

CHALLENGE OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

A Climate Reporting Guidebook

TEMASEK
FOUNDATION



World Editors Forum
SCIENCE IN THE NEWSROOM

This report includes learnings from the *Temasek Foundation – WAN-IFRA Journalism Programme: Challenge of the Climate Crisis* and information published by WAN-IFRA.

The programme, driven by the World Editors Forum, the global network for editors within the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), and supported by Temasek Foundation of Singapore, will culminate in a Global eSummit on the subject in February 2022.

The voices highlighted in the guide are experts in their fields of reporting, storytelling or science.

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Climate change is the story of our generation, both for audiences and journalists, all around the world. The challenge for newsrooms is to tell this story well, going beyond the news of extreme weather events, to helping our communities figure out the way forward. This will call for a deep understanding of the trade-offs and challenges we will inevitably face ahead, as business as usual will not get the job done.

Telling this story in words, graphics, data projects, visuals and videos will require honing new skills from our newsrooms, which will also need to bone up on the

science that underpins the issue, so as to present information in an authoritative and engaging way.

We need to give hope, and inspire people to believe in the possibility of progress, that the world can come together to tackle this challenge, huge and daunting as it might be. Our newsrooms can and must play our part in this grave, even existential crisis, of our times.



Warren Fernandez

Editor in Chief, Straits Times
President, World Editors Forum

REPORTING CLIMATE SCIENCE

Climate reporting is the responsibility of every journalist and newsroom

Now is the time to step up science reporting to meet the urgent need for accurate information and interpretation of climate events, data, stories, imagery and increasing misinformation and disinformation around the subject.

Getting these facts right is important because decisions, livelihoods and lives will depend on it.

- Hold political authority to account
- Connect the local and the global
- Connect distant communities
- Drive policy change
- Drive business change
- Empower communities to:
 - Advocate
 - Mitigate
 - Adapt
- Alert public to remote danger
- Amplify weaker voices

Credit: Corinne Podger

Authoritative climate reporting is all about the science, context and language



UN research has shown a “staggering” rise in extreme weather events since 2000.

An extreme event is something that is severe, unprecedented, unseasonal.

An event can be extreme without looking like a *disaster*:

- UK – warmer summers
- Australia – more droughts
- Asia-Pacific – more tropical storms



By exploring and getting to grips with the foundation science that informs climate change research, reporters are better equipped to cover it authoritatively and knowledgeably.

CORINNE PODGER

Challenge of the Climate Crisis Trainer
Director and Principal, The Digital Skills Agency



Understand methods for studying and measuring climate change

Journalists need to familiarise themselves with the many methods used to study climate change, including lesser known sources. For example, ice and sediment core analysis is used to identify pollens and other pollutants in the atmosphere captured centuries or millennia ago that give an indication of plant life and climate at that time.

Know and identify the key metrics to measure climate change. Also familiarise yourself with lesser known sources.

Other sources could include:

- Historic weather records (back to the 1800s)
- Geological records
- Ice cores
- Sediment cores
- Tree rings
- Survival of vulnerable organisms (e.g. coral)
- Solar activity

Become familiar with the science



Through learning how to read and analyse journal articles, journalists can be better prepared to identify appropriate story angles and target audiences, and create engaging multimedia to support their storytelling.



CORINNE PODGER

Challenge of the Climate
Crisis Trainer

**Director and Principal,
The Digital Skills Agency**

Understanding the elements of a science journal article, and which sections to read first

Title and authors

- Authors listed in terms of importance / role in the experiment

Abstract

- An executive summary

Method

- Description of the experiment
- Detailed
- Designed to be replicable

Conclusion

- Summary of results
- Implications
- Areas for further work

References

- Sources consulted by the authors

READ THESE FIRST

Abstract
accessible

Conclusions
why it matters

Remember to make sure the research is reliable and newsworthy and think about which audiences would find it appealing.

Always identify the science. Be cautious with the rest

‘Grey literature’ is information produced by individuals/organisations whose primary function is not publishing

Grey literature includes:

NGO reports

Government reports

Policy statements

Conference proceedings

Newsletters

Videos

What do you need to know?

- It may not be the most up-to-date information
- It has not been peer reviewed
- It may not be scientifically accurate

Keep data in context

Cherry-picking data and using data out of context leads to a conclusion different from the conclusion arising from scientifically available data

Claim

President Joe Biden's climate plan includes cutting 90% of red meat from Americans' diets by 2030.

Rating

 **False**
About this rating [↗](#)

Context

Biden announced that his administration would seek to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in half by 2030. The Daily Mail ran a story that asserted, in entirely theoretical terms, that the policy "could" require Americans to reduce their meat consumption by 90%. Politicians like Rep. Lauren Boebert retweeted the Daily Mail's speculation as fact.

 **Lauren Boebert** 
@laurenboebert [Follow](#) 

Joe Biden's climate plan includes cutting 90% of red meat from our diets by 2030. They want to limit us to about four pounds a year. Why doesn't Joe stay out of my kitchen?

6:53 AM - 24 Apr 2021

3,244 Retweets 15,798 Likes 

 5.1K  3.2K  16K

Identify and call out misinformation



**PAMPOSH
RAINA**

Challenge of the
Climate Crisis Trainer

**Journalist and
Trainer**



To understand and address climate crisis misinformation, it is important to identify the most pervasive forms in which such false or manipulated content surfaces and the social media platforms/messaging apps on which that content is widely circulated. This kind of misinformation can be caught early not just by monitoring the news cycle but complementing that with social media monitoring and developing a newsroom toolkit.

Why you should worry about information disorder

Journalism faces the risk of being drowned out by the cacophony.

Journalists risk being manipulated by actors who attempt to mislead or corrupt them into spreading disinformation.

“Fake news” undermines the credibility of news media.

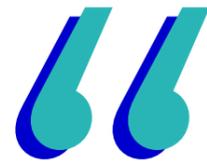
Misinformation and disinformation around climate science can affect the acceptance of climate change mitigation solutions.



Akintunde Akinleye / Climate Visuals Countdown

Rethinking your newsroom organisation

The way your editorial team is organised to cover climate change will influence your output. So how are news organisations stepping up?



Newsrooms that expand their climate reporting typically choose one of the following three organisational structures to achieve their goal: They either increase the budget of their existing science desk or set up a whole new climate desk which then operates in parallel with their existing science desk. A third and less common approach is to neither expand existing science desks nor to launch a new climate desk, but to take an interdisciplinary 'climate hub' approach with existing staff.

German climate journalist Sara Schurmann, who is currently advising Germany's public broadcaster SWR on its climate journalism, has suggested a fourth tactic which is to install a temporary 'managing climate editor' as part of the chief editor's team.

Wolfgang Blau
Visiting Research Fellow
Reuters Institute, Oxford University



TELLING THE STORY

Move beyond doom and gloom



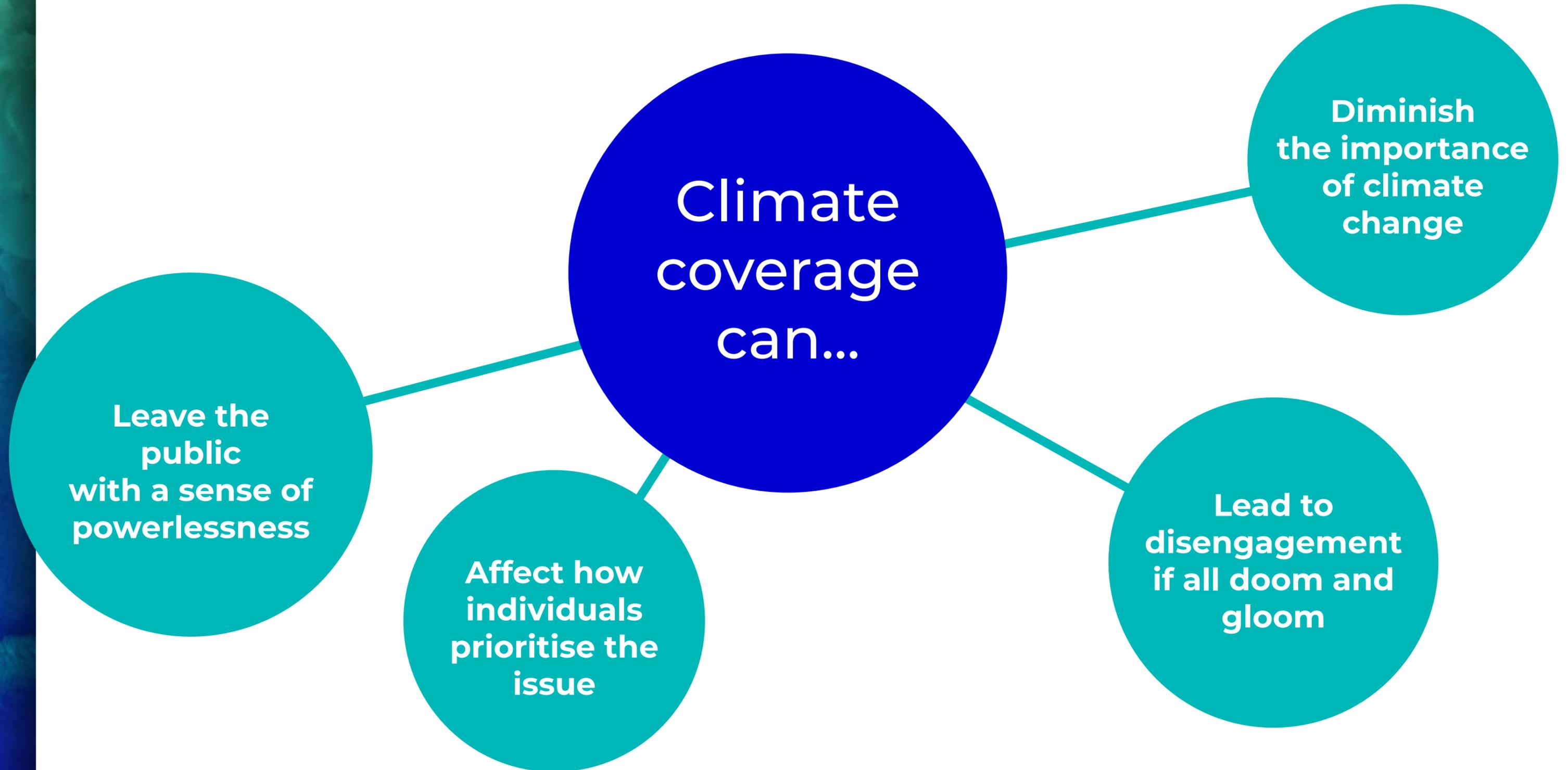
Reporting about climate change shouldn't just revolve around a doom and gloom narrative. It should also tell our audiences that it is a problem that can be solved. Reporting on climate change from a solutions lens encourages the public to take action, which leads to a more engaged citizenry, a prerequisite to not only mitigating the climate crisis but also to a healthy, functioning society.



PORTIA LADRIDO

Challenge of the Climate
Crisis Trainer
Journalist and Editor

Confront the audience challenge



How solutions journalism can help

- 1 Can increase engagement, more time on page
- 2 Increase sharing
- 3 Increase readers' interest in and knowledge about the issue
- 4 Help distinguish newsrooms and publications from competitors
- 5 Shift the discourse - encourage less polarised, more constructive discussions



Raphael Pouget / Climate Visuals Countdown

Integrating solutions elements into your reporting

Elements of a solutions journalism story

A solutions story focuses on a **RESPONSE** to a social problem — and how that response has worked or why it hasn't.

The best solutions reporting distills the lessons that make the response relevant and accessible to others. In other words, it offers **INSIGHT**.

Solutions journalism looks for **EVIDENCE** — data or qualitative results that show effectiveness (or lack thereof).

Solutions stories reveal a response's shortcomings. Reporting on **LIMITATIONS**, in other words, is essential.

Where to find sources for climate change solutions

- Think tanks, policy experts, innovation networks
- Academic experts
- Large datasets
- People involved in implementation
- People involved in the problem
- Hold up a mirror to your own life
- [Solutions Story Tracker](#)

Journalism vs. advocacy



When it comes to audience reach, to meet the challenges brought about by news fatigue and climate anxiety, a solutions journalism approach should be part of the reporting strategy but climate change reporting must continue to adhere to basic tenets of journalism; accuracy, balance, independence, accountability plus rigorous evidence-based reporting on responses to social problems.

As long as we continue to hold power to account, interrogate the data we use for our reporting and are transparent in and accountable for the work that we do, we can continue to maintain a clear demarcation between independent journalism and advocacy.



**YUSOF
ABDUL-RAHMAN**

Challenge of the Climate
Crisis Trainer
Journalist and Consultant

Building a climate story: setting parameters

Reporting elements

When planning climate stories, consider:

What is the minimum version of this story that you are confident you can get?

What is the best possible version of this story you can prove?

	Minimum	Maximum
Climate Theme/Thread	A single topic e.g. livelihood security	Multiple related topics e.g. livelihood security, food security, cultural identity and others
Interviews	A single source e.g. local community member	All relevant stakeholders e.g. local community leaders and members, scientists, governments, NGOs, voices from comparative locations etc
Data	Climate change data or human impact data	Climate change data and human impact data e.g. for remote coastal location dependent on fishing, to include data on fish biomass, coral recovery, income improvement, migration etc
Documents	Local government reports or local scientific study	Science journals (peer reviewed) and 'grey literature' such as government reports, policy statements, conference proceedings, NGO reports etc
Media	Text or audio or video	Multi-format treatment to include text, photo, video, data visualisations, audio and interactive (gamification)
Solutions Elements	Case study on example of a response to the problem	More than one example of response to the problem

Building a climate story: mapping audience needs

Audience needs

Identify your audience, understand their news consumption behaviour and consider the appropriate format (or formats) that you will need to best communicate your story to them.

	Minimum	Maximum	Audience Needs
Climate Theme/Thread	A single topic e.g. livelihood security	Multiple related topics e.g. livelihood security, food security, cultural identity and others	What is livelihood security in a local and global context? A contextual example that can be understood and applied to them.
Interviews	A single source e.g. local community member	All relevant stakeholders e.g. local community leaders and members, scientists, governments, NGOs, voices from comparative locations etc	Personal experience of the problem. Analyst/scientist who can put it into global/local context.
Data	Climate change data or human impact data	Climate change data and human impact data e.g. for remote coastal location dependent on fishing, to include data on fish biomass, coral recovery, income improvement, migration etc	Local data Comparable international data
Documents	Local government reports or local scientific study	Science journals (peer reviewed) and 'grey literature' such as government reports, policy statements, conference proceedings, NGO reports etc	N/A
Media	Text or audio or video	Multi-format treatment to include text, photo, video, data visualisations, audio and interactive (gamification)	Rich, quality, fit for purpose
Solutions Elements	Case study on example of a response to the problem	More than one example of response to the problem	How they can share this local story so that they help raise awareness. Applicable solutions in their own context.

Make the story real



JOI LEE

Challenge of the Climate
Crisis Trainer
Journalist and Producer



Good climate change journalism goes beyond just reporting the facts and data behind climate change. It's about translating the abstract science and connecting climate change to the stories of real people and communities who are impacted, in a language that is relatable to the readers. In doing so, climate change storytelling has the power to help build a broader understanding in the public that climate change is real, it's here, and it's impacting our neighbourhoods, communities and homes.

Framing human stories

Focus on the social dimensions on climate change

More than anything else, people care about their health, their wealth and the future of their children. Climate change is relevant to all three of these things, so try to think in those terms when you are working out how to tell your story, both to your editor and your audience.

Follow vibrant, strong characters

Sometimes, the only storytelling tool you need is a person with a powerful story to tell. Find someone who is deeply impacted by the climate issue you're looking at – this is where the 'tension' and 'plot conflict' of a story really develops.

Don't portray people as victims if they don't see themselves that way

Make sure that the narrative is in line with the principles, values, perspectives of the people you are working with.

Focus on inequalities/inequities exposed by climate change

Climate change affects everyone, but it impacts different people disproportionately. Seek out the voices and the stories of those who are being impacted the most. Think about the role of gender, class, religion, generation, in terms of how people are being impacted.

Reframing language, tone and audience

Start talking less 'planet', talking more 'people'. Put a face on climate change.

Focus on the here, and the now — and less on faraway places and future decades.

Take science and translate it into daily life. Drop the jargon.

Localise the global. Find ways to connect foreign research and international meetings to what's happening at home.

Focus on the solutions, reframe the story around resilience and adaptation. Not all stories have to be doom and gloom.

Balance is not the same as impartiality.

**Don't say too much.
Stay simple.**

Climate change brings a risk of 'information overload.' A story is meant to simplify the complex, so don't cram in too many details. Don't forget the big picture of what it is that you want to convey.

Visualising the climate crisis



TOBY SMITH

Visuals and Media
Programme Lead
Climate Outreach



A constant stream of negative or strong or emotional messaging about climate can be really overwhelming to readers, and doesn't offer anything that they can potentially relate to or any positive change that they can effect themselves.

Outside of social media, there's a really good opportunity for news organisations to incorporate more climate solutions or stories of climate resilience and climate justice, which give climate change that longer narrative about the practical things that society, individuals or governments can actually do as a positive measure against it.

Visualising the climate crisis

As part of its Climate Visuals project, [Climate Outreach](#), a UK-based non-profit organisation focused on driving public engagement with climate change, developed [seven core principles for climate change communication](#), designed to improve engagement with this type of content.

Climate Outreach have released a collection of 100 images, freely available to editorial media, educators, campaigners and not-for-profit groups to help them inspire climate action.

The images in the [Climate Visuals library](#) are free to download after registration.

The infographic features the Climate Visuals logo (an eye icon above the text 'climateVISUALS') and the title '7 core principles for climate change communication'. It lists seven principles, each with a teal icon: 'Show real people' (person icon), 'Tell new stories' (open book icon), 'Show climate change causes at scale' (factory and tree icon), 'Show emotionally powerful impacts' (two people icon), 'Understand your audience' (group of people icon), 'Show local (but serious) impacts' (location pin icon), and 'Be careful with protest imagery' (person at a podium icon).

Credit: Climate Outreach

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For more information, visit temasekfoundation.org.sg.

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