

# Courses for Catholics

## What is 'Courses for Catholics'?

www.Courses for Catholics.org is a resource website for anyone interested in catechesis and Catholic faith formation.

It encourages Catholics to come to a better understanding of their faith while sharing it with others through the use of excellent internet-streamed and DVD-recorded video resources that provide material from the best Catholic teachers and communicators to parish or school groups at the group's own venue, at their own pace, at the times and dates that best suit them and at low cost.

Have you ever wanted to help fellow Catholics come to a better understanding of their faith and thereby to a deeper appreciation of and intimacy with Jesus Christ? Why not explore this possibility and follow our Step-by-Step guide to facilitating an internet-streamed or DVD-recorded course?

### **A step-by-step guide to facilitating a DVD-recorded or internet-streamed course**

**Step 1:** Start everything with prayer. If possible attend daily Mass or spend some time in front of the Blessed Sacrament in Eucharistic adoration. Open yourself to the will of the Lord and ask Him to place in your heart a desire for what He wants you to do and to lead you through it.



If the desire remains ask your parish priest for permission to facilitate a course. Introduce him to the 'Courses for Catholics' website and go through the courses listed under the 'Courses' tab. You can see previews of many of them by clicking on the web address of the course provider under the heading 'Where to find these DVD and internet-streamed resources'.



Give him time to consider and then go with whatever he says.

**Step 2:** If he agrees, decide together on what course.

While checking out the list of courses ask yourselves:

What age group are we catering for? eg. young adults/mature adults/RCIA candidates/a mixture.

What faith issues are we addressing and what level of knowledge/understanding does the intended audience have?

How many sessions do we want to run the course over? Will there be one session per week? How many sessions/weeks?



Do we want to run it after the weekday morning/evening Mass? Or over a short few days, perhaps as a weekend summer school? (As there is a risk of overloading the participants, the summer school approach may work only for short courses of 3 or 4 presentations/sessions.)

During which liturgical season(s) will it run (Advent/Christmas/Lent/Easter)? Will the subject of the course and the Mass readings for this season complement one another for greater efficacy? For example Bishop Barron's 'Eucharist' series might be presented during the Easter season when the weekday Mass readings are from John 6, or in the weeks prior to Corpus Christi or weeks 17 to 21 in Ordinary Time Year B. His 'Seven Deadly Sins - Seven Lively Virtues' is recommended for Lent while his 'Catholicism' series may be presented anytime.

Will the timing clash with any other programs or events in the parish?

Do you need a team to help facilitate the course? If so spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to provide you with good capable prayerful people of like mind who are easy to work with. When the course DVDs arrive (if you are not using internet-streaming) you might consider viewing them together in a 'dress rehearsal' before opening it up to a larger group. This can be a useful opportunity to test the venue and its facilities and to try out the DVD/projector/sound system/internet-streaming at the venue.

**Step 3:** When you have decided which course to facilitate ask yourselves:

How many participants can we expect?

Do we have the use of an appropriate venue for the period/dates/times? Does the venue come free of charge or do we have to pay for it? Can we offer the course completely free of charge or will we need to ask for donations? Do we need to purchase Student Course Books for this particular course?

Does the venue have tea/coffee making facilities? Do we need to bring kettles, mugs etc?

Does the venue already have a projector and sound system capable of playing movie films from DVDs? Does the venue have broadband wifi that is fast enough for video internet-streaming? Do we have access/passwords etc for this?

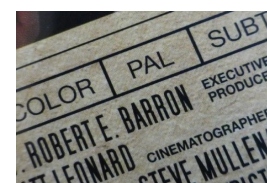
Do we need to borrow or buy a projector and screen (and perhaps an amplified speaker) capable of playing DVDs? Does the venue have a blank white or slightly offwhite wall suitable to project upon instead of a screen? Will the sessions be held during daylight hours or after dark? If during daylight, do the windows need to have curtains or blinds to block out bright sunlight?



#### **Step 4:** Borrow or purchase the course.

If you know someone who already has the course ask if you can borrow it for the duration. Otherwise purchase a copy from the distributor or another store. Click the 'Courses' tab on the website and find a link to the distributor (Courses for Catholics does not sell anything, nor do we seek any donations or subscriptions - we simply recommend good courses that may be purchased elsewhere).

Read the reviews and view the previews and ensure you are familiar with all the components (DVDs, student study guide, facilitator's guide, answer key, posters etc) that you will need to advertise and facilitate the course. All these can be found in the course provider's websites linked to under the 'Courses' tab on the website.



If you are using DVDs check that the disks will play in your region (Region 1 = North America, Region 2 = Europe etc) or better that it is a multi-region DVD disk or that you have a multi-region DVD player that will play disks for all regions.

Also check that you are ordering the correct format (NTSE or PAL) or better use a multi-format DVD player that will play both formats. Ensure you have ordered all the relevant DVDs and course materials and that they will arrive in good time.

#### **Step 5:** Setup your projection system.

If the group is very small you might consider using a large television. If so skip this step and proceed to Step 6.

If you are using a projector ensure your DVD player will connect to the projector. It is better to play the DVD from a DVD player rather than from a laptop or PC as this avoids interruptions from the computer operating system software (eg. updating notices appearing on screen etc) and

DVD players are generally less expensive than laptops. However, if you have a very old projector it may not be possible to connect it directly to a DVD player and you may have to use a laptop instead.

If you are streaming video from the internet you will need a laptop connected to the projector/sound amplifier or you could stream through a smartphone or tablet using a Chromecast device to send the signal wirelessly to the Projector (the projector will need a HDMI input for this). You can also use Chromecast to stream to a television that has HDMI.

We recommend you avoid buying anything unless you are sure you will have a use for it in the future. If you have not facilitated a course like this before and are unsure whether you would like to facilitate any further courses it is better to borrow the equipment instead of buying it. Start with whatever projector is available to you. If you do eventually decide to buy a projector and have lots of money to spend we think the ideal projector for this purpose would have (among other things) an HDMI input, be capable of projecting a 1080p HD image, have internal stereo speakers of about 10W each (for small venues), a stereo audio output socket (to connect to external amplified speakers for larger venues) and a brightness of at least '2000 lumens' - the brighter the better. Bring your DVD player, cables and Chromecast device along with you and explain to the retailer what you want to do. Take a disk along with you and ask him to demonstrate the playing of a DVD using his projector(s). Explain that you might also need an external amplified speaker for the sound (for the larger venues).

**Step 6:** 'Dress Rehearsal' - Try everything out at the venue.



Whether you are using a DVD player connected to a projector (with or without an external amplified speaker), a laptop connected to a projector, a smartphone or tablet connected wirelessly via a Chromecast device to a projector or TV or a DVD player connected to a large TV try the arrangement out at the venue. Decide where the seats and the screen will go, ensure the volume is sufficient for the room, that you have enough extension leads from the power sockets etc and that it is a safe arrangement.

If the venue has a smooth blank white or slightly offwhite wall it may be possible to use this instead of a screen. If the course will run during daylight hours check that the brightness of the projection is sufficient and whether the windows need to have curtains or blinds to block out bright sunlight.

Ensure everyone on your team knows what they are doing - whether they are setting up the projector and screen and speakers, setting out the chairs, making and distributing the tea, welcoming people at the door and signing them in, introducing the DVD talk (the Course Facilitator), facilitating the group discussion after the DVD (the Group Facilitators) etc. (see the session program suggestion in step 10 below).

For a brief description of what the Group Facilitators do read the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions (below) or download the 'Group Facilitator's Profile' from the website.



Ensure you have enough Group Facilitators to chair the group discussions after the DVD - you will need one such person for each group of 6 to 10 participants. Ensure each Group Facilitator has a Catholic Bible, a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and a copy of the Course Book Answer Key (if applicable) and that they are familiar with the answers and with any relevant verses of Sacred Scripture and paragraphs from the Catechism of the Catholic Church prior to the start of the each session.

**Step 7:** Advertise the course.

Have the course announced at all the Masses from at least two or three Sundays in advance. People need time to decide if they are interested in attending.

Display the posters on all the parish notice boards, in other places around the parish, in the parish newsletter and on the parish website. Encourage people to attend but tell them that spaces are limited to the size of the venue and that they need to contact you in advance to reserve a place. This will give you a better idea of how many to expect and enable you decide whether you need to order more Student Course Books.



In addition to the posters you can make your own advertising flyers (using the downloadable template from the website) and hand them out at the door after Masses. Invite the participants to bring a Catholic Bible and a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (which they can get online on their smartphone) with them.

**Step 8:** Make a list and buy the tea, coffee, biscuits, milk etc you will need for the first session. Buy some large sticky labels for use as name badges.

**Step 9:** Make out an Attendance Sheet for the participants to sign-in as they arrive (or use the downloadable template from the website).



This can include name, email address, mobile phone number and permission to include the participant in a WhatsApp group. The mobile numbers will be useful if you have to cancel or postpone one of the presentations and need to contact the participants at short notice. You might create a WhatsApp group for this and use it later to advertise future courses. Write the venue and date on top of the Attendance Sheet for future reference.

Print out some Prayer Cards - you can download a prayer card from the website.

**Step 10:** When the day or evening of the first session arrives you may follow something like the following programme, for example:

7pm. The team arrives at venue and sets up the projector, screen and sound and tests it with the course DVD or streaming device. They set out the chairs, fill the kettles, set out the Attendance List with pens and participant name badges near the entrance.

8pm. Participants arrive and are welcomed, they sign in, receive a Student Course Book, a name badge and a prayer card and take their seats.

8.10pm. The Course Facilitator welcomes everyone, thanks those who made the evening possible and introduces the course. He/she reminds participants of how many sessions there are in the entire course and that following the DVD presentation (which lasts so many minutes) they will form groups of 6 to 10 persons to discuss what they saw and go through the relevant parts of the student course book together with a Group Facilitator.

The Course Facilitator then invites everyone to recite the prayer on the prayer card together.

8.15pm. The DVD presentation is then viewed with the lights turned down to enhance the effect.



About 10 minutes before the DVD is due to finish the filled kettles are switched on.

9.15pm. (or earlier, depending on the length of the DVD presentation) When the DVD presentation has concluded the Course Facilitator identifies the Group Facilitators (they might be distinguished by a different colour name badge) and invites everyone to form groups of 6 to 10 persons around them.

While participants are forming groups and moving their chairs into circles other team members prepare the tea and coffee and biscuits which is then delivered to the newly formed groups (do not take a break in the proceedings for the tea - it is very difficult to get everyone to sit down again).

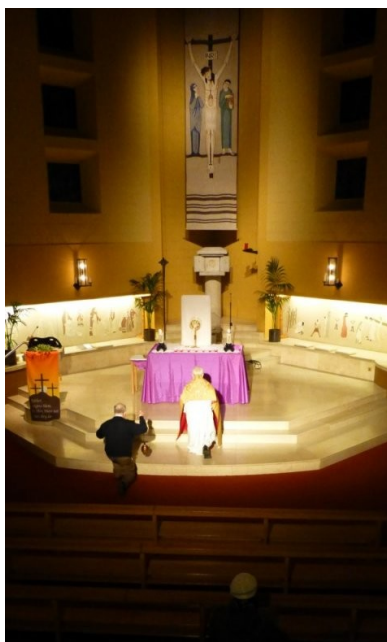


The Group Facilitators then go through the relevant parts of the student course book with their group. (N.B. In feedback, participants have consistently told us that the group discussion is one of the most important and enjoyable parts of the course. It is essential to give everyone an opportunity to talk about their faith - they may never have had such an opportunity before - and to listen to others in an encouraging and affirming small group setting).

9.45pm. The Course Facilitator announces that it is time to finish.

**Step 11:** Following the first session of the course the team might like to discuss the experience - what worked well, what could be improved for the next session etc.

**Step 12:** Visit the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic adoration in thanksgiving for the course.



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*Please note that this step-by-step guide is intended to help facilitate Catholic faith formation courses for adults. If your group is to include children or teenagers you must ensure that you adhere to child protection legislation and procedures and ensure that everyone involved has been satisfactorily vetted by Garda or Police vetting procedures.*

## Frequently Asked Questions

Question: "I have no formal training in theology or catechesis. How can I help others understand and appreciate what I do not fully understand myself?"

Answer: "You can rely on trusted, highly qualified, world-renowned, academically excellent Catholic theologians of good standing (such as Bishop Robert Barron, Dr. Scott Hahn, Fr Robert Spitzer, Jeff Cavins etc) to give the talks for you. They have made available to you excellent DVD-recorded versions of their best presentations for this purpose".

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Question: "I am afraid the group discussion that follows the DVD presentation might take on a life of its own and go off in the wrong direction and that people will unwittingly come away with some heresy or other in their heads".

Answer: "This is probably the biggest danger with group discussion. Your group discussion must remain focussed on the subject of the talk and when questions arise that are not covered in the talk or in the student workbook the group must refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) for the answers. Each group needs a strong Group Facilitator appointed to it who will insist on keeping the discussion focussed and who will always refer to the CCC for answers (see the Group Facilitator questions below). The response to uncertainty and doubt must always be 'what does the Catechism say?'. The CCC is essential for every discussion in every group during every session. The purpose of the discussion part of the course is to explore what the Church actually teaches and answer the questions and doubts of the course participants - it is not to tell others what I myself think the Church teaches. Your parish priest should also be present to answer difficult questions and steer the discussion back towards orthodoxy".

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Question: "Where can I get a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church?"

Answer: "At any good book seller. You can read an electronic version online (on a smartphone) at [www.scborromeo.org](http://www.scborromeo.org) There are downloadable apps available for both Apple and Android smartphones - search your app store for the Laudate or the Learn the Faith apps".

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Question: "I'm thinking of organizing a course. In addition to a copy of the Catechism is there anything else I should ask the participants to bring with them?"

Answer: "In addition to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (which is available online on their smartphones) participants at these courses should also bring a Catholic Bible. Catholic translations include among others the Revised Standard Version CE which is a more literal translation for serious scripture study, the Jerusalem Bible used in the liturgy in Europe and the New American Bible used in the liturgy in North America both of which are easy to read and the New Jerusalem Bible which has more contemporary language but is still true to the original meaning. Note that Catholic Bibles have all 73 canonical books; 46 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. If there is a Student Course Book for the course and you are not supplying it you might like to ask the participants to get one and advise them on where it can be obtained well in advance of the start date".

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Question: "What sort of person makes a good Group Facilitator?"

Answer: "A good Group Facilitator is a patient well balanced prayerful person who can take

charge of a group without imposing themselves upon it. They do not focus attention on themselves or on their own opinions but focus on the needs of others. They have a gentle approachable welcoming personality and are careful to put others at their ease. They are humble enough to admit they do not know the answers (and are not expected to) and yet firm enough to insist the group refer to the CCC for the answers. They are mindful of the feelings of others. They are careful to give everyone an opportunity to speak and diplomatically skilful enough not to allow any one person to dominate the discussion for too long.

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Question: "What does a Group Facilitator need to do?"

Answer: "The Group Facilitator is not a teacher but someone who facilitates discussion while at the same time keeping the group focussed on the subject of the talk. He/she is like a chairperson who uses the subject of the DVD talk, the Course Book questions and the Answer Key to guide the group in discovering what the Church teaches. The Group Facilitator encourages each person to say something, especially the quieter less talkative members of the group, with open ended prompts like "any thoughts on this John?" but does not insist that everyone makes a contribution to the discussion. They never put anyone on the spot with specific questions or ask anyone to read anything.

When questions arise that are not covered in the talk or in the student workbook the Group Facilitator will gently but firmly insist the group refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) for the answers. The Group Facilitator is humble enough to admit they do not know the answers (even when they think they might know) and always responds to such situations with something like "well, lets see what the Catechism says on that" and thus invites the group to discover together what the Church really teaches. The Group Facilitator never attempts to 'wing it' or guess the answer nor do they agree with anyone without reference to the CCC."

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Question: "Do you have a downloadable version of the Step-by-Step guide that I can print out?"

Answer: "Yes. A downloadable version of the Step-by-Step guide is available from the Downloads page of the website.

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Question: "Do you have a downloadable version of these Frequently Asked Questions?"

Answer: "Yes. a downloadable version of these Frequently Asked Questions is available from the Downloads page of the website.

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Question: "Do you have any other useful documents I can download?"

Answer: "Yes. In addition to the 'Step-by-Step Guide' and 'Frequently Asked Questions' we also have a downloadable 'Do-It-Yourself Poster/Flyer Template', a 'Prayer Card', a 'Course Attendance Sheet', a 'Group Facilitator Profile' and a 'Courses for Catholics Summary Leaflet' (this document) available from the Downloads page of the website.

## Comments and Endorsements

*“Having experienced three or four ‘Courses for Catholics’ run on the exact same lines described in this website, I can attest to its value as a pastoral resource for adult formation in the faith. From the starting point in prayer, through the technology of DVD projection and the important shared discussion it provides an effective teaching, revising and renewal resource for any parish or group. The participants find it enjoyable, instructive and non-threatening. The drop-out rate is very low. All the steps are important especially the shared discussion part. The website gives the whole process involved in setting up your own DVD catechetical series... it answers questions, quietens anxieties, overcomes hesitancy. Follow it and establish your own faith formation course programme” (V. Rev. Fr. Diarmuid Connolly, Pastor Emeritus, Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock, Dublin 15).*

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*“The course encourages us to refer to the Catechism of the Catholic Church on all issues and thus be confident that it is under the guidance of the Church’s Magisterium... The format was excellent. It was good to hear and discuss other people’s views on the DVD presentations.... it was well worth attending” (Patricia Nulty, participant at 'Catholicism' series, St Mary of the Servant’s, Blakestown, January to Easter 2013).*

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*“I highly recommend Fr. Barron's 'Catholicism' series for anyone eager to do something by way of evangelisation during this Year of Faith. My parish ran it as a ten week course (January to Easter 2012) and forty to fifty people took part. The facilitator arranged a half-hour recapitulation for the groups of participants each week and the responses revealed just how much the Catholicism series had gripped everyone's attention and how thoroughly the course was being enjoyed and the catechesis impacting on memories. The choreography (on the DVD) was a feast for the eyes as the universality and diversity of the Catholic Church was revealed week after week by Fr. Robert Barron who traveled the world to bring it into our homes and meeting places, to revitalise our faith” (Sr. Helen Weston, Mount Sackville Convent, Castleknock, Dublin 15).*

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*“I thoroughly enjoyed Fr Robert Barron’s life giving 10-part film presentation course on the Catholic Faith ['Catholicism' series]. His love and enthusiasm for the beauty, goodness and truths of the Catholic Faith is highly contagious! This visually beautiful, faith filled, informative presentation transports the participant to the heart and soul of the Church, making this course an invaluable opportunity for personal Faith renewal, adult Faith formation, and for those seeking a deeper meaning in their lives.*

*It is a refreshing approach to evangelization, to “Sharing the Good News” of the Gospel. One feels drawn, renewed and challenged towards a personal intimate relationship with the loving Mysterious Trinitarian God, and attracted to participating or re-engaging in the family of a vibrant faith filled community. Our course was “the streamline” option, consisting of 10 two hour sessions. We started with a prayer to the Holy Spirit, followed by the DVD presentation on the theme for the night (1 hour - approx) followed by refreshments and discussion” (Carol Brady, Group Facilitator at the Catholicism series, St Mary of the Servant’s Parish, Blakestown, January to Easter 2013).*

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*“As someone who studied Theology, I was amazed by the fact that so many of the main authentic teachings of the Catholic Church (contained in the Creed, the Scriptures, the Catechism of the*

*Catholic Church, and Encyclicals etc) were condensed into these ten (hourly) presentations in such an informative, educational, and inspirational way. The overall experience was greatly enhanced by the personal faith sharing, (in small facilitated discussion groups) which followed on from the topic of the evening. It was a blessing to question, clarify, and share our experiences of joys, sadness and the challenges of our pilgrim journey along “the way”. My heartfelt thanks to all, especially for all the graces and blessings received. I felt renewed, illumined and empowered to “Share the Good News of God’s Love” with others” (Carol Brady, Group Facilitator at the 'Catholicism' series, St Mary of the Servant’s Parish, Blakestown, January to Easter 2013).*

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*“When I first facilitated Fr. Barron’s Catholicism series forty three people turned up to a packed venue on the first night. When we finished ten weeks later we still had forty three. One woman told me ‘I went home on a high last week [after episode 1] and I couldn’t wait to get back here tonight for more’ ” (Course Facilitator at the 'Catholicism' series, Our Lady Mother of the Church, Castleknock, January to Easter 2012).*

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*“Tony and I thoroughly enjoyed the course and would recommend it to others... things we learned long ago in school became more meaningful... Fr Barron’s presentations were brilliant and the discussions afterwards really enhanced the whole series... all in the wonderful atmosphere which was created in the church in Blakestown. I will be sorry when it ends and would at some point like to do it again”. (Maura Clarke, participant at the 'Catholicism' series, St Mary of the Servant’s Parish, Blakestown, January to Easter 2013).*

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### **Some of the courses available...**

There is a large and ever growing number of excellent internet-streamed and DVD recorded courses available that fall into one or more of the following broad categories:

Introduction/overview of the faith (eg. Catholicism, Chosen (for young teens), The Creed, Catholicism the Pivotal Players)

Sacraments/Christian Life (eg. Eucharist, The Mass, 'Altaration' (for teens), Seven Deadly Sins/Lively Virtues, Conversion, Untold Blessing, An introduction to the Theology of the Body, The Theology of the Body for Teens)

Scripture/Salvation History/Understanding the Bible (eg. The Bible-in-a-Year Podcast, Unlocking the Mystery of the Bible, The Bible Timeline - The Story of Salvation, Genesis to Jesus, Encounter (for young teens), Priest Prophet King, David the King, Fulfilled: Uncovering the Biblical Foundations of Catholicism)

Mariology (eg. Queen of Heaven - Mary's Battle for Souls, The Bible and the Virgin Mary)

Faith and Reason/Science and the Existence of God/Apologetics/Answering Atheism (eg. The Mystery of God, The Reason Series (for young adults), Catholicism the New Evangelization, Fulfilled, From Nothing to Cosmos, Cosmic Origins, Science God and Creation, Credible Catholic)

## and where to find them

Visit the website [www.coursesforcatholics.org](http://www.coursesforcatholics.org) and go through the courses listed there under the 'Courses' tab. Most of the courses are available from one of the following websites:

<http://store.wordonfire.org/collections>

<https://shop.ascensionpress.com/>

<https://tanbooks.com/>

<https://www.magiscenter.com/store/>

<https://stpaulcenter.com/studies-tools/journey-through-scripture>



*"The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ"*

*"...catechesis has not ceased to look for the most suitable ways and means for its mission... I think immediately of the great possibilities offered by .... the whole series of audio-visual means. The achievements in these spheres are such as to encourage the greatest hope."*

(Pope Saint John Paul II, *Catechesi tradendae*, 5 & 46)

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