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The Essentials of **USE OF ENGLISH & COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

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Chapter 4

4.0

WRITING

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is the most tasking of the four language skills, especially to the second language user of the language. To write effectively, one has to go beyond mere constructing and stringing together a number of sentences to express one's ideas. Of course, such a weak effort can only result in producing awkward write-ups, which hardly express the desired ideas. To write effectively, it requires a deliberate and consistent effort to master the art of good writing. Effective writing techniques have to be learnt and adopted. Also, language and form should blend to suit purpose.

It is, therefore, the intention of this chapter to guide beginners in the art of good writing. The area of focus is on short school essays and other forms of technical writing such as reports, speeches, memoranda, minutes, letters and so forth, which are included in the school language curriculum.

4.1 THE PARAGRAPH

The paragraph seems to be a good starting point in learning the art of writing because any kind of writing is composed of a series of paragraphs which are adroitly linked together to develop the thesis of the essay (or any other write-up). That be the case, we have to consider what actually constitutes a good paragraph.

WHAT IS A PARAGRAPH?

A paragraph is one of the major divisions of an essay (or any other prose composition). A single main idea is developed in a paragraph. A paragraph may consist of a single sentence, although, usually, a group of sentences form a paragraph. Such sentences must all be developing one main idea, otherwise they are not justified to be in one paragraph. In form too, a paragraph is recognized by indentation. The first line of a paragraph is indented (That is, set in) about two and a half centimeters from the margin in handwriting, or about five spaces in a typewritten copy. However, in some business letters, the block form, where everything is typed flush with the margin, is used.

THE TOPIC SENTENCE

As mentioned earlier, a paragraph develops one main idea. This main idea is usually expressed in a controlling sentence called the topic sentence. The topic sentence, as it were, expresses the purpose of the paragraph. All other sentences in the paragraph expand, support or illustrate the idea raised in the topic sentence. Take, for example, the following paragraph.

One of the reasons why there has been an increase in crime in our society is the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria today. As a result of unemployment and its penury and frustration, many of our youths have resorted to various crimes either to make a living or just to spite society that had denied them means of livelihood. Armed robbery, swindling, hired killing and other anti-social acts have become the quickest way to make money and escape from the excruciating pains of hunger and poverty. If these youths have been employed, they might not have been lured into these nefarious acts. An idle mind, they say, is a devil's workshop.

In the paragraph above, the first sentence is the topic sentence and it contains the central idea which the other sentences help to expand.

The topic sentence is usually placed at the beginning of the paragraph (as is the case with the paragraph above). Sometimes, the topic sentence is placed in the middle of the paragraph or at the end. The topic sentence may be placed at the end if the writer wishes to summarize or emphasize his purpose. This is also true where particular details are presented first and a generalization follows at the end of the paragraph in the form of a topic sentence. Here is an example:

Have we not, at one time or the other, secretly rejoiced in mishaps which had befallen persons we perceive to be our rivals, or persons we just do not like? Have we not sometimes taken sadistic pleasure in watching an arrogant person tumble down from his pedestal where he had previously perched to look down on the rest of us; let us say, he has just lost that plum job which had made him puff himself up? What about our Nigerian police and other state security men who smile to see their victim squirm and wriggle in pain or to see the blood they draw as they callously drive in their instrument of torture? *Whichever way one may look at it man is fundamentally sadistic and gloats over the suffering of others.*

PARAGRAPH UNITY AND COHERENCE

A paragraph must have unity and should be coherent. A paragraph is said to have unity when it develops a single idea. The sentences in the paragraph all point to one idea, or related ideas. A mark of a badly written paragraph is to introduce different unrelated ideas in one paragraph, or to introduce an idea, which was not announced or implied in the topic sentence.

A paragraph is coherent when the sentences are properly linked. The sentences are placed in a good and natural order that the reader will understand

easily. Transitional devices are used to link sentences. The transitional devices include pronouns, repeated key words, transitional expressions, or parallel structures. Note the use of transitional devices in the paragraph below:

The transition from the cold war to a condition of secure peace cannot be made in a day. But it can be made, and it must be made. *It will have to be made in stages. The first stage will consist in persuading all powerful governments of the world that their aims, whatever they may be, cannot be achieved by war. In this first stage, scientists - not only nuclear physicists but also physiologists, geneticists, and bacteriologists - have a very important part to play. Their discoveries have created the dangers, and it is their obvious duty to arouse the public and the governments to a sense of the risks they are running. They may, in performing this duty, be compelled to take action of which their governments disapprove but loyalty to mankind should be for them the paramount consideration. I am convinced that it is within their power to persuade the governments both of the East and of the West to look to negotiation rather than war for a solution to their problems.* (from the Use of English

mimeograph of the University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, 1987).

In paragraph above, coherence is achieved as ideas are linked to one another through the use of repetition of key words, use of pronominals such as pronouns or other substitutions, and use of transitional expressions to signal development of ideas. The *transition* in the first sentence is repeated in the second and third sentences, using the pronoun *it* to replace it. The idea of *transition* is also repeated in that transitional expression, *the first stage of* sentence four. This is further repeated in the fifth sentence as *in this first stage*. From here, focus shifts to scientists of the fifth sentence. The word *scientists* is repeated in the rest of that paragraph as the pronouns *they*, *their* and *them*. The idea of *danger* in the sixth sentence is reiterated as *risks* in the seventh sentence. *Their* discoveries of the sixth sentence is linked to *their... duty* of the same sentence. *Duty* is repeated in the seventh sentence and echoed as *loyalty to mankind* in the same sentence and also echoed as *their power to persuade* of the eighth sentence. Another key expression repeated in the passage is *powerful governments of the world* of the fourth sentence, which is echoed as *government both of the East, and of the West* in the eighth sentence. The word *government* is repeated in other sections of the paragraph. The idea of *persuading* in the fourth sentence is reiterated as *arouse* in the sixth sentence and *persuade* in the eighth sentence. This idea of persuasion is linked to *negotiation and solution* of the

last sentence. An example of parallel structures is *it can be made* and *it must be made* of the second sentence. This is simply a repetition of a pattern. The essence of all these devices is to produce a well-knit paragraph.

Below is a list of transitional expressions used to link sentences in a paragraph.

2. **ADDITION:** Moreover, further, further more, besides, addition, equally important, next, first, second, third, in the first place, in the second place finally, last.
3. **COMPARISON:** Similarly, likewise, in like manner.
4. **CONTRAST:** but, yet, and yet, however, still, nevertheless, on the other hand, on the contrary, even so, notwithstanding, for all that, in contrast to this, at the same time, although this may be true, otherwise, nonetheless.
5. **PLACE:** here, beyond, nearby, opposite to, adjacent to, on the opposite side.
7. **PURPOSE:** to this end, for this purpose, with this object.
8. **RESULT:** hence, therefore, accordingly consequently, thus, thereupon, as a result, then.
9. **SUMMARY, REPETITION, EXEMPLIFICATION, INTENSIFICATION:** to sum up, in brief, on the whole, in sum, in short, as I have said, in other

words, that is, to be sure, as has been noted, for example, for instance, in fact, indeed, to tell the truth, in the mean time, afterward, later, now, in the past. [from Barbraage College Handbook, p.367-8]

To conclude this section on paragraph, it must be reiterated that a well written essay is one which paragraphs are unified, coherent and well-developed by the subsequent sentences in the paragraph.

4.2 THE ESSAY

An essay is an attempt to put in logical and thought provoking order an organized body of ideas about a given subject. Essay writing requires a lot of creativity and imagination. It takes some effort to sustain the interest of a reader through the use of a carefully selected diction (that is, choice of words) and spicing of the essay wit humour. Sentences must be varied in length and type. Also there should be proper use of punctuation marks to convey the desired meaning.

In this section on the essay, we shall consider steps in essay writing and the various kinds of essay.

STEPS IN ESSAY WRITING

There are three main steps in the writing of an essay. These are pre-writing, writing and rewriting

A. PRE-WRITING

The pre-writing stage is the foundation of the essay. If adequate planning is not done at this stage,

a good essay cannot be achieved. At the pre-writing stage, the following things are done.

- i. choosing and limiting the topic;
- ii. gathering material about the topic;
- iii. determining what is relevant to the essay;
- iv. organizing the material;
- v. writing of an outline for the essay;

i. CHOOSING AND LIMITING THE TOPIC

In your choice of topic (where you are given options), you should select the one you are familiar with. You can only communicate effectively if you have it clear in your mind what material you want to communicate. Once you have chosen your topic, you can narrow its scope if it is too wide. For instance, the topic *Education* is wider than *Education in Nigeria*. Again, *The Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria* is much less wide, but even wider than *Poor Funding as a Major Factor Responsible for the Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria*. The scope will depend on the time allotted to the essay.

Another way to narrow the topic is to consider the four kinds of writing: narration, description, exposition and argumentation. Each of these is more appropriate to certain topics than to others. For example, an essay on *The Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria* may be one of exposition whereby the writer tries to clarify this issue. It may be one of persuasion where the writer tries to stir into action policy makers in the field of education in Nigeria or the general public.

The writer may also combine both exposition and persuasion to achieve his aim. In most school essays, however, the scope is often defined for the student.

ii. GATHERING MATERIAL ABOUT THE TOPIC

Material may be gathered from other documents, from personal interviews and telephone conversations, and from your own existing knowledge of the subject. All material gathered should be carefully jotted down on your paper. Gathering of material may also involve thinking around the topic given. This is especially the case with examination essays. Every idea that occurs to you should be written down regardless of the order in which they occur. You can rearrange them later.

To be sure you have covered all the aspects of the topic you can ask questions around the topic with *who, what, why, where, when and how*. For example, Who is responsible for the falling standard of education in Nigeria?

What are the causes of the falling standard of education in Nigeria?. etc

iii. DETERMINING WHAT IS RELEVANT TO THE TOPIC:

In gathering material for the essay, ideas are jotted down as they occurred not minding their relevance. But now, having the purpose of the essay and the audience in mind, you can determine what material is relevant to the essay from the whole lot of material you have gathered. Any material that is not necessary should be discarded.

(iv) ORGANIZING THE MATERIAL

Having crossed out the irrelevant points now rearrange the remaining ones in the order you wish them to appear in the essay. Some facts may be more related than others. Some of the points may need to be merged together to form a paragraph.

(v) WRITING AN OUTLINE FOR THE ESSAY

Having sifted and organized the material, you now draw on outline for the essay. The essay outline indicates what order the facts in the essay are presented. Points to be discussed in each paragraph are indicated. Here is a more detailed outline of the essay on *The Falling standard of Education in Nigeria*.

OUTLINE

Introduction (stating the thesis and structure of the essay)

What are the indications of the falling standard of education in Nigeria?

- (a) diminishing students' academic output as noticed in public examinations.
- (b) over reliance on examination malpractice by students to pass examinations.
- (c) inability to perform competently in their chosen fields of specialization by higher education beneficiaries.

What are the causes of the falling standard of education in Nigeria?

- a. poor funding of education by governments and poor facilities.

- b. negligence of duty by principals and teachers.
- c. parents not providing their wards with the necessary materials needed for their education.
- d. lack of interest in education on the part of students.

iv. **What can be done to control the Falling standard of education in Nigeria?**

- a. government to step up funding of education and provision of necessary facilities.
- b. teachers to be given more incentives.
- c. supervision in schools to be intensified.
- d. parents to be enlightened more on the need to provide the materials needed by their wards at school.
- e. students to be adequately motivated on the need for education.
- f. more discipline to be enforced in our schools

v. **Conclusion.**

(Making a final appeal to all persons concerned to help salvage education in Nigeria).

B. WRITING

With the outline written out, you can proceed with the writing of the first draft of the essay. In examination essays, there may not be the time to rewrite the first draft, so care should be taken to avoid errors. The writing should follow the outline with the

major sections of the outline serving as paragraphs. However, you can, if the points in a section are too unwieldy, break it up into several paragraphs. For example, *what are the causes of the Falling Standard of Education in Nigeria?* Can be treated in more than one paragraph and so on.

The essay has to be written following the conventional structure: introduction, body and conclusion.

(i) THE INTRODUCTION: The introductory paragraph states the thesis (that is, the controlling idea) of the essay. It gives the necessary background information – what? Who? Where? When? In formal documents, such as reports, the introductory paragraph also makes clear the principle upon which the body of the work is arranged:

In the rest of this essay, we shall attempt to point out the indications of the falling standard of education in Nigeria, examine the causes of the falling standard of education, and proffer solutions to remedy the situation.

The introduction should also arrest the attention of the reader. A poorly written introductory paragraph cannot make the reader have a clear focus of what the essay is about, how it is structured and also cannot arrest and sustain his interest.

(ii) THE BODY: The body constitutes a number of paragraphs treating the subject in stages or steps that are logically linked to each other. The presentation of material here should follow a natural order: A before B, B before C, C before D, and so on. However, it is not all essays that can be easily organized in this natural sequence. In this case, you can adopt any of the following methods to determine the order of presentation:

(a) Chronological Order: In this case, events are presented according to the time they occurred such as in the narration of an incident.

(b) Spatial Order: Here the essay is organized in such order as north to south, or outside to inside, or front to back, or left to right. This kind of presentation is good for such an essay as describing the college campus.

(c) Descending Order of Importance: here, the most important facts are treated first and the least important last. In formal writing, such as reports, the point that should make the highest impact should be presented first.

(d) Ascending Order of Importance: This is mainly used in literary works to build up suspense and a sense of climax. This method can also be used in presenting points in an argumentative writing. However, this is not appropriate for business letters, reports and other such related writings.

(e) Ascending Order of Complexity: Here the simplest aspects of the subject matter are presented before the more complex ones. Also the writer proceeds from the familiar to the unfamiliar.

iii. THE CONCLUSION: A well-written essay ends appropriately in the conclusion. Each piece of writing demands its special kind of ending. Some endings review what has been said in a kind of summary. Others are used to make recommendations or offer solutions to problems raised in the essay. In some also, a final appeal is made to the reader or a final attempt to persuade the reader, as in argumentative essays.

(C) REWRITING

The rewriting stage involves carefully reading through what has been written and making the necessary corrections. If there is enough time, it may involve rewriting the entire essay to ensure that it is free of blemish as much as possible.

In revising the essay draft, the following points have to be borne in mind.

1. Does the opening paragraph clearly state the thesis and structure of the essay?
2. Do the paragraphs adequately develop the thesis?
3. Are the paragraphs well-linked with one another?
4. Do the paragraphs have unity and coherence with transitional expressions linking ideas?
5. Does the essay end smoothly in an appropriate conclusion?

6. Are the sentences well constructed and correct?
7. Are the sentences varied in length and type?
8. Are appropriate words used to suit the audience and purpose of the essay?
9. Are words correctly spelled?
10. Are capital letters and the punctuation marks properly used?

KIND OF ESSAY (DISCOURSE TYPES)

We can classify our essays into our broad types, namely: narration, description, exposition, and argumentation.

(I) NARRATION: The purpose of a narrative essay is to tell a story, to relate a sequence of events in a chronological order. However, narration is not just telling a story. In narration, there is implied or stated significance of the events presented. For example, in a narration such as *an accident I witnessed*, the writer may wish to present as the significance of the narration, the bizarre nature of the accident, and he tells the story in such a way to evoke the horrifying scene he himself witnessed.

A narrative essay, like any other essay, has a beginning (introduction), middle (body), and end (conclusion). The arrangement follows the sequence of events. Actions are presented as they occurred, each stage of the actions forming a paragraph. For example, an essay on *My First Trip to a City*, might be divided into the following stages/paragraphs:

Paragraph 1 - the preparation (introduction)

Paragraph 2 - the journey to the city

Paragraph 3 - my arrival/my first impression of a city.

Paragraph 4 - conclusion

As events related in a narration are mainly past events, we make use of the past tense, although there is occasional use of the historical present tense. Let us take a look at this short narrative piece or writing:

It happened one day about noon, going towards my boat, I *was exceedingly* surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which *was very* plain to be seen in the sand. I *stood like one* thunderstruck, or as if I *had seen* an apparition. I *listened*, I *looked* round me, but I *could hear* nothing, nor see anything. I went up to a rising ground, to look farther; I *went up* the shore and down the shore, but it was all one; I *could see* no other impression but that one.

Note that the verbs (which are italicized) are in the past tense. What we have in the fourth sentence is *could hear/see*. Do not mistake the bare infinitive to be present tense *see* is in a phrase with *could* as *hear* is. What we have is *nor could see anything*. The second *could* is deleted.

In narration we have a measure of description too.

(II) DESCRIPTION: In a descriptive essay, the purpose is to evoke a mood or create a dominant impression about a person, place, or object. Using concrete, vivid images that appeal to the reader's sense, the writer tries to make the reader see, hear, or feel what the writer saw, heard, or felt.

Here is an example of a piece of writing involving description.

He was an old man, up in his seventies thirty years or more older than Dollie, but he was as strong as a bull. He was a squat sort of man, heavy in the shoulders, with remarkably long arms, the kind of build they say the river natives have on the Congo from padding so much in their boats. He had a round bullet head set on powerful shoulders. His skin was very dark, and the thin hair on his head was now grizzled like tufts of old cotton batting. He has small eyes and a flat nose, not big, and the kindest and wisest old face in the world, the sad, wise face of an old animal peering tolerantly out on the goings-on of the merely human creature before him.

This is a description of an old man. Note the impression the writer wants to create of the old man: he is strong even though old; he is also wise. The writer makes use of concrete images to recreate in the reader's imagination the old man. He uses comparison: *as strong as a bull, the kind of build they*

say the river natives have on the Congo from paddling, so much in their boats, round bullet head, grizzled like tufts of old cotton batting, etc. Also note the use of such adjectives as 'strong', 'squat', 'heavy', powerful, small, fat, kindest, wisest, and old. There are the adverbial too: *remarkably*, *tolerantly* and so on. All these aid in effective description.

The tense of a descriptive essay can be present tense or past tense. In this passage past tense has been used.

In arrangement, the description requires a sequential arrangement of details that move in a consistent way: from near to far, from general to particular, from right to left, from top to bottom, and so forth. As description moves in one of these ways it provides a framework for individual details.

(III) EXPOSITION:

Here, the purpose is to inform, clarify, define, explain, or analyze. Most school writing (research papers, essay examinations, lab reports) is expository, that is students are asked to explain or clarify their ideas. Given below are two passages typical of this kind of writing:

PASSAGE A

The antithesis between a technical and a liberal education is fallacious. There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal, and no liberal education which is not technical: that is, no

education which *does not impact* both technique and intellectual vision. In simple language, education should turn out the pupil with something he *knows* well and something he *can do* well. This intimate union of practice and theory *aids* both. The intellectual does not work best in a vacuum. The stimulation of creative impulse *requires*, especially in the case of a child, the quick transition to practice. Geometry and mechanics, followed by workshop practice, *gain* that reality without which mathematics is verbiage.

PASSAGE B

The majority of alloys *are prepared by* mixing metals in the molten state; then the mixture is *poured* into metal or sand moulds and *allowed* to solidify. Generally, the major ingredient is melted first, then the others *are added* to it and should completely dissolve.

The expository essay is mainly written in the present tense (although one cannot entirely rule out the other possibilities). The passive form of verbs is generally used in scientific writing as in passage B: '*are melted*', '*is poured/allowed*', '*is melted*', and '*are added*'. If we are to write in the active voice, it should be something like, '*the students prepare majority of alloys*' ...etc.

In an essay of this kind, we divide up the idea or object to be discussed into its component parts or stages and discuss each part or stage in a paragraph. We write a good introduction, which makes the reader know immediately what we intend to do in the essay, e.g. discuss how the alloys are prepared.

(IV) ARGUMENTATION

An argumentative essay attempts to convince, bring about an event, or move the reader to action. In an orderly way, the writer analyzes a problem, offers a solution, acknowledges opposing solutions, and restates the one given in the essay.

An essay of argument usually follows this pattern:

- (a) The introduction establishes the basis of argument and defines terms.
- (b) Argument against your viewpoint (in the weakest position) are presented.
- (c) Argument for your viewpoint in ascending order of importance (probably a paragraph each, unless there are a large number of them) are strongly presented.
- (d) In the conclusion, you quickly survey the arguments in favour of your viewpoint, make a final appeal to win the argument in your favour.

The pattern illustrated:

TOPIC: Should expensive funeral ceremonies in Igbo land be banned?

PARAGRAPH 1 (Introduction)

In Igbo Land today, it has become the vogue to organize expensive and colourful funeral ceremonies supposedly to show love and respect for a deceased family member. The manner this is being done has generated a lot of controversy. The issue now is whether such an ugly practice should be allowed to continue in our society or banned outright. Personally, I strongly support that this practice that is fast taking over our society should be statutorily checked.

PARAGRAPH 2: (Opposing arguments)

It may be argued that it is a tradition in Igbo land to revere the dead. Sparing no cost to give a beloved one a 'befitting' funeral ceremony is the greatest honour one can give to the departed. In the spirit world, his soul rests assured that all honour due to him has been given and that he is still held in much esteem by his relatives. It could also be said that etc.

PARAGRAPH 3: (Arguments for your point of view)

Such arguments to support this ugly practice that is fast gaining ground in our society is baseless. One, it has to be clearly stated that the kind of funeral ceremonies as we witness today is not in Igbo tradition. What we have are mere circus shows which rather ridicule the dead and cast doubts on our intellect ... etc.

PARAGRAPH 4: (Another strong argument to support your point of view) e.g. Funeral processions on our roads disrupt traffic.

PARAGRAPH 5: (Yet another strong argument for your point of view. The number of paragraphs is your choice) e.g. it encourages materialism with its ugly consequences.

PARAGRAPH 6: (Conclusion)

Finally, there should be no doubt left now about the negative impact expensive ceremonies have on Igbo society: Such practices are not a part of Igbo tradition; funeral processions cause a lot of nuisance on our roads; and the show of affluence associated with these ceremonies encourages excessive materialism with its ugly consequences. Therefore, our houses of assembly in the Igbo states must live up to their responsibility to the people, and make laws to check this evil in our society immediately.

4.3 FORMAL & INFORMAL LETTER WRITING

Introduction

The skill of letter writing is one of the essential skills a student should possess. The reason is that at one time or the other one may be required to communicate through the channel of letter writing. It is therefore our aim in this section to discuss in full all aspects of letter writing and it is our hope that the readers would find it interesting and useful.

Types of Letters:

Based on format, letters are traditionally classified into three. They are:

1. Formal letter
2. Semi-formal letter

3. Informal letter

Formal Letter: Formal letter otherwise referred to as business or official letter is any letter written for official purposes. It includes such letter as:

1. Letters of application for job.
2. Letter to government establishments or departments.
3. Letter from one institution to another.
4. Letter to the editor, etc.

The formal features of Formal letter

The formal features of formal letter include the following:

1. The addresser's address.
2. The date.
3. The addressee's address.
4. The salutation.
5. The subject matter of the letter.
6. The body.
 1. The subscription.
 2. The signature.
 3. The Writer's name.

The Addresser's Address

The addresser's address is the writer's address, which is usually stated at the right hand corner of the writing sheet. Note that it is wrong to write one's name on top of the address. Also it is wrong to state the address all in capital letters. Conventionally, the address could be presented either in block form or indented form depending on the writer's choice.

Examples

(a) *Block form*

Department of Economics,
School of social Sciences,
Alvan Ikoku College of Education,
Owerri.

OR

No 10, Douglas Road,
Owerri,
Imo State.

(b) *Indented form*

Department of Economics,
 School of Social Sciences,
 Alvan Ikoku College of Education,
 Owerri.

OR

No 10 Douglas Road
Owerri
Imo State.

The inclusion of local government, state or even the country on the address depends on the destination of the letter in question. If a letter is meant to move from one local government to another, one state to another or one country to another, the addresser's address should include the local government, the state or the country. Take for instance, a letter meant for overseas can have the following address:

St. Peter's Church.
Umuoziri Iinyishi.
P.O. Box 38.
Ikeduru L.G.A
Imo State,
Nigeria.

In the above examples, you would notice that at the end of each line of the address there is a comma but one may decide to do away with the commas only to have a final full-stop at the end of the address. This convention is also acceptable. Example:

P.O. Box 45
Owerri West L.G.A.
Imo State
Nigeria.

The Date

After the addresser's address, what follows is the date. There should be no gap between the addresser's address and date if the letter is hand written. The date could be written in any of the following formats.

9th February, 1999.
February 9, 1999.
9 February, 1999.

The Addressee's Address

The addressee's address is the address of the recipient which is written by the left hand margin of the writing sheet immediately after the date. It usually begins with the designation of the recipient followed by the address. Example:

The Personnel Manager,
Shell Development Company,
P.M.B 1030
Port-harcourt
Rivers State.

OR

The Registrar
Alvan Ikoku College of Education
Owerri
Imo State.

There should be uniformity in stating the addresser's address and the addressee's address. That is, if the writer chooses to use block form, the two addresses should be written in block forms.

Salutation

Any of the following salutation formats is suitable for official letter:

Dear Sir,

Sir,

Dear Madam,

Madam,

Where it is not possible to know the sex of the recipient, it is better to write "Dear sir".

The subject matter or Title

The subject of an official letter is usually summarized and stated immediately after that salutation. The title can either be capitalized or written with initial capital letters for the lexical words. The subject matter should not be written before the salutation, and it is usually underlined.

The Body

The body of official letter is usually made up of three parts, namely the introduction, the message and the conclusion. In the introduction, there is no room for exchange of pleasantries, instead the main aim of the letter is stated. Subsequently, the message of the letter is stated and developed in paragraphs. When the message is exhausted, the conclusion is drawn.

The language of business letter is strictly official. By this we mean there is no room for informal language. The use of slangy expressions, colloquial expressions, and contracted forms is strictly prohibited. The language should be polite as much as possible and should not degenerate into abuse no matter the emotional state of the writer.

The Subscription

There is only one acceptable form of subscription in official letter, and that is "Yours faithfully". The "Y" or "Yours" is usually written in capital letter while the "F" of "faithfully" is written in small letter. There is a mandatory comma immediately after "faithfully".

The Writer's Name and Signature

The subscription is immediately followed by the writer's signature, full name and designation where applicable. Notice that the signature comes before the name and not the other way round. Note the following.

Yours faithfully,

Signature
John Ade.
General Secretary.

SEMI-FORMAL LETTER

Semi-formal letter, just as the name implies, is partly formal and partly informal. A good example of semi-formal letter is a letter to an adult friend or one's parent's friends. It can also be a letter to one's boss or employer asking for recommendation.

The Formal Features of Semi-Formal Letter

The Addresser's Address and Date:

Unlike formal letter, there is only one address in semi-formal letter and that is the addresser's address. All that was said with regard to addresser's address and date also applies here.

The Salutation

Any of the following salutations is suitable for semi-formal letter.

Dear Mr. Eze.
Dear Mrs. Obi,
Dear sir,
Dear madam,

The Body

The body of semi-formal letter usually has three parts, namely, *the introduction, the message and the conclusion*. The introduction states the theme of the letter followed by the message which is developed in

paragraphs. Finally, there is the conclusion which is usually abrupt since there is no need for parting words.

The language of semi-formal letter is in between formality and informality. It is a combination of some features of formal and informal language. Whereas colloquial expressions such as contracted forms are permissible in semi formal letter, the use of slangy expression is not allowed. The language should be framed to reflect relationship between the writer and the recipient.

The Subscription

The subscription of semi-formal letter depends on the salutation. If the salutation is Dear Mr...or Dear Mrs..., the subscription should be "Yours sincerely" where "Yours" begins with capital "Y" while "sincerely" begins with small "s".

But if the salutation happens to be "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam", the subscription should be "Yours faithfully".

The Writer's Name

In semi-formal letter, the writer's full name (first name and surname) is required.

INFORMAL LETTER

Informed letter is also referred to as personal or private letter. This is the kind of letter written to a close relation or friend. This kind of letter is usually very common among students because they are always writing to their relations (father, mother, brother,

sister, uncle, aunt etc), or friends.

The addresser's Address and Date: These are as discussed previously under formal and semi-formal letters. Students should be reminded that on no account should they write their name on top of their address. Again the address can either be stated in block or indented form.

The Salutation of Greeting: This takes various forms depending on the recipient. The following should be noted:

Parents: My dear father,
My dear mother,

Siblings: My dear brother,
Dear brother,
Dear Brother Mike
Dear Chidi,
My dear sister,
Dear sister,
Dear Sister Mary,
Dear Chinyere

Other relations: Dear uncle,
Dear aunt,
Dear cousin,
Dear Uncle John,

Friends: Dear Ben,
Dear Joy,

In an informal letter it is wrong to write "Dear friend" when writing to a friend. The above examples should be strictly adhered to as there is no alternative to them.

The Body

The body of informal letter just like other forms of letter are made up of three parts namely, the introduction, the message and the conclusion.

The introduction is devoted for exchange of pleasantries. In some cases it could be a forum for the writer to acknowledge the receipt of a previous letter from the addressee. Whichever is the situation, the introduction is meant to establish the close relationship that exists between the writer and the recipient. Students should ensure that their letters are well introduced to stimulate the interest of the reader.

For every letter there is always a message or messages the writer wants to put across. After the introduction the message follows. The message should be developed in paragraphs, keeping the rules of paragraph development.

The conclusion sums up the letter. However, there is no one way of concluding a letter. The conclusion depends on the writer's intentions. A writer may conclude his letter by wishing his recipient well. Whatever the case may be, the conclusion should be written to ensure that the letter has come to a conclusive end.

The Language of Informal Letter

The language is strictly informal. There is no room for formal usage. Thus, the use of colloquial expression such as contracted forms and slangy expressions are permissible. Note that where slang is used, it must be enclosed in quotation marks. The language of informal letter should also be chatty, hence some of the sentences are likely to be short.

The Subscription

The subscription of informal letter can take any form provided it is not "Yours faithfully" or "Yours truly". Therefore any of the following can be suitable:

Yours sincerely,

Yours ever,

Your affectionately,

Yours affectionate son/daughter,

Yours etc.

Note that in the examples above the "Y" for "Yours" is written in capital letter while the subsequent words are written in small letters. It should also be pointed out that the word "Yours" has no apostrophe before or after 's'. It is therefore wrong to write:

Your's or

Yours' truly.

The Writer's Name

In informal letter, only the first name of the writer is required. The surname is not necessary. Thus, for a writer whose name is Emeka Njoku, only Emeka should be written.

4.4 SPEECH WRITING

The focus here is on the formal features of a speech. Other aspects of writing such as preparation and some aspects of organization are handled in other sections of this book.

One thing to be noted about the features of a speech is that it follows the prevailing convention in the environment where it has to be delivered. For example, the overloading of the vocatives aspect of speeches with the titles and accolades of dignitaries is characteristic of the Nigerian society. Nevertheless, there are features common to all speeches. A typical speech format is given below:

**AN ADDRESS PRESENTED BY MR. UCHE AMADI,
THE CHAIRMAN, OBODO STUDENTS' UNION
(O.S.U), ON THE OCCASION OF HER WELCOME
CEREMONY HELD IN HONOUR OF OBODO FIRST
YEAR STUDENTS FOR THE 2001/2002 SESSION.**

The Chairman of the occasion.
The Patron of Obodo Students' Union
Executive Members of O.S.U,
Distinguished guests,
Fellow Students.
Ladies and Gentlemen.

I feel greatly honoured standing in your midst to deliver this address on this August Occasion of welcome ceremony for the first year students of our community, Obodo, who have just joined us in this great citadel of learning, Alvan Ikoku College of

Education, Owerri. It is really a thing of joy to welcome yet another batch of Obodo Students, into our fold.

It shows that our beloved community is making a steady progress in academics and other aspects of development as well.

(There follow other paragraphs which touch on the other issues relevant to the occasion. Then there is the last paragraph which will serve as the conclusion).

Once again, I welcome you to this great institution of learning. I have every hope that you will let yourselves be guided by these little pieces of advice I have just given you. If you do, you'll always find your stay here enjoyable and smooth, and in the end you'll reap bountifully. I wish all of you a happy and fruitful stay in Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri.

The following points should be noted:

- a. There must always be a vocative, e.g. "The Chairman..." etc.
- b. In the introduction, you have to make your listener know what the speech is about. The speech should also end smoothly in a befitting conclusion.
- c. Humour and anecdote are added to speeches to make them interesting to the audience but you should not disgress too far from the theme.
- d. Use of direct address is one of the features of a speech, for example, the use of 'you'. It makes it seem as if you are talking to the audience directly even though it is a written speech.

- e. There is the use of colloquial abbreviations such as "you'll" instead of "you will".

In conclusion, the speechwriter should bear in mind that what he is writing is something to be read out to an audience. He should not use jaw-breaking words that will confuse the audience and ridicule his personality. Rather the writer should make sure there are no grammatical blemishes to diminish his esteem before his audience. The last word is: write simply but accurately.

4.5 REPORT WRITING

A report is a document, which provides an account of something witnessed or examined, or of work carried out, or of an investigation together with conclusions arrived at as a result of the investigation. (Little, 1981, p. 158)

Reports are classified into various kinds according to their contents, length and form.

a. Reports Classified According to Content

- (i) **Eye-witness Report:** This kind of report is mostly written in a narrative form and presents events in the order they happened. It is the kind of report written to give an account of an accident.
- (ii) **Work Report:** This is the kind of report written to give information on a particular project as it progresses, or on completion, or within a specified scope of duration.

- (iii) **Investigation Report:** This is routine kind of report an organization carries out on its operation. Sometimes, there is a set form on which it can be filled out.
- (iv) **Oral Report:** This kind of report is not written but oral. It is not much of our concern here.
- (v) **Routine Report:** This is much the same as investigation report and is also filled out on a predesigned form.
- (vi) **Special Report:** This kind of report is usually called for under special circumstances. An organization can set up a committee to produce such a report on a particular matter. This is the kind of report that concerns us in this writing.

b. Report Classified by Length

Under this classification we have short (or summary) report and full (or detailed) report. The basis for classification is the scope covered by each. We shall return later to this.

a. Report Classified by Form

Report can take three forms: letter form, schematic presentation, and mixed form.

1. Letter Form: A report can be presented in the form of a letter. This kind of report has its limitations, which include the following:

- i. The subject matter must be a simple one and is limited.
- ii. It presents only one viewpoint (that of the writer).

- iii. It has to follow the order of an ordinary business letter in its presentation.

2. Schematic Presentation: This method is used in presenting a more detailed, complex and extensive report than the letter form. Here, subheadings, indentation, and numbering of the various sections of the report make it easy to refer to any section of it required. One can easily select any part of it for closer study.

This kind of detailed report is usually accompanied by a covering letter (or letter of transmittal). (Examples of both the schematic report and a transmittal letter are given at the end).

3. Mixed Form: This is a mixture of the letter form and the schematic type. The letter form is followed until the section on findings where the items are numbered as in the schematic form. The report then ends in the letter form. (see an example at the end of this section).

THE FORMAT OF A REPORT

The format used in presenting a report depends on whether it is a short or full report.

a. The Format of Short Reports

A short report can follow the schematic form or the letter form. Which ever format is adopted, it has to follow this order in the presentation of items:

1. Terms of reference
2. Procedure
3. Findings

4. Conclusions
5. Recommendations (if required)

Let us take a closer look at what the writer does in each of these sections.

1. Terms of Reference: Usually an individual or an organization instructs that a report be written on some issue. The instructing authority usually sets the goal and scope of the report. The report writer has to conform to this set target. Therefore, in presenting the report, the writer usually states in the terms of reference section the authorizing body, the goal set and the date. Here is an example.

Following the violent students' demonstration of 10th at March, 2002, the College Committee of Deans at its meeting of 15th March, 2002 set up this ad hoc committee to investigate the matter and determine the immediate and remote cause or causes of the unrest and make recommendations to prevent future occurrence.

2. Procedure: In this section, the writer states the methods used to collect data, such as interviews granted, books and other material consulted and so on. It also states whether some tests were carried out to verify certain things in the process of the investigation.

3. Findings: The report writer here presents an objective report of his discoveries in the course of the

investigation. For example, he states the grievances that the students he interviewed enumerated as the cause of their violent demonstration.

4. Conclusions: The report writer presents his opinions on the findings made and states the veracity of the allegations and claim made.

5. Recommendations: The section is added if it is stipulated in the terms of reference. Here the report writer suggests solutions to the problem or better ways of handling the issue under investigation.

b. The Format of Full (Detailed) Reports:

A detailed report has all the parts of a short report listed above (i.e. terms of reference procedure, findings, conclusions, and recommendations). Apart from these, there are other features added to a detailed report to make it easy to skim through and extract information from any part of it without having to read the whole report. The other components of a detailed report include:

1. A title page showing what the report is about and who wrote it. Here is an example of a title page:

College of Education, Okigwe

*A Report of the Ad hoc Committee set up
by the College Committee of Deans of 15th
March, 2002, to investigate the Violent
Students' Demonstration of 10th March,
2002.*

Date 15th April, 2002

2. A table of contents organized like any other one

showing the various sections of the report with proper pagination.

3. A synopsis of findings, conclusions and recommendations. This is a sort of summary of the report to let the reader have a general idea of what the report is about.

4. An appendix located at the end of the report. In the appendix are things such as charts, tables of figures, verbatim statements, sub-reports, definition of terms, and all such things that would have distracted the reader if put in the main part of the report. Some of these serve as illustrations, some as evidences tendered, and so on.

Having so far discussed the classified, content, and features of reports, let us examine these practical examples of reports. Example A is a short report written in both the letter and schematic forms. Example B is a summary report presented in a schematic form. Note the way the various sections have been arranged using numbering, indentation, underlining et cetera to facilitate an understanding of how the parts are related. The two passages were culled from Peter Little's *Communication in business* (pp. 169-73)

Example A

Mixed Form: A maintenance engineer reports to a firm about discoloured tap-water at branch premises.
BARLOW AND HARING LTD
Broadway

Helmstead HEL PB

12th April 19...

The Officer Manager
Barlow and Baring Ltd.
Dear Sir,

Hot water supply, 53 Long Lane

You instructed me, on the 9th April, 19..., to investigate the cause of the discoloured draw-off from the hot water supply at the firm's branch premises at 53 Long Lane, Helmstead. I accordingly visited the property on 11th April and made the following observations.

1. Draw-off from the cold water supply is clear
2. The hot water system is of the direct kind and includes three radiators.
3. All piping, together with the hot water cylinder, is of copper.
4. The radiator are of pressed steel.
5. The Long Lane area of Helmstead is an acid ('soft') water area.

I am of the opinion therefore that the discolouration is caused by reaction between the acid water supply and the steel radiators and recommend that these radiators be replaced by others of non-ferrous materials.

Yours faithfully

J.F. Jimpson

Maintenance Engineer

Example B

Summary Report (schematic presentation). The personnel officer of a factory reports on apprentice unrest.

REPORT ON APPRENTICE UNREST **AT ADDRESS ENGINEERING**

I. Terms of Reference

On the instructions of the Work Manager (2nd May, 19...) to report on apprentice unrest and make recommendations.

II. Procedure

- A All supervisory grades concerned with apprentices were interviewed.
- B Twenty apprentices, selected at random, were interviewed in the works.

III. Findings

A Extent of Unrest

The comments of the Apprentice Supervisor and foremen revealed a wide spread malaise and resentment amongst apprentices. Although manifestations of this in individual breaches of discipline and a general uncooperative attitude were considered only minor, several foremen expressed the view that the situation was deteriorating and serious

outbreaks of misbehaviour might result.

B. Causes of Unrest

Resentment is felt by apprentices over the following matters:

1. Training: Complaints were made that:
 - a. Supervision was inadequate
 - b. Apprentices were kept too long in one section
 - c. Apprentices were being used on production lines
 - d. Skilled men intent on bonus earning were unwilling to spend time explaining what they were doing.
2. Conditions: Complaints were made that:
 - a. Machines were left dirty by skilled men
 - b. Safety precautions were ignored particularly by operation of machines with guards removed.
3. Pay: The belief was widespread that rates paid to apprentices were the lowest in the area.

IV Conclusions

A Extent of unrest

On matters of justified complaint, immediate action must be taken to prevent further disturbances.

B. Causes of Unrest

1. Training: There is evidence that

- all complaints were well-founded.
2. Conditions: Complaint 2 (a) above is unimportant but removal of safety guards is an offence against the Factories Act and must be stopped.
 3. Pay: Our rates compare favourable with those paid to apprentices in other factories of this area, and complaints on this score would cease if apprentices were made aware of this.

V Recommendations

- A. A senior Training Officer to be appointed and instructed to draw up a training scheme which will ensure balanced experience in the works and adequate supervision.
- B. All supervisory grades to be reminded of the importance of keeping machinery guarded when in operation.
- C. The Personnel Officer to address a meeting of apprentices and explain the favourable rates of pay enjoyed in this factory.

9th May, 19..

John Smith
Personnel Officer

Example C

(This is an example of a transmittal letter)

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, OKIGWE
P.M.B 450, Okigwe

Tel: 04-227834

Fax: 04-227945

Date: 15th April, 2002

Our Ref: COE/N/114/082

The Secretary,
Committee of Deans,
College of Education, Okigwe,
P.M.B. 450,
Okigwe.

Dear Sir,

Submission of Report on Students' Demonstration

In your meeting of 15th March, 2002, your esteemed committee set up my ad-hoc committee to investigate the violent students' demonstration of 10th March, 2002 to determine the cause or causes of the demonstration and make recommendations to your committee.

Having accomplished that task we hereby forward our report.

Your faithfully,

Nduka N.C

Nduka N.C. (Dr.)
Secretary of Ad-hoc Committee.

4.6 WRITING A MEMORANDUM (MEMO)

The term "memorandum" (in plural "memoranda") is used to refer to various forms of written communication, which are mostly circulated internally within an organization. Its original meaning was something used to aid memory but it has come to refer to different kinds of communication. Some of these include:

1. A sort of unsolicited work report or investigation report an executive submits, usually to a superior officer, on a project carried out or an idea that could be tried out to improve the organization;
2. A simpler type of document circulated in an organization to remind, or introduce to, those concerned certain arrangements, or just to pass instructions;
3. Brief internal communications between individuals in an organization mostly written on short pads provided for the purpose which have "memorandum" or "memo" written on them and sometimes bearing the organization's name. Below is an example of such memo pads.

SUNBEAM NIG. LTD		
Department		
From.....	To.....	Date.....

There is space provided for the message to be written

The term "memorandum" (in plural "memoranda") is used to refer to various forms of written communication, which are mostly circulated internally within an organization. Its original meaning was something used to aid memory but it has come to refer to different kinds of communication. Some of these include:

1. A sort of unsolicited work report or investigation report an executive submits, usually to a superior officer, on a project carried out or an idea that could be tried out to improve the organization;
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3. Brief internal communications between individuals in an organization mostly written on short pads provided for the purpose which have "memorandum" or "memo" written on them and sometimes bearing the organization's name. Below is an example of such memo pads.

<p style="text-align: center;">SUNBEAM NIG. LTD</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Department</p> <p>From.....To.....Date.....</p>

There is space provided for the message to be written

which is usually brief. This is not usually signed.

In summary, the primary function of a memorandum is to convey information, or pass instructions, or to make proposal for the future.

The format for writing a memorandum varies but they more or less follow the same pattern.

From:.....
To:.....
Subject:.....
Date:.....

(This is then followed by a short introduction of the circumstances that prompted the memorandum.

Then the rest of the body follows).

Formal memorandum are usually signed. Here is an example of a formal memorandum:

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION , OKIGWE

From: Head, Department of English
To: All the Academic Staff of the Department
Subject: Submission of course content.
Date: 8th March, 2002.

You are requested to submit to the Department the course content of course(s) you teach. Indicate clearly the course code, course title and whether it is degree or N.C.E. This is should reach the Department on or before 26th March, 2002. Please comply.

Amadi C.O.

Amadi C.O.
Head of Department.

4.7 MINUTES WRITING

Minutes of a group meeting are a record of decisions reached in such a meeting. In the minutes, the secretary records the motions and the resolutions of such motions for reference in subsequent meetings. Minutes are usually read at the beginning of a subsequent meeting and adopted by members of the group if accurately recorded. Afterwards the chairman signs them and they become legally binding on all the members of the group and can be tendered in court. Any inaccuracies observed in the recording of minutes are noted in the minutes of the current meeting.

Minutes are made up of the following:

1. Date and place of meeting.
2. The names of those present, or the number of persons present (if it is a large group).
3. The issues discussed, with decisions reached on them (their presentation follows their order in the agenda, except it was decided to change the order).

In writing the minutes, the following points of style should be noted. Minutes must be accurate, clear, unambiguous and self-explanatory. It must be brief. Minutes are usually written in the past tense. For easy reference, minutes ought to be numbered and given a title.

MODE OF PRESENTATION

The first thing to be written in minutes is the title. This should indicate the date and place of meeting. Here is an example:

Minutes of the General Meeting of Ugochinyere Age Grade held on 26th December, 2002 at the Umuosogu Civic Hall. After the title, the next thing to be written is the persons present at the meeting. Their names are written if it is a small group

e.g. *"Present: N. Ibe (in the chair); Messers: Duru; Oghonna; Egeme; Korie; Ebebe; Imaoha; Mesdames: Egbula; Chukwu".*

But if it is a large group, what is written is the number of persons present e.g.

"Forty members were present. Mr. N. Ibe was in the chair"

What follows after words is the reading and signing of the minutes of the previous meeting. There are two ways the secretary can write this in the minutes:

a. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The secretary read the minutes of the meeting held on 30th March, 2002 and these were there-upon signed by the chairman

b. **Minutes of previous meeting**

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting on 30th March, 2002 be signed as a correct record.

Afterwards the items on the agenda are presented in the order they occurred (except where it was decided to alter the order). Each item is numbered. The decision taken on each item is noted. The way the motions, the arguments for and against the motion, and the resolutions are presented in the minutes vary from organization, and from secretary to secretary.

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e.g. "Present: N. Ibe (in the chair); Messers: Duru; Ogbonna; Egerue; Korte; Ebebe; Iwaolu; Mesdames: Egbula; Chukwu".

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Some secretaries write down only the decisions reached on a particular motion. However, for clearer presentation, there are two parts which ought to be presented:

1. A Preamble: The preamble gives a clear idea of the motion, report, letter or even argument that lead to the resolution:
2. The Resolution: This itself states what decision has been taken on a matter. Here are three methods that can be used to present minutes on an issue:

METHOD 1

Review of the Annual Subscription

On a motion by Mr. Ogbonna. It was resolved: That the annual subscription be increased From the present #100 to #500

METHOD 2

Review of the Annual Subscription

Mr. Ogbonna proposed, Mr. Egerue seconded and it was resolved: That the annual subscription be increased from the present #100 to #500.

METHOD 3

Review of the Annual Subscription

Mr. Ogbonna proposed and Mr. Egerue seconded: That the annual subscription be reviewed from the present #100 to #500 considering the tremendous loss in the value of the naira ever since the subscription of #100 was instituted and considering the enormous

projects the Age Grade has at the moment which require a lot of money. The proposal was carried. In the minutes, expression of thanks, regret, congratulations, etc. from individuals or organizations are shown as resolutions:

Resolved: That the Age Grade's regrets at the absence of Mr. Madu owing to illness be conveyed to Mr. Madu by the secretary with the Age Grade's wishes for his speedy recovery.

If reports, letters etc. are read out and it was decided that no action would be taken on them they are minuted as "received"

Donation to the church Building

A letter from the Unuamunu Church Building Committee asking for Donations was received.

If, however, it was resolved to do something about it the minute would read:

Donation to the Church Building

The secretary read a letter from the Unuamunu Church committee asking for fund donation from the Age Grade.

Resolved: That the Financial Secretary make a donation of one hundred thousand naira (#100.00) on behalf of the Age Grade.

Some secretaries omit such words as 'the', and 'and', 'a' etc. to reduce the words in the minutes. Here is an example.

Treasurer reported increased number of members had paid subscriptions in advance.

Instead of:

Treasurer reported that an increased number of members has paid their subscriptions in advance (Irtle, 1977, p259).

This sometimes makes the minutes not to be clear enough.

DRAFTING AN AGENDA

An agenda is simply a list of items to be discussed in a meeting written in the chronological order of their presentation. Below is an example of an agenda.

Agenda

1. Chairman's opening remarks
2. Reading the minutes of the previous meeting
3. Review of the annual subscription
4. Reading the letter from Unuanunu Church Building Committee
5. Presentation of the accounts of the year 2001
6. A.O.B. (This means "Any other business").



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