



## Graphic Medicine: Comics & Healthcare HONR 108G

### Course Information

**Course Title:** Graphic Medicine: Comics & Healthcare

**Course Number:** HONR 108G

**Term:** Terp Young Scholars, Summer 2026

**Credits:** 3

**Course Times:** 9:00am-12:00pm (there will be 2 10-min breaks during class sessions).

**Professor:** Max Barnewitz

**Pronouns:** They/them

**Email:** mbarnewi@umd.edu

**Office Hours:** by appointment

**Classroom:** TBA

### Course Description

Art practices offer shape to our understanding of our bodies and the medical world. From early medical illustration to art therapy, art and medical science intersect, offering emotional outlets and new methods of discovery. In recent years, the process of narrating, visualizing, and communicating healthcare and medical experiences has found a surprising new home: comics. In 2007, Dr. Ian Williams coined the term “Graphic Medicine” to describe the emergent intersections between sequential art and how we engage with healthcare and our physical and mental wellness. Graphic Medicine has steadily grown to include comics that depict medical history, stories of trauma and recovery, and the creative practices that foreground these experiences. This class investigates this intersection and offers students a unique approach to understanding and visualizing the medical world.

In this course we will learn experientially using traditional comics techniques from storyboarding to fully realized comics. Students will broaden their understanding of medical research and science communication through the unique and accessible lens of graphic medicine. *Please note: Students do not have to “know how to draw” or even have read any comics before to succeed in this class. Willingness to engage with an open mind, collaborate with your peers, and take creative risks will directly impact your success!*

### Course Objectives

This course leverages comics to explore how we engage with medical discourse, navigate the healthcare system, and understand health, illness, and care. In this class, we will balance research and practice, engaging in creative risk-taking to build new pathways towards narrative and community. At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify and navigate aspects of medicine and medical history as presented through illustration and comics.
- 2) Analyze the relationship between medicine and art both as therapeutic and educational tools.
- 3) Create short comics using traditional methods to tell stories that are essential to students’ own lived experiences, interests, and participate in different approaches to comics across social and cultural contexts.



- 4) Demonstrate community involvement through public exhibition of creative-research in the form of comics readings and the creation of an anthology of student work.

### Required Resources & Materials

- Course Website: [elms.umd.edu](http://elms.umd.edu)
- Supplies
  - Composition Notebook (Provided in-class)
  - Pens & pencils of choice (Please bring your own!)
  - You are encouraged to bring a tablet or laptop for the final week of class for finishing your final assignments; these are not required.
- **All readings will be made available through ELMS.** Readings include but are not limited to:
  - *Graphic Medicine Manifesto* by MK Czerwiec, Ian Williams, Susan Merrill Squier, Michael J. Green, Kimberly R. Myers, and Scott T. Smith.
  - Excerpts from *Making Nonfiction Comics* by Eleri Harris and Shay Mirk
  - Excerpts from *Bald* by Tereza Cechová and Stepanka Jislová
  - Selected comics from *Crucial Comix* website (<https://www.crucialcomix.com/comics/>)
  - Selected comics from the Graphic Medicine website (<https://www.graphicmedicine.org/comic-type/graphic-novels/>)
  - *Why Comics?* By Hillary Chute (specifically the chapter on "Illness")
  - "'No time to rest, vent or mourn': Medical Intern Narratives and Graphic Medicine." By Sathyaraj Venkatesan and Anu Mary Peter. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/ink.2017.0013>.
  - "The Pain Scale" by Eula Biss (<https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/wp-content/blogs.dir/32748/files/2023/05/44363570.pdf>)

### Course Structure

*Graphic Medicine* requires you to flex your creative and analytical minds, engaging in comics as both artistic practice and framework for understanding the unique field of healthcare and medical communication. To achieve our goals, we will alternate between in-class comics activities and close reading, analysis, and discussion of specific comics and articles. Students will be responsible for conducting their own visual research, drawing and reading graphic works, and preparing for in-class discussions. By the end of the term, students will create a short comic to present in a student-made anthology.

**Please note:** Collaboration and curiosity are key components of this class. We will learn from each other, and I encourage students to value their own creative voices and those of their peers. As an educator, I believe that creating opportunities and spaces for artists to create together is essential in terms of aesthetic and technical merit, and together to see the full range of boundaries that constrain and oppress. This class asks students to engage and support rigorous, culturally engaged work with open hearts and minds.



**A reminder regarding content:** This course endeavors to explore the wide range of experiences that relate to health and the medical world. This class will allow us to explore anatomical illustration as well as read stories of pain, physical illness and injury, mental health challenges, and stories of medical trauma and prejudice. These topics will be explored with curiosity, care, and space to ask questions. Respect for the subjects is tantamount. But we must also engage respectfully with each other and care for our own boundaries and needs. If there are times when you feel uncomfortable, scared, or would like to take a break, you may step out of the classroom at your own discretion, and rejoin us for the next activity. If you are aware of a topic that is particularly challenging to you, please speak to me at your convenience so that I can provide you with a content warning.

## Major Assignments

### Homework Activities/Assignments:

- Participation (50%):
  - Daily Composition Notebook Book Drawing Assignments (20%)
  - In-Class Readings & Discussions (30%)
- Midterm (10%)
  - Group Presentation
- Final (40%):
  - 2-4 Page Comic (30%)
  - Class Comics Anthology (10%)

### Participation & Engagement:

Participation will look different for each student. However, engagement in this class will require the following:

- Arriving to class **on time** with readings and/or drawing assignments complete and ready for discussion
- Participating in group discussions with questions, observations about the readings, listening and supporting peers generously, and engaging in in-class drawing activities boldly, sincerely, and with an open mind is expected.
- Your workspace should include **ONLY** the materials that you need for that day (i.e. low-tech!). Please do **NOT** let your technology become a distraction to you or your peers. Please see below for my policy on technology.
- You will submit a scan and short reflection from your composition notebook every day until our last week of class (13 submissions total).

### Presentations:

- **Group Presentation (Required):** In addition to your in-class assignments, you will be required to choose 1 additional work (ANY comic, zine, cartoonist, etc.) and give a *SHORT* (5-10 minute) presentation to your peers about the significance of this comic and/or its author(s) as it relates to graphic medicine. If you have difficulty finding an appropriate topic, please reach out for guidance. You will work in groups of 3 during the second week of class to create presentations **due in-class Friday, July 24.**

### Final:

- **Student Anthology (Required):** As part of your final exam, you will collaborate on the co-creation of a graphic medicine anthology which can contain your final comic and any additional work you would like to curate alongside your peers for publication and sharing in public forum (i.e. comics reading or small comics “festival”). **Due on ELMS Friday, July 13 by 9am.**



- **Comic (Required):** During class we will dedicate considerable time to creating 2-4 page comics on a healthcare related subject. You will engage with evidence-based research and communicate in comics on the medical topic of your choice. You will have time to workshop, thumbnail, draft, and finalize your works for print and public reading. **Due in-class, Friday July 31 by 9am.**

## Class Policies

**Participation & Attendance:** You must attend class *on time* and actively participate in class to earn your participation grade. I am aware that attending class can often feel challenging especially when balancing your courseload, work, social life, etc. However, participation in class is your responsibility, and missing class will have a negative impact on your participation grade. You are allowed **one** unexcused absence from this class. Students who have more than three unexcused absences will lose a full letter grade in their participation grade. Excused absences (including medical need, hospitalization, mental health care, death in the family, military training, etc.) will be accepted with appropriate documentation. I encourage you to advocate for yourself in regards to this policy. If you are aware of an expected absence, please be in contact with me to make sure that you do not fall behind with the material.

**Lateness/Early Departure:** Being late to class or leaving early from class will also affect your grade. Three instances of lateness or early departure will equal one absence. Participation in class is vital to our collaborative learning environment that you, your voice, and your work are essential to.

**Technology: Absolutely NO phones are to be out during class.** Your workspace should include ONLY the materials that you need for that day (i.e. low-tech!). Some students may need to use computers or tablets for their work, and the use of those materials for participation is permitted. However, please do not let your technology become a distraction to you or your peers. (You will be asked to leave and will be considered absent for the day if your phone is out or if your computer becomes distracting.) If you must take a phone call during class, please raise your hand and ask to be briefly excused due to an emergency or, better yet, make a plan with me before class should the need arise.

**Late Work:** Due to the fast paced nature of this class I do not accept late work. You are responsible for presenting your midterm presentation on the assigned date. Your composition notebooks, participation, and final comic, must be ready on the day assigned. If there is a crisis, I will evaluate the situation on a case by case basis.

**Extra Credit:** Extra credit is often offered but not guaranteed. Please do not ask for extra credit opportunities.

**Classroom Respect & Civil Discourse:** This classroom is a space where you are encouraged to think critically about the world around you and representations of identities and experiences that differ from your own. Together, we will learn to see underlying arguments and messages that surround us everyday. This classroom is a space for academic inquiry and creative exploration. No comment, question, or suggestion is “wrong” as long as it is relevant to the topic of discussion and delivered respectfully, and all students should feel safe voicing their thoughts. Please consider your identities as well as those around you. **Hateful and disrespectful language has no place in our classroom and will not be tolerated.** You will be asked to examine your own preconceived notions and underlying assumptions of race, gender, ability, socioeconomic class, and identity, and discomfort is to be expected, but respect, care, and curiosity are tantamount to building a safe and supportive learning environment for everyone.



**Finally:** This syllabus and schedule is subject to change at the instructor’s discretion, and the student will always be kept abreast of course developments or schedule changes via ELMS. Your continued enrollment in this course constitutes your acceptance and understanding of the policies outlined in this syllabus.

## Grading Structure

To get an “A,” you must show clear and dedicated engagement and progress over the entire class. Unexcused absences will have a negative effect on your grade. Missing 3 classes without an appropriate excuse (doctor’s note, family emergency, etc.) will result in lowering your grade by one letter, more than that will result in additional letter grade drops. Note: due to the short length of this course, there will be limited extra credit offered.

Assignment	Percentage %
Composition Notebook	20%
In-Class Discussions & Participation	30%
“Midterm” Presentation	10%
Collaboration on Student Anthology	10%
Final Comic	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Final Grade Cutoffs									
+	97.00%	+	87.00%	+	77.00%	+	67.00%	+	
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
-	90.00%	-	80.00%	-	70.00%	-	60.00%	-	

## Tips for Success in This Course

1. **PARTICIPATE!** Discussions and group work are a critical part of the course. You can learn a great deal from discussing ideas and perspectives with your peers and professor. Participation can also help you articulate your thoughts and develop critical thinking skills.
2. **MANAGE YOUR TIME!** Make time for your participation in discussions each week. Give yourself plenty of time to complete assignments including extra time to explore the wonderful world of comics.
3. **BE BOLD & CURIOUS!** Draw as much as you can!
4. **ASK FOR HELP!** If you need help with ELMS-Canvas or other technology, IT Support. If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me, your classmates, your librarians, your friends for support. Come to office hours and tell me about your favorite local squirrels! We’re in this together, don’t be a stranger!



## Semester Breakdown

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Module	Topic	Activities & Assignments
<b>Week 1: What is Graphic Medicine?</b>		
<b>Monday</b>	Introductions: What is Graphic Medicine?	<p><b>Syllabus Overview</b>  <b>Read:</b> <i>Graphic Medicine Manifesto Introduction</i> (in class)  <b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Introduce yourself in a comic: why are you curious about graphic medicine?</li> <li>- A brief comics history: What can comics do that other forms can't?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 1</p>
<b>Tuesday</b>	Comics vs. Medical Illustration	<p><b>Read:</b> Medical Illustration History; Andreas Versalius  <b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-up</li> <li>- Understanding Comics - Transition Exercises</li> <li>- History of Medical Illustration Exercise</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 2</p>
<b>Wednesday</b>	Anatomy & Drawing	<p><b>Video:</b> Understanding Anatomical Drawing  <b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Life Drawing Exercises</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 3</p>
<b>Thursday</b>	The Politics of Healthcare	<p><b>Read:</b> Healthcare System Comic; Vaccine Comic  <b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- In what ways is medicine political?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 4</p>
<b>Friday</b>	The Personal of Healthcare	<p><b>Read:</b> The Pain Scale  <b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicating pain - develop your own pain scale/scale comics</li> <li>- Sign up for presentation date</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 5</p>
<b>Week 2: Mapping the Body: Personal Accounts of Health &amp; Illness</b>		
<b>Monday</b>	Medicine, Stats & Data	<p><b>Read:</b> <i>Making Nonfiction Comics</i> Ch. 7</p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Drawing Data Comics</li> <li>- Group Presentation Work Time</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 6</p>
<b>Tuesday</b>	Picturing Bodies	<p><b>Read:</b> Bald</p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Drawing the Body Comics</li> <li>- Group Presentation Work Time</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 7</p>
<b>Wednesday</b>	Picture Minds	<p><b>Read:</b> OCD &amp; Me</p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Drawing Anxiety Comics // Emotional Support Animals</li> <li>- Group Presentation Work Time</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 8</p>
<b>Thursday</b>	Medicine, Comics & Race	<p><b>Read:</b> Covid Comic; Henrietta Lacks Comic</p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Comics &amp; Social Justice</li> <li>- Group Presentation Work Time</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 9</p>
<b>Friday</b>	Medicine, Comics & Gender	<p><b>Read:</b> Women's Problems Comic</p> <p><b>Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Developing a Personal Narrative Comic</li> </ul> <p><b>Group Presentations Due Today!</b></p> <p><b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 10</p>
<b>Week 3: Drawing Medicine: How We Can Understand Medicine in Comics</b>		



<b>Monday</b>	Medical Research	<b>Activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Interview with a medical librarian - Donna Ramone, University of Utah</li> </ul> <b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 11
<b>Tuesday</b>	Medical Provider Perspectives	<b>Activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Interview with a healthcare provider - Dr. Kate Ahmed, DVM</li> </ul> <b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 12
<b>Wednesday</b>	Telling Your Own Stories	<b>Activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Research &amp; Thumbnail your comic!</li> </ul> <b>Assignment:</b> Composition Notebook Check-In Day 13
<b>Thursday</b>	Final Comics Work Time	<b>Activities:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Medical Fact Warm-Up</li> <li>- Work on Final Comic Assignment</li> <li>- Reflection &amp; Comics Jam (Friday)</li> </ul> <b>Final Assignment:</b> <i>Prepare final comic for student anthology</i>  <b>Assignment:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submit Anthology Pages (Friday)</li> <li>- Come with finished comic to read in-class (Friday)</li> </ul>
<b>Friday</b>	Final Comics Work Time & Showcase	

### Land & Enslavement Acknowledgement

The University of Maryland is located on the traditional homelands of the Piscataway people, past and present. Acknowledging this fact reminds us of our important connection to this land where we live, learn and work. We recognize the painful history of genocide, oppression, and forced removal from this territory, and we recognize, honour and respect these nations as the traditional stewards of the lands and water on which the University of Maryland is now present.

We, at the University of Maryland, recognize and honor the exploited labor of forcefully enslaved people upon which the foundations of the United States and our institution were built. Enslaved people of African descent farmed, paved, maintained, and developed the land on which our university stands today. Through intergenerational resistance, leadership and a steadfast pursuit of freedom and justice, their descendants fought and continue to fight for a societal transformation in defiance of the profound injustices of the transatlantic trade, chattel slavery, convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, dehumanization and the caste system that permeates our existence. They desegregated and



integrated our classrooms and now lead our university and Maryland Terps forward to achieving a better world. We are forever indebted to the unwilling generational sacrifices and stolen labor of the enslaved Africans and their descendants. Together, we will strive to atone, heal and uplift the unbreakable spirit and beauty of Black Americans.

## Campus Policies

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses. For students, that begins with **Academic integrity—it is your responsibility to be aware of the policies that govern your life as a student at UMD!** The University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please visit the **Office of Undergraduate Studies** for a full list of campus-wide policies and follow up with me if you have questions. We want to highlight in particular that plagiarism, whether it is submitting someone else's work as your own, submitting your own work completed for another class without my permission, or otherwise violating the University's Code of Academic Integrity, will not be tolerated and will result in a grade of XF. If you have questions about how to use and attribute use of sources, talk to the instructor. The Code prohibits cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and plagiarism. Specific acts of academic dishonesty may include cheating on quizzes/exams, plagiarizing papers, submitting the same paper for credit in two courses without authorization, buying papers, submitting fraudulent documents, and forging signatures. The Office of Undergraduate Studies also provides a full list of **course-related policies**. **Please follow up with the instructor if you have questions.**

## Course Policies

UH is committed to creating equitable and inclusive learning environments and relies on you to support:

### Names/Pronouns and Self-Identification

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. The pronouns someone indicates are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. Visit the **LGBTQ+ Equity Center** to learn more. Additionally, how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity, is your choice whether to disclose (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. We will do our best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and we ask that you do the same for your peers and instructors.



## Safe Learning

Everyone has the right to learn safely in UH. With a diversity of perspectives and experience, we will often find ourselves in disagreement and/or debate with one another. It is important that we work together to foster and preserve a classroom environment in which we can learn from each other. **Behaviors that prevent safe learning, including harassment, microaggression, and racially and culturally triggering language, will not be tolerated.** Be mindful of how you speak to relieve the burden on others to point it out. Sometimes students need to share when they have been triggered so that it can be addressed. Please come forward if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced, and/or if your engagement in the course (or UH) feels hindered in any way.

**NOTE:** Faculty are **mandatory reporters** of instances of sexual/relationship violence. They can also direct you to resources without any explanation of why you need them, so *do* bring concerns to our attention with only as much detail as you see fit to disclose. See below for more information.

## Course Evaluation

Please submit course feedback through Course Experiences in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to CourseEvalUM is confidential. Campus will notify you when Course Experiences is open for you to complete your evaluations on the **Course Eval UM website**. By completing all of your evaluations each semester, you will have the privilege of accessing through Testudo, the evaluation reports for the thousands of courses for which 70% or more submitted their evaluations.

## Resources & Accommodations

### Accessibility and Disability Services

The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The **Accessibility & Disability Service (ADS)** provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known. Any student who needs accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make arrangements.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at 301-314-7682, or email them at [adsfrontdesk@umd.edu](mailto:adsfrontdesk@umd.edu). Information about **sharing your accommodations with instructors, note taking assistance** and more is available from the **Counseling Center**.

### Tech Help:

- Support:
  - o (301) 405-1500
  - o [itsupport@umd.edu](mailto:itsupport@umd.edu)
- **Keep Learning**
- **Tech-related needs**

### Request a:

- **Tutor**
- **Guided Study Session**



- [Careers4Terps Account](#)

### **Student Resources and Services**

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit [UMD's Student Academic Support Services website](#) to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you.

In particular, everyone can use some help sharpen their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting [UMD's Writing Center](#) and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need ([UMD's Student Resources and Services website](#) may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit the [Counseling Center](#). For immediate help schedule a [Counseling Center Emergency Visit](#).

### **Basic Needs Security**

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, please visit [UMD's Division of Student Affairs website](#) for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

### **Notice of Mandatory Reporting**

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible University Employee," or RUE, and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to UMD's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct.

If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of UMD's confidential resources, such as [CARE to Stop Violence](#) (located on the Ground Floor of the Health Center) at 301-741-3442 or the [Counseling Center](#) (located at the Shoemaker Building) at 301-314-7651.

You may also seek assistance or supportive measures from UMD's Title IX Coordinator, Angela Nastase, by calling 301-405-1142, or emailing [titleIXcoordinator@umd.edu](mailto:titleIXcoordinator@umd.edu). To view further information on the above, please visit the [Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct's](#) website at [ocrsm.umd.edu](http://ocrsm.umd.edu).

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