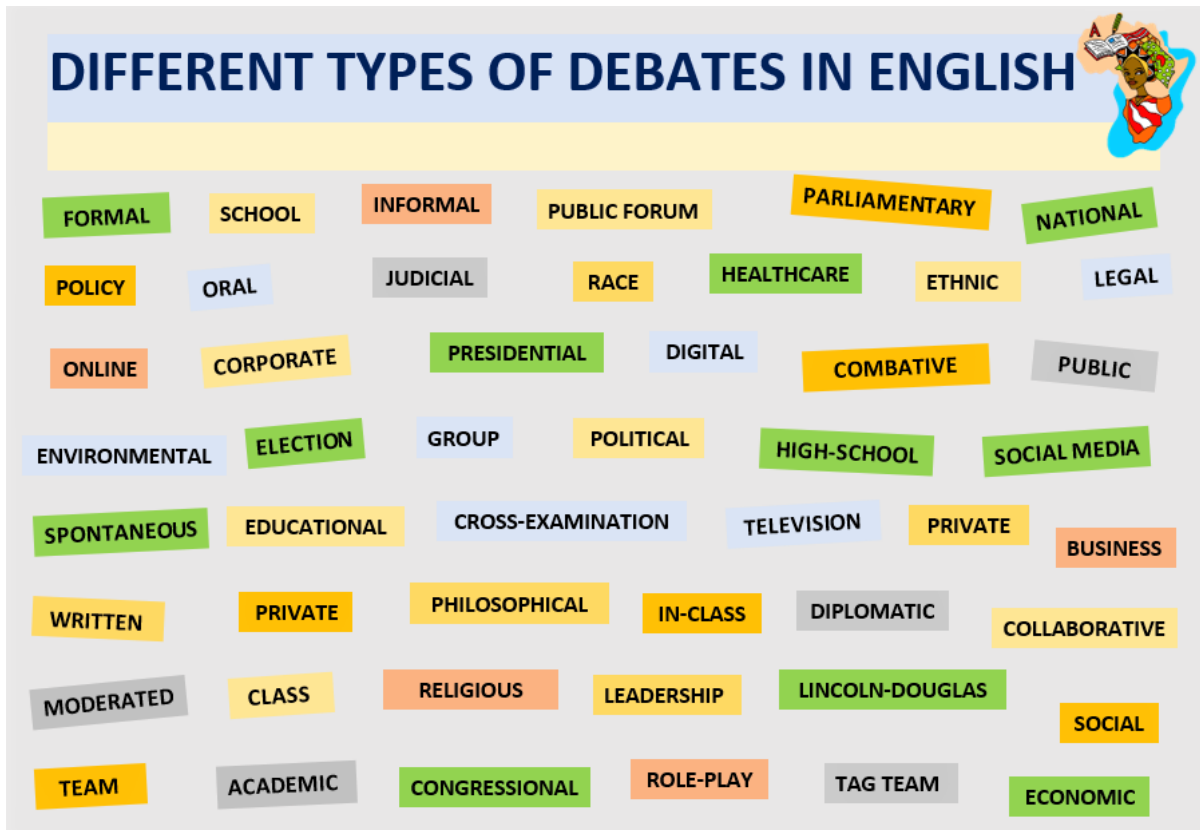
The main goal of a debate is to prove that you are right about a certain subject or topic and that the opposing side is wrong.

This is basically an argument and we always want to win arguments. To emerge victorious, you have to support your statements or claims with evidence.

Therefore, debating is intrinsically competitive. You need a winning side and a losing side. In fact, there are judges who evaluate your performance as you dish out your arguments.

These judges can be appointed or not. They can actually be your friends, your parents, the audience in a presidential debate, onlookers in the street or readers on social media.

Hence, it matters to know what type of debate you are going to engage in and who is going to judge you.



For your own information, when I was in secondary school, I used to be in a debate club to improve my English oral skills. We would participate in competitions and the winner was always the same.

He came from a rival school and he was such a powerful and charismatic orator that even the judges were in awe of him.

What about me? I wouldn't say that I was a poor speaker but I wasn't memorable either. Did I ever win?

No, of course, I didn't.

I did what I was expected to do (memorising the facts and spitting them out fearfully) but I was never cut out for arguing fiercely in front of a group of people.

However, with time, like with everything else, I discovered that debate could be learned. I discovered that one can actually become a good speaker with the right amount of training.

So what type of debater are you?

### **Are you...?**

- charismatic?
- brave?
- fearful?
- keen?
- articulate?
- fierce?
- tactless?
- polite?
- impolite?
- persuasive?
- organised?





### **Do you...?**

- interrupt your opponents?
- wait for your turn to speak?
- use foul language?
- yell all the time?
- give well-researched and surprising arguments?
- stick to the topic?
- argue just for the sake of arguing?
- learn from your opponents' arguments?
- support your arguments with facts?
- appeal to [ethos, pathos and logos](#) in order to persuade your adversaries?
- listen?

## Can you...?

- find arguments easily?
- speak clearly and intelligibly?
- convince your opponent effortlessly?
- make dramatic pauses for more effect?
- react quickly?
- find faults in your opponent's arguments?
- speak confidently and courteously?

### Different Types of Debaters in English

			
Good Keen Witty Brave Eloquent Able Believable Practised Experienced Seasoned Well-rehearsed Gifted Effective	Bad Reluctant Boring Fearful Dumb Incompetent Untrustworthy Unpractised Inexperienced Callow Unprepared Ineffectual Ineffective	Great ★ Excellent Formidable Talented Articulate ★ Powerful Brilliant Passionate Fiery ★ Doughty Persuasive Persistent Confident	Mediocre Poor Lacklustre Talentless Inarticulate Weak Dull Apathetic Passionless Cowardly Unconvincing Irresolute Self-doubting

## [How to Debate Confidently and Courteously: Step One \(Definitions\)](#)

Debating can greatly improve your oral expression skills in English.

Learning how to debate confidently and courteously might even open more doors for you.

For example, during job interviews, employers tend to choose candidates who can express themselves eloquently, politely and confidently.

So, how do you go about learning this skill?

Let's start with a few vital definitions first.

**A debate can be:**

- a serious discussion about a subject of public interest.
- a competition in which teams of students with opposing views discuss a particular topic and a winning side has to be chosen.
- a structured argument.
- a dispute.

**An opponent is...**

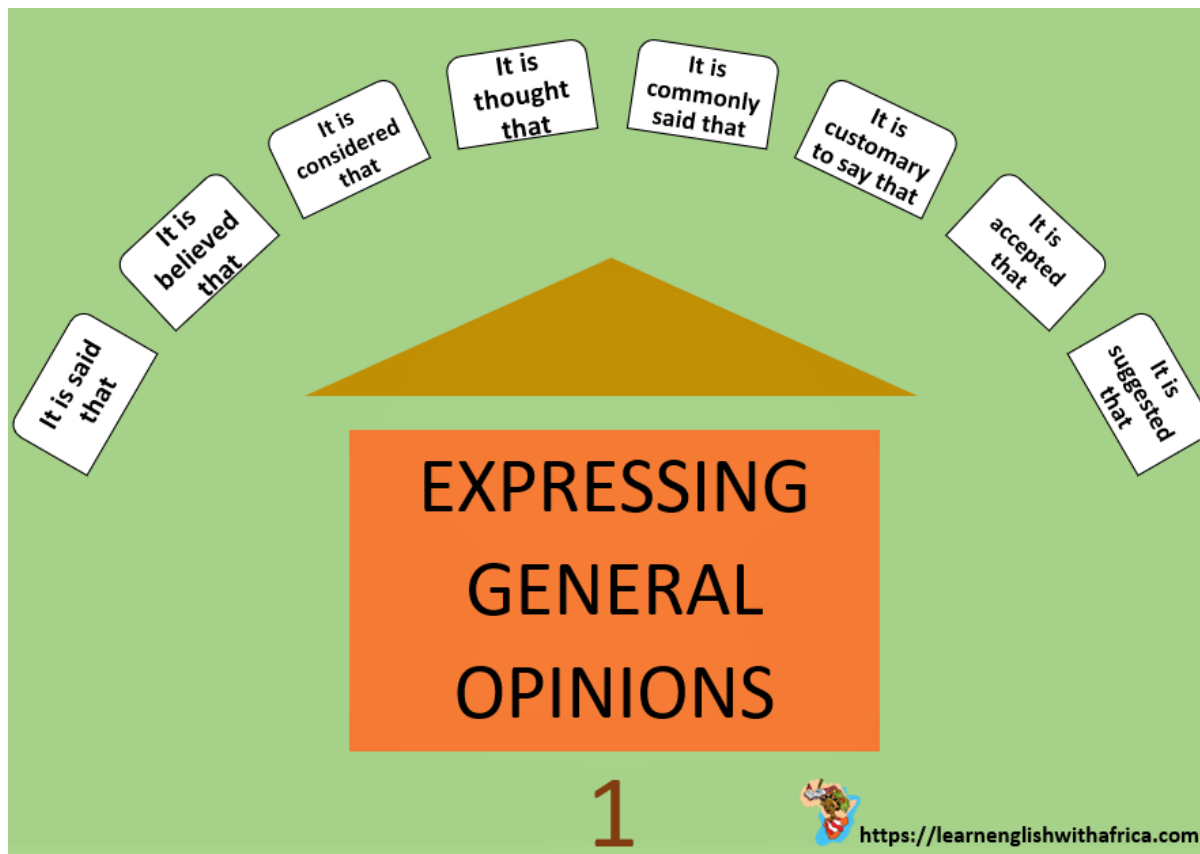
- a person who opposes.
- an individual who disagrees with someone's views.
- a competitor.
- an objector.
- a challenger.
- a rival.

**Confident debaters...**

- are full of conviction.
- trust in their abilities.
- feel sure about their opinions.
- are not insecure.

**Courteous debaters...**

- are polite.
- are respectful.
- are considerate.
- have polished manners.



## [How to Debate Confidently and Courteously: Step Two \(Conditions for Success\)](#)

As an English speaker, how do you develop...?

### [Confidence](#)

Below are **5 tips** to help you become more confident when you are speaking.

1. **Participate in as many debates as you can**: Confidence usually comes with experience and exposure. The more you do debates in English, the better you will become because you will acquire the skills to handle different types of situations.
2. **Do proper research**: Research is also important when you are presented with a subject that you have to debate. Look online, go to your local library, search in books or magazines that you already have. Being knowledgeable about a particular topic makes you look more credible.
3. **Work on your oral expression actively**: You can practise with a friend or a classmate. You can focus on pronunciation, rhythm, tone and voice modulation. Your efforts will certainly pay off.

4. **Work on your body language:** Knowing how your body behaves is vital. You can learn how to make eye contact with your opponent or with the audience. You can remove unnecessary body movements like excessive hand gestures that may reveal that you are nervous.
  5. **Expand your vocabulary:** Eloquence is a cherished quality, especially in competitive debate. To acquire the necessary lingo, you need to watch other debates and read guidebooks that teach you how to debate. Your opponents can also teach you how to formulate arguments. So, listen to what they are saying very carefully.
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We have just seen how you can become a more confident debater. What about becoming more courteous when you are speaking?

How do you develop...?

### **Courteousness**

Below are **5 tips** to help you become more courteous when you are debating.

1. **Listen to your opponents:** it is very important that you really hear what the other side has to say. It is a way of showing them respect and this is good for you because your answers will be more relevant.
2. **Do not interrupt your adversaries:** waiting for your turn to speak is essential. You will thus hear the whole side of your rival's argument and you can respond to it accordingly.
3. **Use proper language:** make sure that you are using appropriate language to address your opponents or talk about the issue at stake. You can learn this by observing excellent speakers so that you can emulate them.
4. **'Don't raise your voice but improve your argument':** as Archbishop and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Desmond Tutu, once said, it is better to avoid yelling at your opponents. You will not score more points by shouting at the top of your voice. If you want to be heard, ensure that everyone in the room can comfortably hear you without damaging your vocal cords.



5. **Have proper body language:** if you do not agree with your opponents' views, avoid disparaging them with sneers, raising your eyebrows all the time or smiling unnecessarily. If you do, you will look haughty or arrogant.

## How to Debate Confidently and Courteously: Step Three (Sample Debate Speech)

### Topic: Zoos should be banned

#### For

This is the affirmative side. Here, the speaker will argue in favour of the topic under discussion.

#### **Introduction:**

4 years ago, a male gorilla named Harambe was shot at the [Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden](#) in the United States of America, barely a day after his 17th birthday. The incident happened after he had grabbed and dragged a three-year-old boy who had fallen into his enclosure.

I strongly believe that Harambe would still be alive today if he had not been put into a cage in the first place. This is why I am in favour of today's topic: ***Zoos should be banned*** and I will prove that animals are much better living in their own environmental habitat than being kept in some cage for our own selfish pleasures.

The word 'zoo' is a short term for 'zoological garden.' According to a [Cambridge Dictionary](#) definition, a zoo is an 'area in which animals, especially wild animals are kept so that people can go and look at them or study them. If we 'ban' zoos, we want to say that that zoos should be forbidden.

In my opinion, zoos should be banned for three main reasons. **First of all**, the mortality rate of captive animals is higher than that of wild animals. **Secondly**, animals lose their natural instincts when they are kept by humans against their will. **Lastly**, zoos should not be allowed to exist because they are a major threat to basic and fundamental animal rights.

## **Argument 1**

The mortality rate for some animals is much higher in captivity than in the wild.

There are more premature and horrendous deaths in zoos than in the wild. According to [www.freedomforanimals.org.uk](http://www.freedomforanimals.org.uk), one of the United Kingdom's longest-running charities working to protect animals, 40% of captive-born lion cubs are said to die before one month of age. It is also said that African elephants live three times longer in their natural habitat than in zoos. These statistics are, of course, unacceptable and something should be done about them.

We can **thus** safely say that it is much better to let nature take its course and let animals live longer. We should not shorten the life span of animals for our own selfish reasons. We should leave animals in the wild where they are supposed to thrive and we should not tamper with how the natural world should be. This leads me to my second argument.

## **Argument 2**

Animals lose their natural instincts when they are kept in a cage by human beings against their will.

In an article that appeared on [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com), James Owen wrote that most captive-born predators die if they are released in the wild, the survival rate standing at 33 % only. In fact, the journalist was reporting the findings of a study about animal survival rates of reintroduced species. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom. These experts found out that captive-born carnivores such as tigers and wolves were more likely to starve to death if reintroduced in the wild. The researchers attributed this to captive animals' lack of hunting skills, fear of human beings, not enough fear of other wild animals, accidents and poaching.

Of course, we see the correlation between captivity and loss of natural instincts for these animals. It goes without saying that it would have been much better if the animals had been born in the wild. There, they would have learned how to survive in what can sometimes be a natural hostile environment.

**Hence**, when we see these findings, we should be asking ourselves if zoos are not violating basic animal rights just by existing. Zoos actually imprison animals in a cruel manner and deprive them of their basic animal right to live in their natural birthplace.

This takes me to my third and last argument.

### **Argument 3**

Zoos should not be allowed to exist because they are a major threat to basic and fundamental animal rights.

Human beings believe in and fight for their basic human rights. They even have a [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) that was proclaimed in 1948 with the help of the United Nations. This document guarantees their basic right to life, freedom, healthcare and a torture-free existence, among things. As living creatures, they enjoy these rights to the fullest so why shouldn't the other living creatures on earth enjoy the very same rights and privileges? Most animals in zoos are not treated as they should. Hence, they get depressed when they are in captivity as an [article](#) in the Guardian rightly reveals. Animal caretakers in zoos might have the best of intentions but statistics prove otherwise. A zoo in [Cumbria](#) lost nearly 500 animals in a span of four years and saw its licence revoked before it was renewed. 500 animals! This is one dead animal every three days! This should not be happening in the 21st century.

**Consequently**, animals would fair much better if they were treated well by human beings. This starts by the closing and banning of animal prisons which we mistakenly call 'zoos'. Animals are used to living in bigger spaces where they can hunt for their own food, yet we wrongfully put them in tight spaces where they can hardly breathe and where they lead an unchallenged and monotonous existence. No wonder they get depressed! Should we ban zoos? Absolutely! The world would be such a better place to live in!

### **Conclusion**

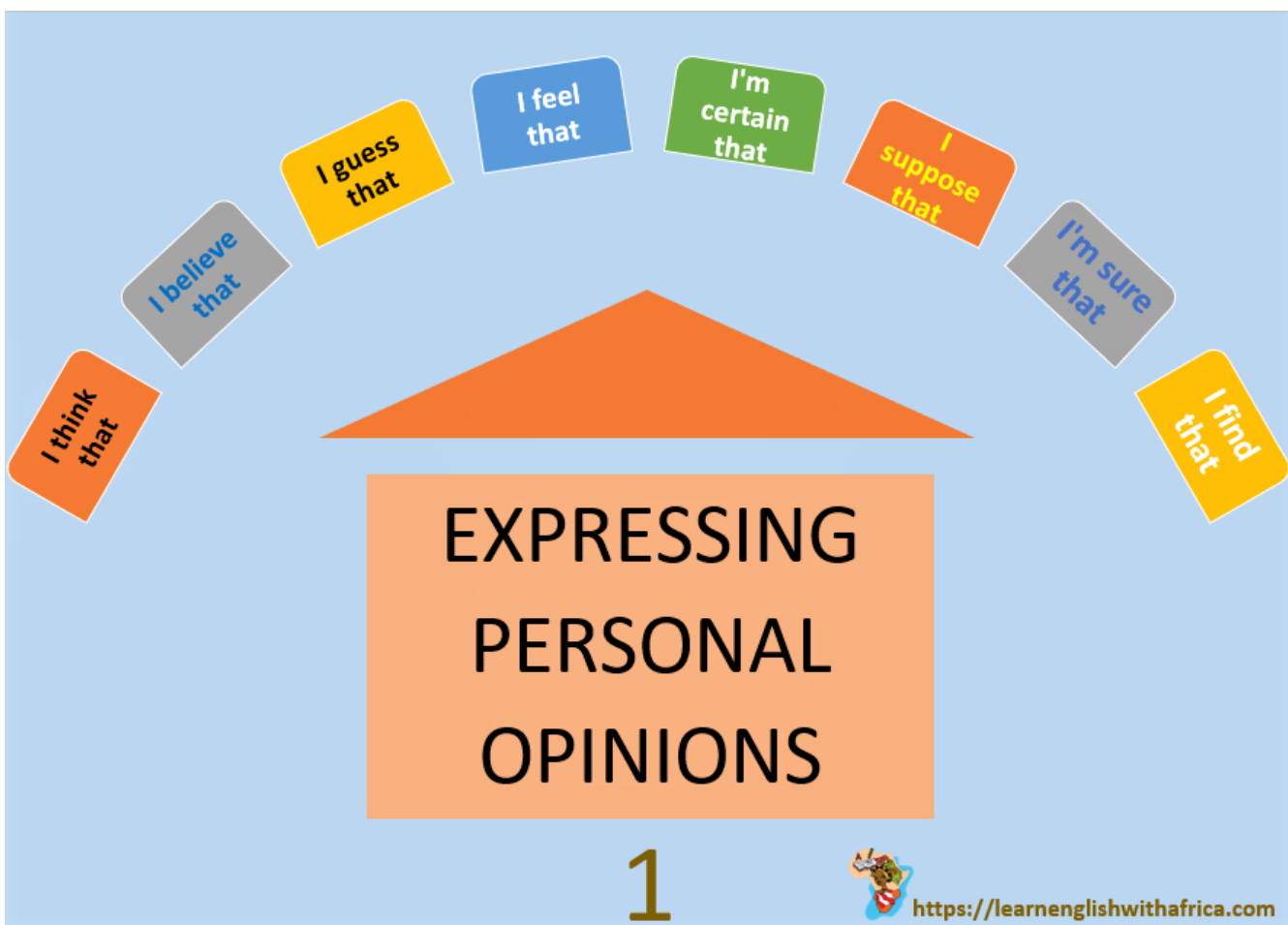
**To sum up**, I would like to say that animal prisons which we call zoos should be banned for obvious reasons. **Firstly**, the death rate of captive animals is higher than that of non-captive animals. **Secondly**, as I have already pointed out, imprisoned animals deprived of their basic right to freedom lose their natural instincts. This is why these animals die in large numbers when they are released in the wild. **Finally**, it is wrong to incarcerate animals when they have committed no crime. This is a blatant violation of their basic

right to freedom and fair treatment. This is why zoos should be banned so that animals should live where they were created to live— in the wild!

**Therefore**, imagine a world without zoos where animals would roam freely without being bothered all day long by selfish human beings looking for entertainment. Imagine a world where we wouldn't have to use the word 'captive' for animals because there would be no need to do so. Imagine a world where animals like Harambe, the 17-year-old gorilla at [Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden](#), wouldn't die mercilessly at the hands of human beings when all he wanted was to be left alone. Harambe didn't ask to be imprisoned. He didn't ask to be kept in a cage. I imagine this world every day and I think that Harambe would have loved it if he were still alive. Unfortunately, he is not. Rest in Peace Harambe.

**Your Turn:** Imagine you are against the motion '**Zoos should be banned.**' This means that you do not want zoos to be closed. Do some research and find some good counterarguments to the previous speech. There are many! Make sure to note your sources for reference purposes. Good luck!

### [How to Debate Confidently and Courteously: Step Four \(Vocabulary for Debating\)](#)



## **Expressing Personal Opinions**

- Personally, I think...
- Personally speaking...
- In my opinion...
- My personal opinion is...
- In my humble opinion...
- In my honest opinion...
- As for me...
- As far as I am concerned...
- As far as I can see...

## **Agreeing**

- I agree with you on that point...
- I agree with you 100%...
- I fully agree with you...
- I agree with what you said...
- I get your point...
- You are right when you point out that/say...
- I share your opinion/view about...
- I understand your stance/position on...
- I have no objection...
- There is some truth in it...
- Of course, you are right when you say...

## Disagreeing

- I don't agree with you on that point...
- I disagree with you...
- You are not right about...
- You are wrong about...
- I am not of the same opinion...
- I don't share your opinion/view about...
- I think that you are exaggerating...
- I really think that you are twisting the truth...

## Get Inspired

An excellent debater! Enjoy the language by the way.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2DZ8bbxd8U>



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