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**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Blended Learning for Effective Reflective Essay Writing**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study assessed the effectiveness of blended learning for effective reflective essay writing among Grade 9 students of Pit-os National High School, Pit-os, Cebu City, for the School year 2018-2019. The quasi experimental method of research was employed. There were 50 Grade 9 students involved in the study. These subjects were grouped into two: the control and experimental groups. The experimental group was intervened with the use of a blended learning approach using the visual writing prompt, an online tool, while the control group was taught with the traditional method of teaching. The main instrument used was *The Day of Destiny* by Sir Thomas Malory. An assessment rubric was used to assess the performance of both the experimental and control groups. There was a significant difference between the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups. The findings showed that the students who were exposed to the blended learning approach had enhanced their writing performance more than the control group. The study concluded that the blended learning approach is effective in improving the writing performances of the students. Furthermore, this approach provides effective instructional experiences for the students because of the responsive environment.

**KEYWORDS**

Blended learning, effective, essay writing, quasi-experimental

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**1. Introduction**

Literature has a great function in developing human feelings, ideas, and interests. It is a work of art that has raised humans from their sub-savagery and ignorance to a higher state of existence. According to Geiger (1972), literature improves human existence for it enables people to enter into different experiences. At the same time, it has the power to draw out or amplify experiences, to affect or enhance awareness of life. In the world of pedagogy, literature makes a significant contribution to students' development and knowledge. For this reason, it is extremely important that teachers should provide students with the essential strategies that will help them appreciate literature and achieve success in every part of their educational and professional endeavors. However, writing is one of the most complicated language skills, which some students consider a source of their anxiety and frustrations. It is not surprising that sometimes children or even adults are reluctant to write.

Nowadays, students do their school activities using technology because they see it as more engaging and entertaining. Technology also enables students to immerse themselves in the learning process. They also find information easily and accurately. It transforms the learning experience of the learners. By incorporating technology in the classroom, students are motivated to do better. Today's technology continuously improves the lives of many people. For many, it becomes an essential part of their lives, and they cannot complete a task in a day without it. Most people agree that there is a need for the younger generation to understand how computers work for them. Education officers have responded to the importance of developing computer literacy by including it as part of the school curriculum.

This time, students already know how to manipulate computers for their projects, presentations, and other school related works. In addition, students who are exposed to computers learn how to use applications which will help them searching information easily. They can also submit work to their teachers from home or anywhere else, letting them accomplish school works outside the

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constraints of school hours and teaching them personal responsibility. Since students are now computer literate, this will absolutely give them an edge once they set foot in their future workplace. With the advancement brought by technology and the way students embrace it, the researcher, who is a Junior High School teacher, therefore, decided to conduct this study to find if using blended learning will help in improving students' performance through reflective essay writing.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

This study is anchored in Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. It is supported by Jerome Bruner's Constructivism Theory and Situated Learning Theory by Jean Lave.

Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning is based on three main assumptions: there are two distinct channels for processing information (auditory and visual); channel capacity is limited; and learning is an active process of selecting, organizing, filtering, and integrating information (Mayer, 2002). People learn more thoroughly from words and visuals together than from words alone, according to the "multimedia principle." Adding words to visuals, on the other hand, is not an effective approach to achieving multimedia learning. The idea is to create educational media that considers how the human mind operates. This theory proposes that the brain does not understand a multimedia display of words, visuals, and aural information as mutually exclusive but rather selects and organizes these pieces dynamically to produce coherent mental constructions. It also underlines the significance of learning when new information is combined with previous knowledge. (Mayer, 2002). This idea can be applied to design principles such as presenting cohesive verbal and graphical information, guiding learners to select appropriate words and images, and lowering the burden on a single processing channel (Mayer, 2002).

The study is also supported by the Theory of Constructivism of Jerome Bruner. The theory involves the concept of learning as a dynamic process involving the formation of new concepts based on current and previous information. The constructivist theory emphasizes the growth of self-learning abilities (student-centered). Instructors or teachers are thought of as facilitators for students in order to encourage them to participate actively in the learning process (Bruner, 1996).

These cognitive frameworks enable students to build new ideas by pushing past given information. The learner will organize bits and pieces of their previous knowledge and experiences to make sense of what they know, then build new concepts and solve new problems using a combination of what they have already processed and what they think should be processed next. Bruner added that the teacher's resources should be geared toward encouraging, assisting, and allowing students to find the essential ideas on their own. The main principle is communication between the students and the teacher. In this theoretical framework, Socratic learning is recommended as the ideal method of communication since it allows the teacher to actively highlight any study skills while the learner verbalizes their progress and difficulties and builds a rubric of their present learning state based on the dialogue. Because this idea builds on previously learned material, any teacher lesson plans, teacher worksheets, or resources should constantly be spiraling the learner's knowledge (Bruner, 1996). According to Bruner, a theory of instruction should address four major aspects: (1) predisposition to learning, (2) ways to structure a body of knowledge so that it can be easily grasped by the learner, (3) the most effective sequences for presenting material, and (4) the nature and pacing of rewards and punishments. A good knowledge structure strategy should result in information being simplified, new propositions being generated, and information manipulation being increased.

A support theory is Jean Lave's Situated Learning Theory. This shows that authentic exercises, context, and culture are not part of the learning process, unlike most classroom learning activities, which include abstract knowledge that is both in and out of context. This theory claims that learning is situated; that is, learning takes place in the context of action, context, and culture. It is frequently unintentional rather than intentional and is referred to as "legitimate peripheral participation." (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Knowledge has to be presented in authentic contexts—settings and situations in which that knowledge would usually be applied. Learners become immersed in a "community of practice" that contains certain attitudes and behaviors to be cultivated, and social interaction and collaboration are crucial components of contextual learning. As a beginning or novice advances from the outskirts to the heart of a community, he or she becomes more active and engaged in the culture, finally taking on the position of an expert. Learning, according to Lave and Wenger, is a social process in which knowledge is co-constructed. They claim that such learning takes place in a specific setting and is rooted in a certain social and physical environment. They saw learning as social involvement, implying that learning is an intrinsic and inseparable element of social activity.

Learning is the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice and move toward full involvement. Learners' participation in a community of practice always implies contextual negotiation and renegotiation of world meaning. They comprehend and experience the world through ongoing encounters in which they reconstruct their identity (i.e., become a different person) and evolve the form of their community membership as the relationships between newcomers, and long-time members

change. Learners are naturally motivated by their increasing value of involvement and their desire to become full practitioners, according to them.

Blended learning focuses on the student by applying Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning and its corresponding sub-theories: Jerome Bruner's Constructivism Theory and Situated Learning Theory by Jean Lave. These theories tend to focus on the process of communication and interactions between the students and the teachers and facilitate and improve how to acquire, construct, organize, retrieve, and apply the knowledge. These three theories supported the blended learning approach.

### 3. Related Studies

The rapid advancement of technology over the previous half-century has had a significant impact on learning opportunities. Blended learning is a significant strategy that provides students with flexibility and convenience. Blended learning, according to Larsen (2012), is a combination of face-to-face (FTF) and computer-mediated training. Blended learning, which combines online and face-to-face learning, has the potential to combine the advantages of both traditional classroom and e-learning environments. According to Aguilar (2012), the term blend has been used to refer to a combination of teaching modes, as well as technology (email, phone, online, etc.), techniques (presentation, practice, production, task-based learning teaching, and etc.), and, in the future, the real and virtual world.

In addition, Giarla (2016) stated that blended learning is a natural progression from the increasing accessibility of e-Learning and online materials, as well as the continuing necessity for a human component in the learning process. He went on to say that this strategy ensures that the learner is engaged and in control of his or her own learning experience. Most students have different learning styles, and a blended approach is more likely to accommodate those needs than a standard classroom teaching experience in the future, real and virtual world.

Blended learning is a learner-centered approach that incorporates traditional face-to-face learning with a computer-mediated learning environment. By integrating the strengths of computer-mediated instruction and face-to-face class time, blended learning environments can create improved student outcomes and facilitate the acquisition of competencies that may not otherwise be achieved. This approach can increase students' involvement with the learning process, enhance critical-thinking development, and improve learning outcomes.

Blended learning, according to Hrastinski (2008), systematically incorporates asynchronous teaching (facilitated by computer-based technology) into traditional onsite teaching to enhance both teaching and learning opportunities. Chung and Davis (1995) claimed that blended instruction gave students more choice over their learning pace, instructional flow, resource selection, and time management.

McLaughlin et al. (2015) cited that blended learning is a learner-centered method that mixes traditional face-to-face instruction with a computer-mediated learning environment. Blended learning settings, which combine the characteristics of computer-mediated training and face-to-face class time, can improve students' outcomes and facilitate the acquisition of skills that would otherwise be difficult to acquire. This method can help students become more engaged in the learning process, develop critical thinking skills, and improve learning outcomes.

Blended learning, according to DeGuia (2004), provides a relaxing environment with customized instructions to match the requirements, styles, and interests of students. According to Clark and Mayer (2008), there are various definitions of blended learning. According to Thorne (2003), blended learning is the combination of e-learning with face-to-face training. Mayadas and Picciano (2007) define blended learning as simply a combination of online learning and face-to-face instruction; Garnham and Kaleta (2002) define such 'hybrid' courses with a more sequential perspective as traditional courses with parts of their instructional activities running online, resulting in a significant reduction in the number of time learners spend in face-to-face classrooms. Blended learning is more than just mixing media. The learning outcome must be prioritized while creating, developing, and delivering various sorts of blends – component, integrated, collaborative, or expansive. This cannot be studied without first considering the students, learning culture, learning materials, electronic infrastructure, scalability, and maintainability of the suggested solution.

As stated by Hinkhouse (2013), blended learning is more than just finding the right combination of technology or providing students with faster access to knowledge in a new medium. She went on to say that rethinking and restructuring the teaching and learning relationship is crucial. It is also noted that going beyond using technology to duplicate or multiply traditional classroom education is important. To make meaningful and engaging integration between in-class and online learning, a full redesign of the teaching approach is required for effective blended courses.

Blended learning, according to Saliba et al. (2013), can improve student access and flexibility, boost active learning, and improve student experiences and outcomes. Blended learning can help teachers improve their teaching and class management skills.

Furthermore, Ja'ashan (2015) revealed that blended learning fits the educational needs of students. Learning satisfaction, ease, and flexibility, acquiring and improving language learning skills, and developing critical thinking skills were all achieved. He went on to argue that some authors believe blended learning is beneficial to students.

According to Kassner (2013), the term blended learning refers to instruction that includes both traditional face-to-face (f2f) and online components and encompasses a wide range of delivery modalities, tools, and pedagogies. She defines blended learning as combining online and face-to-face forms to provide a more effective learning experience than any medium could provide on its own.

Studies on the possible benefits of a mixed learning method on the learning process have been published in the literature. King (2002) explored the interactions and experiences of teachers and students in a hybrid/blended teacher education program. Blended learning, by eliminating the limitations of online training while avoiding the inconvenience of traditional face-to-face instruction, may provide a chance for pre-service teachers to build interactive and collaborative learning communities.

Chen and Jones (2007) found that the majority of students in the blended learning segment said they would take another accounting course if it was given. However, there were some notable distinctions. Learners in the conventional environment, in particular, were happier with the clarity of instruction. Learners in the blended-learning part, on the other hand, felt that they gained a better understanding of the concepts in the subject. Students who took the course via blended learning said their analytical skills increased significantly. The findings imply that the two delivery strategies had similar ultimate learning effects but that both could benefit from adopting features of the other.

In terms of the effects of BL strategy on self-efficacy, Orhan (2007) found that students' self-efficacy benefited from a blended learning environment with self-regulated learning methods. El-Deghaidy and Nouby (2008) conducted a study in which a cooperative-based blended e-learning environment was used. The findings obtained demonstrated that the post-test mean scores of the teacher candidates in the experimental group (blended learning group) were higher than those of the teacher candidates in the control group.

Morris (2010), in his study, analyzed and showed that the student's performance on multiple choice questions in a formal examination scored better on questions that were supported by extensive online learning resources provided throughout the students' enrolment in the course.

According to Guzer and Caner (2013), different writers stated that blended learning increases students' interest in learning. Findings emanating from a study in a private school indicated that students who were taught with a blended learning model had better scores than those who attended traditional instruction (Aslam, n.d.).

Moreover, Hinkhouse (2013) cited that blended learning has also been shown to enhance students' performance of tasks in a study she conducted where 128 learners from industry and higher education were trained to use Microsoft Excel. The study resulted where the group trained using the blended learning approach performed real-world tasks with 30% more accuracy and also 41% faster than those who received only online training.

A different study sought to determine the meaning of the term blended learning and explore the potential effects of blended learning on foreign language reading comprehension in three domains: corporate, higher education, and the field of foreign language learning and teaching (Bojović, 2017).

Facer et al. (2004) conducted a study in a secondary school in Bristol, England, to explore the use of technology in the classroom. Participants used a mobile computer game called Savannah to determine if there were technical challenges and explore concepts with mobile game-based learning. Their findings showed that this format could support student learning, but effective implementation was not yet realized. Technical programming effectiveness, based on the engagement and enthusiasm reported from student interviews, indicated the need for further exploration.

The study of Tampon (2012) clearly demonstrated that the use of blended learning activities provided effective instructional experiences for biology students because of the interactive environment that it promotes. It was observed that after exposing students to blended learning, there is a significant difference between the posttest of the control and experimental groups. The experimental group yields a higher mean percentage compared to the control group.

The study of Esguerra (2008) clearly demonstrated that the use of computer software integrated into teaching office productivity tools to college students is more effective for the group exposed to computer-assisted instruction and performed better than the group exposed only to the conventional teaching. However, it can also be claimed that conventional teaching was also effective, as stated.

Engaging students in blended learning within a K-12 educational environment may enrich the educational foundation and technological skills which are essential for today's generation. Looking for opportunities to redesign the way students learn may uncover opportunities to re-engage them and improve their interest in learning.

Technology has brought developments throughout the world, and it has changed the facet of education. With the advancement of technology, it is likely to change the way learners grasp ideas and deliver information to them.

With the theories and related literature presented, it is necessary that teachers should give essential strategies to meet the learning styles of the students to promote learning in the classroom. Blended learning is believed to be a good approach to be used by the students in order for them to improve their academic performances.

#### **4. Research Problem**

This study determined the effectiveness of blended learning in improving reflective essay writing performances among Grade 9 students, Pit-os National High School, Pit-os, Cebu City, S.Y. 2018-2019. The result of the study served as a basis for a proposed action plan.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?
2. What are the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pretest performances of the control and experimental groups?
4. Is there a significant difference between the pretest and posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?
5. Is there a significant difference between the posttest performances of the control and experimental groups?
6. Based on the findings, what action plan would be proposed?

#### **5. Methodology**

This study utilized quasi-experimental research using a blended learning approach. The subjects of the study were all Grade 9 students who were currently taking English 9 with a description of Anglo- American Literature subject. They belonged to one section but were segregated as a control or experimental group. The subjects were chosen by matching them according to their grades, age, and gender. There were 50 students involved, 25 for the control group and another 25 for the experimental group. The main instrument used in this study was a selection from the textbook Anglo American Literature of Grade 9. The story is entitled *The Day of Destiny* by Sir Thomas Malory. The students were asked to read that particular literature. After the students had read it, they were asked to write a reflective essay out of the material being read. Students' writing performances were assessed with the aid of the assessment rubric. The result served as a basis for the proposed action plan.

The research was conducted at Pit-os National High School in Barangay Pit-os, Cebu City. A letter was secured by the researcher, noted by the adviser and the dean of the University of Cebu Main Campus, and was sent to the principal asking permission to conduct the study. Before the pretest and posttest were administered, pilot testing was done on a group of students who were not part of the research subjects before using the main instrument to collect data. Subsequently, the researcher conducted the pretest on the two groups (control group and experimental group) as the preliminary basis of data. The preliminary conduct of the test determined the writing performances of the research subjects to determine their mean result before they were given the intervention. Secondly, the researcher used different approaches for the two groups of subjects. In the control group, teacher-directed instruction was used, while in the experimental group, a student-centered approach was utilized. As to the control group, the researcher utilized classroom teaching, which used a face-to-face discussion which provided a traditional way of delivering the lesson. The researcher conducted the lesson according to the study program and the existing curriculum in the traditional way. Whereas, in the experimental group, blended learning was applied. Students were introduced to an online tool which is visual writing prompt ([visualprompts.weebly.com](http://visualprompts.weebly.com)). Discussion about the importance and use of visual writing prompts was done with the students. Students were asked to read *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, another material for intervention. After the task, they were told to search for pictures related to the material read, and out of the picture chosen, they were asked to write a reflective essay. Thirdly, the researcher conducted the posttest of the two groups of subjects after they were given the intervention. Using

the research material used in the pretest (The Day of Destiny), the students were asked to write a reflective essay using a picture. The control group wrote their essays the usual way, while the experimental group used pictures in creating their essays.

The results were checked by another English teacher. The data obtained were collated, tabulated, statistically analyzed, and interpreted. With the use of content validity and considering the rubric made, it was found that students had scores more than 75% or the passing score, which makes the research instrument considerable.

**6. Results and Discussion**

*6.1 Pretest Performances of Control and Experimental Groups*

Table 1. Pretest Performances of Control and Experimental Groups

Pretest Result	Control Group		Experimental Group		Level of Performance
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
16-20	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	Very Good
11-15	8	32.00%	9	36.00%	Good
6-10	17	68.00%	16	64.00%	Poor
1-5	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	Needs Improvement
Mean of the Control Group = 9.96			Mean of the Experimental Group = 9.76		
SD = 1.37			SD = 1.67		

Table 1 shows the mean percentage of the pretest results of both the control and experimental groups. Based on the scores of the students, the control group got a mean percentage of 9.96 while the experimental group got 9.76. It clearly presents that the mean scores of both groups are comparable.

For the control group, 17 students out of 25 got scores ranging from 6-10 out of 20 as the perfect score, while 16 out of 25 students from the experimental group. Both groups performed poorly in the pretest conducted.

Based on the result in table 2, students' level of performance is poor, and they really need interventions to enhance their performances. This shows that learners nowadays must be exposed to a new approach to learning in order for them to be able to increase their knowledge.

*6.2 Posttest Performances of Control and Experimental Groups*

Table 2 Posttest Performances of Control and Experimental Groups

Pretest Result	Control Group		Experimental Group		Level of Performance
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
16-20	0	0.00%	20	80.00%	Very Good
11-15	20	80.00%	5	20.00%	Good
6-10	5	20.00%	0	0.00%	Poor
1-5	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	Needs Improvement
Mean of the Control Group = 12.2			Mean of the Experimental Group = 16.88		
SD = 1.61			SD = 1.48		

Table 2 presents the posttest performances of both the control and experimental groups. It shows that both groups of students improved their performances in the posttest. However, it is observable that there was an utmost improvement in the performances of the experimental group with a mean score of 16.88 compared to the control group with a mean score of 12.2. This shows that the experimental group got a higher mean score compared to the control group. This means that the subjects in the experimental group did better than the control group after they were exposed to the blended learning approach. This signifies that students learn more if they are exposed to not just only the traditional way of teaching but also to a good blend in the teaching-learning process using a blended learning approach.

Furthermore, by employing a mixed learning method in the classroom that fits their learning styles, students absorb ideas fast and learn easily. This will help them deepen their comprehension through blended learning.

The intervention given to students utilizing visual writing prompts resulted in an increase in their writing performance. This clarifies Richard Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. It claims that individuals learn more thoroughly via pictures and words than from just words.

### 6.3 Significant Difference of the Pretest Performances of the Control and Experimental Groups

Table 3 Significant Difference of the Pretest Results Between Control and Experimental Groups

Variables	Group	Mean	p-value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Pretest Results of Control and Experimental Groups	Control	9.96	0.6448127	Fail to reject Ho	Not Significant
	Experimental	9.76			

Table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference in the pretest of control and experimental groups. From the pretest conducted, the control group got a 9.96 mean score, while the experimental group was 9.76. Based on the mean scores of both groups shows that there is no significant difference in the pretest results between the control and experimental groups.

The result presented shows that students really need to be given an intervention that would help them improve their writing skills.

To provide students with a meaningful learning experience, it is extremely important that teachers provide them with the essential strategies that would help them in their educational endeavor.

### 6.4 Significant Difference Between the Pretest and Posttest Performances of the Control and Experimental Groups.

Table 4 Significant Difference of the Pretest and Posttest Results Between Control and Experimental Groups.

Variables	Group	Mean	t-stat	p-value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Pretest and Posttest Results of Control Group	Pretest	9.96	6.354344	1.44E-06	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	12.2				
Pretest and Posttest Results of Experimental Group	Pretest	9.76	21.05072	5.59E-17	Reject Ho	Significant
	Posttest	16.88				

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results of both the control and experimental groups. Based on the data acquired between the two groups shows that there was a change in the performances of every group.

In the control group, the mean score in the pretest was 9.96, while in the posttest was 12.2 having a p-value less than  $\alpha=0.05$ . This shows a change in the performance of the control group from the posttest compared to the pretest.

On the other hand, the experimental group got a mean score of 9.76 in the pretest, while in the posttest was 16.88 having a p-value less than  $\alpha=0.05$ . This also shows a change in the performance of the experimental group from the posttest compared to the pretest.

The table revealed that the posttest performances of the students from the two groups are significantly higher than their performances in the pretest. This implies that after the students were given time to be exposed to face-to-face discussion and blended learning approach, there was a significant change in their performances.

However, posttest performances from the experimental group with a mean score of 16.88 were significantly higher compared to the control group with a mean score of 12.22. This goes to show that the use of the blended learning approach is effective as applied to the experimental group.

Through blended learning, students increase their level of understanding and provide effective instructional experiences as it promotes an interactive environment.

**6.5 Significant Difference Between the Posttest Performances of the Control and Experimental Groups**

Table 5 Significant Difference in the Posttest Performances of the Control and Experimental Groups

Variables	Group	Mean	p-value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Posttest Results of Control and Experimental Groups	Control	12.2	2.5839E-14	Reject Ho	Significant
	Experimental	16.88			

Based on the results of the posttest of the control and experimental groups, table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between the two groups of subjects.

As shown in the table, the control group obtained a mean score of 12.2 while the experimental group got a mean score of 16.88. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the two mean. The result of the study shows that blended learning is very effective.

Moreover, Hinkhouse (2013) cited that blended learning has also been shown to improve students' performance of tasks in the study conducted. Students enjoyed working on school works with technology because they viewed it as more engaging and entertaining. In addition, with the use of technology, students like working on their tasks because it makes their work easier.

In addition, students have benefited from the inclusion of technology and computers by equipping the necessary skills expected from them while helping teachers the way lessons can be planned and taught. It means that the use of a blended learning approach in teaching can help the students very well in the lesson, and it can help promote understanding and participation.

**7. Conclusion**

Student writing of reflections is effectively developed when teachers make the technology resources readily available, utilized, and enjoyed all the time. Blended learning makes students actively get involved in the self-regulated undertaking, which suits their learning styles.

**8. Recommendation**

The researcher recommends the following as a result of this research:

1. Topics for future research
  - 1.1 Blended Learning as a Tool to Strengthen Students' Vocabulary Skills
  - 1.2. Blended Learning for the Improvement of Students' Academic Performances
2. Implementation of the proposed action plan to enhance teachers' capacity to use blended learning in the learning process.

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