

# Writing Style Guides and Exercises: Comma Usage and Sentence Structure

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## The Rules of Comma Usage

1. Use a comma to separate the elements in a series (three or more things), including the last two. "He hit the ball, dropped the bat, and ran to first base."
2. Use a comma + a little conjunction (and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so) to connect two independent clauses, as in "He hit the ball well, but he ran toward third base."
3. Use a comma to set off introductory elements, as in "Running toward third base, he suddenly realized how foolish he looked."
4. Use a comma to set off parenthetical elements, as in "The Founders Bridge, which spans the Connecticut River, is falling down." By "parenthetical element," we mean a part of a sentence that can be removed without changing the essential meaning of that sentence. The parenthetical element is sometimes called "added information."
5. Use a comma to separate coordinate adjectives. You could think of this as "That tall, distinguished, good looking fellow" rule (as opposed to "the little old lady"). If you can put an and or a but between the adjectives, a comma will probably belong there. For instance, you could say, "He is a tall and distinguished fellow" or "I live in a very old and run-down house." So you would write, "He is a tall, distinguished man" and "I live in a very old, run-down house." But you would probably not say, "She is a little and old lady," or "I live in a little and purple house," so commas would not appear between little and old or between little and purple.
6. Use a comma to set off quoted elements. Because we don't use quoted material all the time, even when writing, this is probably the most difficult rule to remember in comma usage. It is a good idea to find a page from an article that uses several quotations, photocopy that page, and keep it in front of you as a model when you're writing. Generally, use a comma to separate quoted material from the rest of the sentence that explains or introduces the quotation:
  - \* Summing up this argument, Peter Coveney writes, "The purpose and strength of the romantic image of the child had been above all to signify the epistemological advantage of innocence."
7. Use commas to set off phrases that express contrast.
  - \* Some say the world will end in ice, not fire.
  - \* It was her money, not her charm or personality, that first attracted him.
  - \* The puppies were cute, but very messy.
8. Use a comma to avoid confusion. This is often a matter of consistently applying rule #3.
  - \* For most the year is already finished.
  - \* For most, the year is already finished.
  - \* Outside the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.
  - \* Outside, the lawn was cluttered with hundreds of broken branches.
9. Typographical Reasons: Between a city and a state [Hartford, Connecticut], a date and the year [June 15, 1997], a name and a title when the title comes after the name [Bob Downey, Professor of English], in long numbers [5,456,783 and \$14,682], etc. Although you will often see a comma between a name and suffix — Bob Downey, Jr., Richard Harrison, III — this comma is no longer regarded as necessary by most copy editors, and some individuals — such as Martin Luther King Jr. — never used a comma there at all.

## **Using Commas with Coordinating Conjunctions**

**Add a comma where necessary in the following sentences:**

1. In theory, the dark smoke from the burning oil wells absorbs sunlight and the surrounding air is heated.
2. The anticipation that biological and chemical weapons would be used caused unprecedented stress for the troops.
3. It seems that she answered the question easily but her answer was actually quite complex.
4. It can be beneficial to register for classes early yet each student must wait his or her turn.
5. Analyzing the data reveals public support of conflict for as environmental issues become a variable, attitudes towards war become more complex.
6. Because of mass destruction to the system, sewage overflowed and spread diseases.
7. He could either go to the store or go to the basketball game.
8. I did not want to go to class nor did I want to write that paper.
9. She worried about finding someone to take care of the dog and provide a good home for him.
10. I did not want to scare him so I did not tell him about the accident.

### **Using Commas with Introductory Phrases**

**Add a comma where necessary in the following sentences:**

1. In Twain's novel childhood provides unique symbolism.
2. Eventually I got around to finishing the term paper.
3. In fact the planet Mars glows red on a clear night.
4. With sweat pouring down his face the point-guard stepped up to the free-throw line.
5. Quickly I ran down the street to the corner store.
6. At the casino Mike lost his money and his pride.
7. Pausing only for a sip of water the runner continued on at an exhausting pace.
8. Although I was tired I finished the paper by the 6:00 A.M. deadline.
9. Sleepily the student designed this wonderful exercise.
10. Reluctantly the prisoner accepted his fate.

## Punctuation Quiz:

1. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

- A. \_\_\_My first job in a factory involved the manufacture of escalator handles and ketchup bottle lids.
- B. \_\_\_My first job in a factory involved the manufacture of escalator handles, and ketchup bottle lids.

2. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

- A. \_\_\_Ms. Espinoza has offered to coach the team this year, however, the competition for the job is intense.
- B. \_\_\_Ms. Espinoza has offered to coach the team this year, however the competition for the job is intense.
- C. \_\_\_Ms. Espinoza has offered to coach the team this year; however, the competition for the job is intense.

3. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

- A. \_\_\_The team's major concerns this year, however, are staying healthy, finding a good shooting guard, and maintaining good relations with the public.
- B. \_\_\_The team's major concerns this year, however, are: staying healthy, finding a good shooting guard, and maintaining good relations with the public.
- C. \_\_\_The team's major concerns this year; however, are -- staying healthy, finding a good shooting guard, and maintaining good relations with the public.

4. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

- A. \_\_\_Three major cities Hartford Bridgeport and Stamford make up the crucial voting blocks of Connecticut.
- B. \_\_\_Three major cities, Hartford, Bridgeport, and Stamford, make up the crucial voting blocks of Connecticut.
- C. \_\_\_Three major cities -- Hartford, Bridgeport, and Stamford -- make up the crucial voting blocks of Connecticut.

5. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

- A. \_\_\_My favorite teacher, who just happens to be my uncle, retired from the university last summer.
- B. \_\_\_My favorite teacher who just happens to be my uncle, retired from the university last summer.
- C. \_\_\_My favorite teacher, who just happens to be my uncle retired from the university last summer.

6. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

A. \_\_\_ It seems a shame that a diligent, sincere politician like Fuentes should be ignored by shallow and thoughtlessly fickle voters.

B. \_\_\_ It seems a shame that a diligent sincere politician like Fuentes should be ignored by shallow and thoughtlessly fickle voters.

C. \_\_\_ It seems a shame that a diligent sincere politician like Fuentes should be ignored by shallow, and thoughtlessly fickle voters.

7. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

A. \_\_\_ Given the hard choices our coach has had to make this year it's no wonder she's decided to retire.

B. \_\_\_ Given the hard choices our coach has had to make this year, it's no wonder she's decided to retire.

8. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

A. \_\_\_ Raoul has been too busy to keep up with his courses because he took on too many extracurricular activities.

B. \_\_\_ Raoul has been too busy to keep up with his courses, because he took on too many extracurricular activities.

9. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

A. \_\_\_ Believing in her own skills and possessing a supreme confidence, proved to make the difference in her campaign.

B. \_\_\_ Believing in her own skills and possessing a supreme confidence proved to make the difference in her campaign.

10. Select the correctly punctuated sentence in this group.

A. \_\_\_ My favorite pizza combinations are sausage peppers and onions mushrooms extra cheese and anchovies and hamburger sun-dried tomatoes pepperoni and sliced red potatoes.

B. \_\_\_ My favorite pizza combinations are: sausage, peppers, and onions, mushrooms, extra cheese, and anchovies, and hamburger, sun-dried tomatoes, pepperoni, and sliced red potatoes.

C. \_\_\_ My favorite pizza combinations are sausage, peppers, and onions; mushrooms, extra cheese, and anchovies; and hamburger, sun-dried tomatoes, pepperoni, and sliced red potatoes.

**Take your own Comma Quiz.**

**Add commas in the following paragraphs where necessary (answer on reverse):**

Although women's college basketball in Connecticut is a marvelously entertaining and increasingly popular sport it is not hard to remember when it was not so popular. Only a few years ago my friends and I could decide on a Sunday afternoon to go to a women's basketball game at the University of Connecticut and believe it or not we could get seats for free near center court. Of course that was before names such as Rebecca Lobo Jennifer Rizzotti Kara Wolters and Carla Berube became household words. Lobo's book *Home-Court Advantage* which she wrote with her mother was a best-seller for a brief time in Connecticut. If more than a couple of hundred fans showed up for a game it was considered a big turnout and games were played in practically silent gyms. Nowadays it is almost impossible to buy tickets to a women's game and you can't get seats even in the Civic Center unless you know someone.

Indeed who would have predicted ten years ago that women's basketball would become so wildly popular in Connecticut? Well people who have watched the growth of women's basketball in southern states are not surprised. The enormous campus arenas at the state universities in Tennessee North Carolina and Georgia are filled to capacity for every home game. The coach for Tennessee's Lady Vols Pat Summitt has achieved nearly godlike stature in that state. A tall striking figure on- and off-court Summitt commands respect wherever she goes. My youngest sister Ruth Ann who lives in Tennessee says you can't get near Pat Summitt after a game. "You'd think she was a rock star" she says. Although Geno Auriemma Coach of the UConn women's team doesn't yet enjoy that kind of support he is rapidly becoming a widely recognized figure. In Connecticut we no longer say there is basketball in college sports and then there is women's basketball; we say there is men's basketball and women's basketball.

Answer Key:

Although women's college basketball in Connecticut is a marvelously entertaining and increasingly popular sport, it is not hard to remember when it was not so popular. Only a few years ago, my friends and I could decide on a Sunday afternoon to go to a women's basketball game at the University of Connecticut, and believe it or not, we could get seats for free near center court. Of course, that was before names such as Rebecca Lobo, Jennifer Rizzotti, Kara Wolters, and Carla Berube became household words. Lobo's book, *Home-Court Advantage*, which she wrote with her mother, was a best-seller for a brief time in Connecticut. If more than a couple of hundred fans showed up for a game, it was considered a big turnout, and games were played in practically silent gyms. Nowadays, it is almost impossible to buy tickets to a women's game, and you can't get seats, even in the Civic Center, unless you know someone.

Indeed, who would have predicted ten years ago that women's basketball would become so wildly popular in Connecticut? Well, people who have watched the growth of women's basketball in southern states are not surprised. The enormous campus arenas at the state universities in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia are filled to capacity for every home game. The coach for Tennessee's Lady Vols, Pat Summitt, has achieved nearly godlike stature in that state. A tall, striking figure on- and off-court, Summitt commands respect wherever she goes. My youngest sister, Ruth Ann, who lives in Tennessee, says you can't get near Pat Summitt after a game. "You'd think she was a rock star," she says. Although Geno Auriemma, Coach of the UConn women's team, doesn't yet enjoy that kind of support, he is rapidly becoming a widely recognized figure. In Connecticut, we no longer say there is basketball in college sports and then there is women's basketball; we say there is men's basketball and women's basketball.



**FIX THE FOLLOWING COMMA SPLICES (Questions 1-20)**

1. Entrepreneurship is the study of small businesses, college students are embracing it enthusiastically.
2. My father is chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, he also heads the Warrant Commission.
3. All over the country, people sell products over the Internet, these people are making impressive profits.
4. One person has been exporting farm equipment, in fact he exports over 30,000 pieces of machinery a year.
5. After the sixth inning, I went home, my family stayed.
6. Formal courses at the graduate level are now being taken by many elderly citizens, some schools even offer them special programs.
7. While time often erases bad memories, my ex-girlfriend never forgets anything, she even remembers things that happened over five years ago.
8. I believe that the teacher has been grading me unfairly, all she does is look for minor mistakes.
9. Even though the semester is almost over, the teacher does not know my name, she confuses me with other students.
10. The team valiantly ran down the field, still they could not score a touchdown.
11. Kimberly sat on the bleachers and cheered for the team, Tom watched her as he vigorously defended the goal.
12. The cat jumped from step to step, it gracefully landed with each jump.
13. The professor stated that he especially favors personally connected papers, these papers reflect the most emotion.

14. Anthony did not agree with the method he was taught, he found other means to solve the problem.
15. I learned the song on the piano, I chose to never play it.
16. Nicole chose what she thought were the best answers to the questions, her grade did not reflect these choices.
17. The correct format looked odd, Victoria chose not to complete the problem this way.≡
18. Michael sculpted the statue, he also painted the picture.
19. The Revolutionary War was a triumph, it was also a struggle.
20. Victoria managed the class, Julia coached the team.

**EACH OF THE FOLLOWING IS A RUN-ON SENTENCES. FROM THE GROUP OF THREE SENTENCES THAT FOLLOWS, SELECT THE GROUP OF WORDS THAT CORRECTS THE RUN-ON. (ANSWER QUESTIONS A-J.)**

**A. Our solar system has nine major planets only one is known to have intelligent life.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Our solar system has nine major planets, only one is known to have intelligent life.
2. \_\_\_\_ Our solar system has nine major planets only one, is known to have intelligent life.
3. \_\_\_\_ Our solar system has nine major planets; only one is known to have intelligent life.

**B. Most asteroids are small and far away therefore they are dim and hard to see.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Most asteroids are small and far away, therefore they are dim and hard to see.
2. \_\_\_\_ Most asteroids are small and far away therefore, they are dim and hard to see.
3. \_\_\_\_ Most asteroids are small and far away; therefore, they are dim and hard to see.

**C. Look through Angelo's telescope you can see Saturn's rings.**

1. \_\_\_\_ If you look through Angelo's telescope, you can see Saturn's rings.
2. \_\_\_\_ Look through Angelo's telescope, you can see Saturn's rings.
3. \_\_\_\_ You can see Saturn's rings, look through Angelo's telescope.

**D. Please check the position of that star cluster I can't find it.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Please check the position of that star cluster; I can't find it.
2. \_\_\_\_ Please check the position of that star cluster, I can't find it.
3. \_\_\_\_ Please check the position, of that star cluster, I can't find it.

**E. Marie is never interested in stargazing during the winter however on warm summer nights she often goes to the college observatory.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Marie is never interested in stargazing during the winter, however, on warm summer nights she often goes to the college observatory.
2. \_\_\_\_ Marie is never interested in stargazing during the winter. However, on warm summer nights she often goes to the college observatory.
3. \_\_\_\_ Marie is never interested in stargazing, during the winter however, on warm summer nights she often goes to the college observatory.

**F. The Milky Way looks like a dim cloud stretching across the night sky it is actually a huge galaxy containing millions of stars.**

1. \_\_\_\_ The Milky Way looks like a dim cloud stretching across the night sky, it is actually a huge galaxy containing millions of stars.
2. \_\_\_\_ The cloud-like Milky Way stretching across the night sky is actually a huge galaxy containing millions of stars.
3. \_\_\_\_ Although the Milky Way looks like a dim cloud stretching across the night sky. It is actually a huge galaxy containing millions of stars.

**G. Watch the sky closely for several minutes you are likely to see an artificial satellite pass over.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Watch the sky closely for several minutes; you are likely to see an artificial satellite pass over.
2. \_\_\_\_ Watch the sky closely for several minutes, you are likely to see an artificial satellite pass over.
3. \_\_\_\_ If you watch the sky closely for several minutes. You are likely to see an artificial satellite pass over.

**H. Louisa pretended to be interested in her brother's hobby she secretly wished she had stayed at home.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Louisa pretended to be interested in her brother's hobby, she secretly wished she had stayed at home.
2. \_\_\_\_ Pretending to be interested in her brother's hobby, Louisa secretly wished she had stayed at home.
3. \_\_\_\_ Louisa pretended to be interested, in her brother's hobby, she secretly wished she had stayed at home.

**I. Some club members were late for the meeting for example, Tanya and Scott came in at 9:30.**

1. \_\_\_\_ Some club members were late for the meeting, for example Tanya and Scott came in at 9:30.
2. \_\_\_\_ Some club members were late for the meeting, for example, Tanya and Scott came in at 9:30.
3. \_\_\_\_ Some club members were late for the meeting; for example, Tanya and Scott came in at 9:30.

**J. We've seen enough for one night pack up the equipment.**

1. \_\_\_\_ We've seen enough for one night; pack up the equipment.
2. \_\_\_\_ Pack up the equipment, we've seen enough for one night.

**FIX THE FOLLOWING RUN-ON SENTENCES (Questions 1-10):**

1. Judy leads a charmed life she never seems to have a serious accident.
2. The airport is about to shut down because of the snow and if the plane doesn't land soon it will have to go on to Boston.
3. The show begins at 7:30 make sure you're there before 7:15.
4. Marcellino always knew his way around the woods this is something he could always depend on.
5. Having prepared himself well for the realtor exams and having exhausted everyone in the family with his requests that someone help him with the true-and-false drills, Jeffrey, who had never been a particularly good student in high school, knew he was ready to take on the greatest challenge of his life.]6. Throughout history money and religion were closely linked there was little distinction between government and religion.
7. The head of state and the religious leader were often the same person all power rested in one ruler.
8. These powerful leaders decided what objects would serve as money their backing encouraged public faith in the money.
9. Coins were minted of precious metals the religious overtones of money were then strengthened.
10. People already believed the precious metals to be divine so their use in money intensified its allure.

## SENTENCE FRAGMENTS

**OF THE THREE SENTENCES IN EACH GROUP, SELECT THE ONE THAT IS NOT A SENTENCE FRAGMENT (QUESTIONS A-J).**

A.

1. \_\_\_\_ Mrs. Blanco gone to visit her mother at the hospital.
2. \_\_\_\_ Finding a parking space there is usually easy during the week.
3. \_\_\_\_ Driving in the city during the evening rush hour.

B.

1. \_\_\_\_ To apply for a job at the new store in the mall.
2. \_\_\_\_ Asking the interviewer how often he would have to work on weekends.
3. \_\_\_\_ Shaking his new boss's hand, Tony knew he would like working there.

C.

1. \_\_\_\_ By the time Frances found out how expensive the wallpapering job would be.
2. \_\_\_\_ After getting estimates from five contractors, she decided to do the work herself.
3. \_\_\_\_ Before picking out an interesting wallpaper pattern that went well with her furniture.

D.

1. \_\_\_\_ Who borrowed Stefanie's car Saturday night.
2. \_\_\_\_ The nineteen-year-old car looked out of place next to the new models.
3. \_\_\_\_ Which the salesman was surprised to find in such good shape.

E.

1. \_\_\_\_ While waiting for her neighbor to move the car that blocked the driveway.
2. \_\_\_\_ To avoid hitting the other car, Michael had to back across the corner of the lawn.
3. \_\_\_\_ By making sure that no one will park across the driveway again.

F.

1. \_\_\_\_ Because Manuel was sure he had heard the same strange story many months ago.
2. \_\_\_\_ Although I will never forget how cold we were when we lost our heat last winter.
3. \_\_\_\_ Since Anna wasn't at the meeting, I took notes so that she wouldn't miss anything.

G.

1. \_\_\_\_ When my cousin moved to Troy, New York, after he finished school.
2. \_\_\_\_ After he went to all the trouble of fixing up his apartment.
3. \_\_\_\_ While living there, he made very few friends.

H.

1. \_\_\_\_ My brother has been running a charter fishing boat for five years.
2. \_\_\_\_ Many of his customers coming back three or four times over the summer.
3. \_\_\_\_ His business been so busy that he has very little time for anything else.

I.

1. \_\_\_\_ In the hiding place that Carl had been using for years to get away from the noisy house.
2. \_\_\_\_ By the time that everyone had quieted down, my favorite television show was over.
3. \_\_\_\_ Before planning another family get-together at the already crowded park.

J.

1. \_\_\_\_ Although I knew she might wear something outrageous, I was still shocked by her dress.
2. \_\_\_\_ Because she didn't want to tell where she had bought the strange outfit.
3. \_\_\_\_ When we finally heard that she had made the dress herself.

**FIX THE FOLLOWING FRAGMENTS, FUSED SENTENCES, AND RUN-ONS (Questions 1-14)**

1. Although he had been an often decorated soldier during World War II and had fought many battles for the losing cause of liberalism in Congress.

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2. This is going to be the most difficult exam of your college career you had better start studying for it immediately.

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3. Knowing better than anyone else how the state legislature had ignored the needs of the community college system and created a crisis characterized by an uneducated workforce that had no place to go for proper training and realizing that someone had to do something about the situation or the state would begin to lose jobs to states in the American south that were more aggressive in providing and publicizing excellence in education, Representative Fuentes began to lay plans for an education bill that took into consideration the needs of the state's community colleges and the students who attended them.

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4. Coach Espinoza really wants this job with Notre Dame University, she is very excited about returning to the college she graduated from.

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5. Right after the Christmas holidays and during those three weeks before class begins in January.

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6. She ran.

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7. Perplexed by the rising rates of inflation and alarmed by the decline in major construction projects.

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8. Anabel realizes what she is doing, I think, but she doing it anyway.

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9. Professor Pepin spends a lot of time translating medieval texts on ancient medicine, however, he also stays informed about the latest developments in modern asthma treatments.

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10. If we're ever going to get out of here in time, we're going to have to re-write all these papers, set up the desks, and clean the chalkboards; stack those books in the corner and clean up the mess around the wastebasket; notify security about the broken window, the thermostat that Raoul messed up, and the desk that was stolen before we even got here.

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11. In Japan, during the last war and just before the armistice.

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12. Working far into the night in an effort to salvage her little boat.

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13. Some of the students working in Professor Espinoza's laboratory last semester.

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14. Even though he had the better arguments and was by far the more powerful speaker.

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**REWRITE THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS SO THAT THEY DO NOT CONTAIN SENTENCE FRAGMENTS (QUESTIONS 15-16).**

15. Although women's college basketball in Connecticut is a marvelously entertaining and popular sport. It not hard to remember. When it was not so popular. Which is hard to believe. Only a few years ago, my friends and I to go to a women's basketball game. And we could get seats for free near center court. Especially on Sunday afternoons. Of course, that before names such as Rebecca Lobo, Jenn Rizzotti, and Kara Wolters became household words. Lobo's book, HOME-COURT ADVANTAGE, which she wrote with her mother. A best-seller in Connecticut. If more than a couple of hundred fans showed up for a game. It was considered a big turnout. And games were played in practically silent gyms. Because the fans didn't care who won. Nowadays, it almost impossible to buy tickets to a women's game, and you can't get seats. Unless you know someone.

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16. Indeed, who would have predicted ten years ago? That women's basketball so wildly popular? Well, people who have watched the growth of women's basketball in southern states. The enormous campus arenas at the state universities in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia filled to capacity for home games. The coach for Tennessee's Lady Vols, Pat Summitt. She has achieved nearly godlike stature in that state. A tall, striking figure on- and off-court. Summitt commands respect. Wherever she goes. My youngest sister, Ruth Ann, who lives in Tennessee. She says you can't near Pat Summitt after a game. "You'd think she a rock star," she says. Although Geno Auremma, Coach of the UConn women's team. Not yet enjoying that kind of support. He rapidly becoming a widely recognized figure. Because he appears frequently on TV news and sports shows.

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