



**Harper Adams
University**

Revision Guide

Strategies and tips for successful revision

Getting
Variety Quiet
Self-talk chants work
Progress Imagery Music
Working Flashcards Writing
Remembering Room alone Time
Story Group Timetable Reading group
Mind-maps Acronyms Presentations Improvement
Speaking Room Strengths Drawing
Acrostics Diagrams Discussion Chunking Company
Groups Posters Strategies
Revision Whole Exam plan Rhymes
Youtube notes Practice telling
topics Focus Flowcharts help

Chunks

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1. About this guide.....

Throughout your time at university and possibly in the future, you will undertake assessments in the form of tests and exams.

This guide aims to outline some of the revision strategies that might help you to prepare successfully for these assessments and to think about utilising the way you learn and therefore revise, to maximise your performance.

This guide brings together a variety of ideas, techniques and strategies that you may find useful and wish to pursue; further detail, ideas and tips may be found in study skills handbooks and guides. See HAU Library Catalogue.

Using the guide.....

This guide has been divided up into sections to examine various aspects of the revision process. It will consider:

Self: physical wellbeing including exercise, sleep and diet

Preparation and Planning: things to consider before starting

Environment: where and when to revise

Learning Styles: knowing what kind of learner you are to adopt the appropriate revision techniques

Revision Activities: some suggestions that you may wish to use

Top tips: a summary of useful ideas and hints

So what is revision?

Revision is not simply a matter of sitting down and learning everything you have been taught. It has many other elements such as:

- Ensuring understanding and consolidating information in order to apply it to questions, tasks, problems or new situations
- Reviewing information and updating/amending it
- Reading around topics already studied to clarify, add to the body of knowledge, achieve a different perspective and /or find examples to illustrate points/ideas

As well as preparation for exams, revision helps you to prepare yourself for the world of work when access to books/notes/technology is not always available or immediately accessible and decisions have to be made based on what you know.

2. Self.....

Revision and exam preparation can take its toll on you physically and mentally. Before and during revision you need to take some time to look after yourself and ensure that you eat healthily, exercise, relax and get the right amount of sleep. Strategies for coping with anxiety and stress are also important.

Diet and eating.....

During revision, it is important to eat and drink healthily. Chocolate and snacks can be seen as a reward for revising but too many can pile on the pounds leading to a lack of energy and motivation. Similarly, not eating because you are revising means your body is not getting the minerals and nutrients it needs to keep you functioning.

Eat a balanced diet and have regular meals. Try not to eat meals while you are revising and/or working at your computer; this time can be used to take a break and relax or reflect on what you have already achieved.

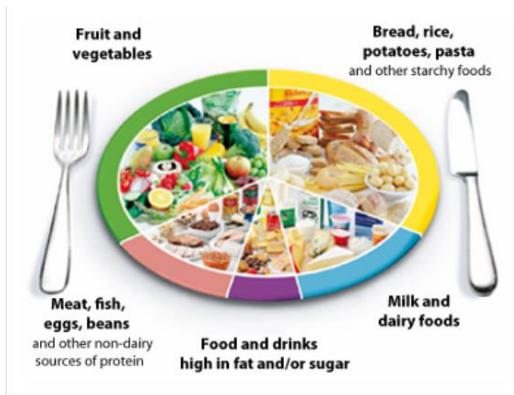


Figure 1NHS Eatwell Plate (Source: NHS, 2015)

There is a lot of advice on healthy eating, for example, the NHS website has a number of suggestions and tips about eating healthily. These may be found at:

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/1127.aspx?CategoryID=51&SubCategoryID=166>

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Goodfood/Pages/eight-tips-healthy-eating.aspx>

Further information on how what we eat can affect our mental well-being and, for example, concentration and memory, is available from:

<http://mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/D/nutrients-table>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/content/assets/PDF/159555/nutrients-table-rebranded.pdf>

Drinking and hydration



It is important to keep your body hydrated whilst you are revising and not to drink too much alcohol which can cause you to become dehydrated, can affect your ability to think and cost you valuable revision time if you have to recover from overindulgence!

Dehydration can cause sleepiness or fatigue, headaches, confusion or dizziness and light-headedness – none of which help with revision!

Caffeine based drinks, including coffee and tea, should be drunk in moderation and should not be used as a substitute for a good night's sleep! A reasonable limit for caffeine is 400g a day or three to four cups of tea/coffee (Bupa UK, 2015). Some sports drinks contain caffeine and are high in sugar so be careful to limit your intake. Fizzy drinks can contain up to the equivalent of 12 teaspoons of sugar! (Family doctor, 2015).

Water is considered to be the 'best' drink to keep hydrated. How much to drink depends on your age, build, the weather, lifestyle and exercise regime, but an average recommendation is 1.5 – 2 litres a day or eight glasses. If you do not like plain water, add a slice of lemon or lime. Some food like cucumber, lettuce and tomatoes are 'water-rich'.



Exercise.....



Don't become a revision couch potato! Exercise is important and for kinaesthetic learners can help with revision techniques (See page 7). Whatever type of learner you are, 15-20 minutes of exercise a day where you raise your heartbeat is good for your general health and well-being, clearing your mind and making you receptive to revision as your brain will function more efficiently.

You don't have to go to the gym; a knock about with friends on the football field or tennis court, a brisk walk or jog, cycling, dancing – whatever suits your style or wherever you happen to be!



There are many suggestions and advice on exercise; for example, the NHS Live Well web page has a variety of suggestions:

<http://www.nhs.uk/LiveWell/Fitness/Pages/Fitnesshome.aspx>

Sleep and relaxation

It is important to build some relaxation into your schedule; this may be in the form of exercise but equally can be more passive such as reading a book, having a bath, yoga, listening to or playing music or an instrument, even daydreaming – whatever helps you to wind down and take a break from study.

Sleep is vital to successful revision and it is important to get the right amount at the right time and of the right quality. An old saying is that ‘one hour before midnight is worth two after’ so don’t revise into the ‘wee small hours’. Six to eight hours sleep a night is recommended.



During deep sleep our brain “downloads” from our short term memory into our long term memory; this allows us to remember what we have revised one day and makes room for us to revise something else the next day. You need to make sure you get enough deep sleep to allow this to happen; a study in 2013 claimed that ‘people who failed to get sufficient deep sleep did 40% worse than their contemporaries’. A study at the University of Surrey in 2013 showed that participants struggled with mental agility tasks with less sleep (BBC, 2014).



Stress and anxiety

Many people experience a certain amount of stress and anxiety when revising or undertaking exams; in more serious cases, students should seek professional help and make special arrangements for their exams. Help can be accessed via the Student Counsellor or the Learner Support Team at Harper Adams University.

There are a number of self-help techniques that can be used to help de-stress. In particular establishing a relaxation routine involving deep breathing can be helpful both during revision and in the exam. Suggestions on this can be found at:

<http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/student-life/coping-with-academic-work-and-exams>

Deep breathing, meditation or mindfulness can all help to release tension.

Deep breathing – close your eyes, breath out more slowly than in whilst relaxing all parts of the body from your toes to the top of your head; focus on feeling warm and imagine tension disappearing. Continue for 20 minutes. Other ideas can be found at:

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief.htm>

Meditation – this is the practice of focussing 100% of your attention on one area. There are many resources available to help with this, for example:

<http://marc.ucla.edu/body.cfm?id=22>

Mindfulness – this is reducing anxiety and stress by breathing and meditation which increases awareness of thoughts and feelings (mindfulnessforstudents, 2015). E.g.

<http://mindfulnessforstudents.co.uk/what-is-mindfulness/>

3. Preparation and Planning

It is important to prepare thoroughly for tests and exams; this involves giving yourself enough time to do so! If you leave everything to the last minute you will run out of time and become stressed.

- Create an exam plan – find out when your exams are; which modules are being examined and where information is that will help you to study, e.g. The Learning Hub.

- Draw up a Revision Timetable – this can be done for each day and for all the weeks before the test/exam.



- Include time for lectures and tutorials and for eating, sleeping, relaxing and emergencies
- Vary your revision sessions in terms of time and subject; don't spend too long on one subject at the expense of others and do spend more time on those subjects that you find more challenging
- Set goals for what you want to achieve each day/week.

- Organise your notes and folders – you cannot revise effectively from a random pile of papers that are scattered round your room or under your bed!

- Gather together wider reading materials – get on loan, or bookmark, books and journal articles that will help to fill gaps or give you a wider perspective or examples; download extra materials from the Learning Hub.

- Assemble essential revision equipment:



- Coloured paper, pens and highlighters
- Post-its
- Flashcards
- Poster size paper
- File paper

- Contact friends/student colleagues to organise group revision sessions or focus groups



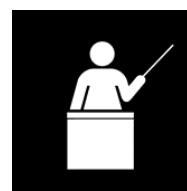
- Book study rooms for group or individual revision



- Check availability of tutors in case you need help

- Attend any timetabled revision sessions

- Establish a routine and **stick to it**



4. Environment

The environment in which you are working can be crucial to successful revision.

- You cannot revise successfully if you are constantly searching for what you need (see Preparation and Planning) so keep your desk/room tidy!
- Make sure that you are physically comfortable – but not too comfortable!! Check the lighting and the temperature; ensure that your chair and desk are ergonomically correct.
- Have a clock in the room so that you can keep a check on what you are doing and achieve your revision goals.
- Physically move away from your desk at times and do some stretches.
- Don't eat your meals at your desk.
- Try not to revise constantly - allow yourself some breaks BUT turn off distractions such as your phone and Facebook while you are actually revising!!



We all like to revise in different places and with different levels of company and noise so if you are revising with other people, check you have agreed on this beforehand. Don't revise with people doing a different subject as you may be drawn into unrelated conversations! See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGFE8GtcMms>

Use the questions below to create your 'perfect' revision scenario

I work best when:-

- ~ I am alone/ in the company of others
- ~ I can get help, ask questions/ can work it out by myself
- ~ I am in my room/in the library/ a classroom
- ~ It is quiet/ there is music or noise – quiet/ loud
- ~ It is morning/ afternoon/ evening
- ~ I have plenty of time/ am under pressure
- ~ I look at whole topics/ small chunks
- ~ I practise past questions/ just learn stuff



So **where** are you and **who** are you with??

5. Learning Styles and Revision

Most people have a preferred learning style although many of us may use a combination of these at times. There are a number of key theories about how people learn and there are assessments you can take on various websites to find out your style.

Three main styles have been suggested: Kinaesthetic (learning by doing); Auditory (learning by listening) and Visual (learning by sight). Knowing which your preferred style is can help you to use appropriate revision techniques.

Learning Style	Characteristics	Revision Tips
Kinaesthetic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Prefers a physical experience: touching, doing or moving.May jump in and 'have a go' – doesn't always look at instructions!Learns by experimentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Move about – pacing/walking/swimming while trying to memorise thingsTry different study positions rather than sitting – lying on back or frontRead while on an exercise bikeListen through headphones to revision materials whilst joggingDraw – a small whiteboard can be very usefulColour diagramsCompile charts, draw graphs and create tablesRepeat experiments or practicalsMake modelsTake breaks frequentlyHave music in the backgroundUse a computer - touching the keyboard may reinforce learningMake flash cards which can be shuffled, flipped, paired up or arranged in orderMake a post-it wall where information can be reordered and moved aboutPut ideas on different pages and shuffle into the correct orderDraw mind mapsWrite information in the air with eyes closedDiscuss ideas with othersUse coloured paper

Learning Style	Characteristics	Revision Tips
Visual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers to see and observe things • Likes to watch someone do something first • May work from lists and instructions • Can picture information and scenarios - visualises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write things down – lists, key words, facts, formulae • Use a key words sheet • Write information in your own words • Rewrite your notes • Colour code notes • Use drawings, make charts, draw graphs and create tables • Create posters and display in room • Draw mind maps and display • Make a Post-it wall • Dot Post-its around in key locations to subconsciously absorb information • Visualise words, formulae, phrases, pages of notes • Highlight in colour, key phrases, words and ideas • Work in a quiet place or have soft background music • Write notes in the margins of handouts/texts • Take a lot of notes and leave spaces for additions • Study alone or in groups • Look at people speaking and stay focussed • Make a PowerPoint with information on one slide and a question on the next - review frequently • Use flashcards – definitions/information on one side, a question on the other • Write out information on a small white board – wipe off, repeat

(Adapted from: American River College, not dated; NBSS not dated)



Learning Style	Characteristics	Revision Tips
Auditory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prefers to listen to information Likes the spoken word either from others or self Likes sound and noises Likes spoken instructions Remembers what hears e.g. song lyrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read work aloud Record work on voice recorder or phone and replay Discuss information with a fellow student Join a focus group for a module Prepare a talk and deliver to others or to self Prepare a PowerPoint with questions and deliver to self or others Attend Q.A. revision sessions and seminars Recite lists, dates, formulae etc. Do an oral summary of what have read Do quizzes on information with friends If in a quiet situation like the library, try hearing words in head Use colour to highlight main ideas on notes, handouts etc. Prepare summaries and read them out loud Quiz/interview friends on topics Ask a friend to read notes aloud Work in a quiet or silent room or have music playing in background Make up a 'rap' or a song to remember concepts, formulae or notes When writing, talk to self – say what you will write and what you are writing and then what you have written Use rhymes and rhythm to remember information, numbers and formulae Watch/listen to YouTube, or similar, revision videos

(Adapted from: American River College, not dated; NBSS not dated)

Whatever your learning style, try to actively engage with your revision; don't just simply sit there. Get involved!

6. Revision Activities

There are many different activities that will help you to revise some of which have been suggested in section 5. This section looks at a few of these in more detail. You could match these to your learning style or try a variety to see what suits you best.

More ideas are available from the Academic Guidance Team in FF10 in the Faccenda Centre.

Using Colour

Your brain loves **colour** so when writing, making notes, completing flash cards, posters or mind maps, use a variety of colour. You could try colour co-ordinating sections of a module so that different sections or key words are in different colours – when answering a question, thinking of this colour will help you to remember information.



Diagrams and Charts

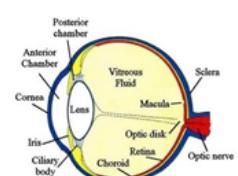
These can be turned into posters and displayed around your room

There are a number of ways to use **diagrams**: –

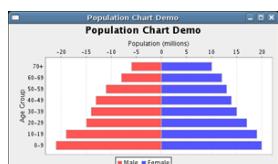
Practise drawing and labelling them (a wipe clean white board is a good way to do this and saves paper!)

Print off some unlabelled copies and practise labelling them

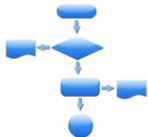
Put a complicated explanation into a simple diagram and then explain it to yourself or someone



There are many types of **charts** that can be drawn up, for example:-



Statistical information can be put into a **graph** to more easily recognise the patterns and trends



Complicated processes can be broken down and turned into **flow charts** – these could be cut up and then rearranged until you can get the stages in the right order.



A **pyramid or hierarchy chart** can help you to organise your thinking if there is an order or sequence that needs to be learnt.

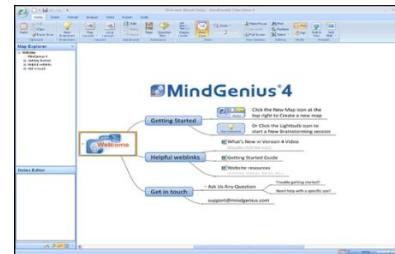


Mind Maps

Many people draw **mind maps**. They are a good ways to display information in a grouped or linked way on a topic. They can be a summary of a whole topic or part of a topic. They too, may be drawn as posters and displayed in your room.

- A good mind map will be clear but with enough detail to cover the key themes or words and phrases
- It can contain pictures or icons as well as words
- It will have links between branches
- Colour and numbers can categorise information and help you to remember ‘branches’
- Examples and links can be included
- They should be neat and tidy!

Mind maps can be hand drawn or generated electronically, for example, using Mind Genius.



Actually drawing a mind map will help you to remember the facts but you also need to remember the information on it. You can do this by:

- Linking ideas to the colour of the branch
- Redrawing individual branches or the whole thing
- Knowing how many links or branches there are from a main branch, e.g. 8
- Testing yourself to see if you can recreate the map; do this in a timed way or go back to your map on different occasions
- Practise either describing the map or giving a ‘talk’ about it to yourself or friends
- Practise turning it into an exam answer using a past question

Key Words Sheets

These can easily be drawn as a Word document with one column for a key word or a question and the other for the answer. They are very good for learning definitions or technical terms. They can also be used to write out the stages of a process.

Definition or Question	Answer

Once you have compiled the sheet, print it out then cut up the columns and rows into a set of ‘cards’.

- Practise matching the question/definition to the answer by playing a game of ‘pairs’ with them
- Shuffle each pile of questions and answers and matching them
- Give some to friends and test each other.
- Practise writing them out if that is your preferred style.

Make sure you keep a copy of the answers before you get busy with the scissors!



Flash/Index Cards

These can be used in a number of ways. Again, colour is useful – either use coloured cards which can be topic based and/or use coloured pens to highlight key information.

- ✓ Key concepts can be written on each card which can be memorised; select a number to learn each day, e.g. 10 – test yourself after an hour, 24 hours, three days, a week. Any you can’t remember go over again before moving on to the next topic
- ✓ A process can be broken down onto a number of cards – these can be used as a sorting exercise later. (Remember to keep a copy of the answers!)
- ✓ Information can be written on one side of the card with a question on the other then you can test yourself or work with a friend and test each other



Imagery

Many people think or recall information in pictures more easily than a verbal description. Concrete images such as a tractor or an engine or a body part are easier to remember than more abstract concepts.

To help with recall, the link method may be used where scenarios are imagined/visualised to remember terms or events

Sense of Place

If you can remember where something is or where you were when you learnt it, this can help with remembering it. For example, if you know that all your economics notes are on your desk whilst all your rural geography are on your bed or your valuation notes are on your chair, this can help to trigger memories. If you can recall the chair, then you may recall the information that was on it. This technique is sometimes called Roman Room. For further information see

<http://owl.massey.ac.nz/study-skills/memory-strategies.php>



Acronyms

These are made up of the first letter of each word and are a good way to remember lists or processes. For example:

SUNWAC – Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe, Aire, Calder – Rivers of Ouse catchment, Yorkshire

BODMAS – Brackets, Order, Divide, Multiply, Add, Subtract – order of operations for maths

Acrostics (Mnemonics)

These are phrases or sometimes poems which help to recall information by using the first letter of each word as a cue to what needs to be remembered. For example:

Richard Of York Gained Battles In Vain = Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Indigo, Violet i.e. colours of the rainbow

Betty Brown Runs Over Your Garden But Violet Grey Walks = Black, Brown, Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Violet, Grey, White ~ used to remember resistor colour codes and their values in engineering and technology



Rhymes, chants and raps

These can help you to remember information as they can help you to put it in order and to ‘sing’ it to yourself – think how many lyrics you know to songs that you listen to! The brain likes the rhythm and the beat of this kind of repetition so helps you to remember information. For example:

“1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

“Winds blow from high to low.” (How pressure influences wind direction)

“Thirty days has September,
April, June and November....etc.”



For some more examples, try the following links:

Remembering words associated with letters:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKdV5FvXLui&feature=youtu.be>

Circulatory System Rap:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSbbDnbSEyM&index=15&list=PL3zju_50w34jn04RmP
Fr7w9-F17i942Ei](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSbbDnbSEyM&index=15&list=PL3zju_50w34jn04RmPFr7w9-F17i942Ei)

Now try making up your own!!

Chunking

Like rhymes, chunking adds a rhythm to remembering information and helps to break long strings of numbers or formulae down into manageable amounts. It also enables you to remember more individual items.

Think about how you tell someone your mobile number – nearly everyone breaks it down into a sequence of pairs or three or four number groups.

For example it is easier to remember **0300 100 06 07** than 03001000607



Audio materials

Listening again to information can be done whilst doing other things such as cleaning or exercising

Revision videos may be available on the Learning Hub or YouTube or programmes may be aired on iPlayer or similar sites.

Podcasts of tutorials or lectures may be available

There may be audio books of some texts or you can record your own material and listen back to it.

Past exam papers

Using past exam papers is an excellent way to revise. They can be useful in a number of ways.

- Assessing what you know and don't know
- Planning your revision
- Practising timing and writing to time
- Practising essay planning



When you first look at a past exam paper, whether it be Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), short answers or essays, use a three point system. Go through it and:-

- ❖ Put a tick against any questions you could tackle immediately (✓);
- ❖ Put a question mark (?) about those you could have a go at but are not very certain;
- ❖ Put a cross (X) against anything that you really don't know.

From this you can plan out your revision and allocate time to each subject; prioritise those topics with a cross against them, then the question marks and finally the ticks. It is very tempting to spend time on things we know but you really need to focus on those topics that are more challenging and about which you know the least.

For MCQ papers:



- Look at the topics and learn the knowledge that is needed for straight forward 'what, which, name' questions – test yourself over and over again.
- Know ratios, targets, definitions, qualities, uses, breeds – use a 'Key words sheet'
- Practise doing simple calculations and completing or interpreting graphs

For short answer questions:



- Make sure you can explain topics – practise writing 5 explanatory points about each thing that you know
- Practise drawing diagrams and labelling them
- Practise completing or interpreting graphs
- Go over calculations; check you understand and can do them

For essay questions (See HAU Guide to Essay Writing: Essays in Exams):



- Practise decoding the question – what do the key command words mean? Look at 'who is doing what to whom' – who or what is the subject; what is the context – time, place, scenario; what or who is being affected; what is being done to them/it by the subject
- Practise doing essay plans
- Practise writing essays in timed conditions

7. Top Tips

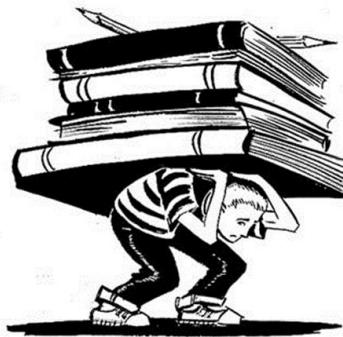


In summary, here are a selection of top tips for successful revision:

- ✓ Start early – don't leave everything to the last minute
- ✓ Be organised – have everything you need in the right order, in the right place and at the right time
- ✓ Know what you have to revise and don't waste time on topics that were assessed in an assignment if they will not come up again in the exam
- ✓ Have breaks and reward yourself – you cannot work all the time
- ✓ Keep active, drink plenty of water and eat properly
- ✓ Get enough sleep and the right kind of sleep
- ✓ Make a 'Do not disturb' notice for your room when you are working there
- ✓ Do not give in to friends who want to distract you or want you to go out when you want to work
- ✓ Turn off the technology – Facebook, tweeting, texting, checking emails etc.
- ✓ Condense notes into manageable amounts
- ✓ Separate the module into chunks for each session – looking at the whole thing can be overwhelming
- ✓ Read around the subject to fill in any gaps
- ✓ Talk to staff and fellow students if you still don't understand things
- ✓ Divide up your time between topics and give more time to challenging subjects
- ✓ Practise hand writing essays to time so that your hand doesn't ache in the exam!
- ✓ Use colour – the brain loves it and you will remember things by association
- ✓ Test your knowledge – use practice or past papers to check your understanding and monitor your progress



- ✓ Put notes or post-its around your room so that you glance at them when you move about – you will be surprised how much you remember
- ✓ Text difficult words or concepts to yourself and review
- ✓ Put notes or posters at eye level or higher – it will make you look and you will remember more
- ✓ Teach a friend a topic – if they understand it you have made it clear
- ✓ Create a topic wall in your room – post-its, mind maps, posters
- ✓ Get a mug printed with 10 facts about a topic – it's amazing what you can learn while having a cuppa!



- ✓ **Don't let it get you down – play to your strengths and give it your best!**
- ✓ **Make a revision timetable and stick to it!**

(Adapted from FWI, 2014; Bradford University, not dated; HAU Staff, 2015. Pers. Comm.)

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