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## Indonesian EFL Students' Problems In Writing Recount Text

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### Abstract

Writing is the way to express an idea or thought in words to transfer information for readers. Commonly, writing is the hardest thing for EFL learners because they have to practice more and through a long process to create good writing. In this research, the researcher is interested to discover the EFL learners' problem in constructing written recount text at tenth grade of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin academic year 2017/2018. Therefore, the researcher employed a descriptive qualitative study and used purposive sampling as the sampling technique. The participants were 32 EFL learners of X- B Accountancy class. The researcher used test, interview, and documentation to gather the data. The outcome of the study revealed that the EFL learners faced two main problems, namely grammar and vocabulary aspect. Besides, there are still other problems faced by some of the EFL learners in terms of content, organization, as well as mechanics. Those problems came from the EFL learners' lack of practice in writing during the class session. Therefore, the researcher suggests the EFL teacher help the EFL learners to overcome the problems based on this research. The teacher also has to discover the solution to enhance the EFL learners' capability in constructing written recount text.

*Keywords: Problem, writing, writing problem, recount text, tenth-grade EFL learners*

### INTRODUCTION

Based on the Curriculum 2013 in Indonesia, the goal of teaching English for Vocational High School is to provide the EFL learners with knowledge and skills to make them able to communicate in English either in spoken or written language at the informational level. Then, they are expected to be able to implement the knowledge they have regarding the language in purpose to access and share information as part of their learning.

In the application of English as written language, the EFL learners have to cope with their grammar and vocabulary capacity for them to be able to write a kind of academic writing.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, schools or institutions must give their EFL learners with adequate skills, which are needed to deal with the real-world situation.<sup>2</sup>

In this study, the first year EFL learners of Vocational High School are conveyed to learn and to master some genres including recount text applied in any aspects of language

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<sup>1</sup> Fatchul Mu'in. 2019. *Theory of Sentences*. Banjarmasin: ULM

<sup>2</sup> F MUJIN. 2019. *Sociolinguistics A Language Study in Sociocultural Perspectives*. Banjarmasin : Jurusan PBS FKIP ULM.

skills. In the application of recount text, the EFL learners can use it to tell their previous experience and feelings. A recount text informs the reader what happened and this may involve the author's personal interpretation of events, as stated in the Standard of Competency and Basic Competence in 2013 Curriculum at the school. In addition, school policies in determining the minimum passing score must be gained.

However, most of the tenth grade EFL learners of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin still face hardships in achieving the minimum passing grade (KKM) due to their lack of knowledge regarding the target language or L2, which is English, primarily in writing skill. Based on the preliminary study conducted by interviewing the EFL teacher, there are some difficulties faced by EFL learners, especially in constructing English written passage.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the EFL learners have problems in expressing and connecting their ideas while writing.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, they do not know which is suitable to write first. Several EFL learners even judged themselves that they are not good at writing. The other problem is related to making a simple past tense sentence, especially when they have to construct a written recount passage.

In constructing a recount written passage, the EFL learners face two major problems. First, the EFL learners still have difficulties in constructing a good sentence with the correct structure using the simple past tense. Second, the problem lay in their lack of vocabulary, especially the essential ones.

The information about the EFL learners capabilities in writing skill also strengthened by the researcher's experience during the three-month-teaching training program in the school. The EFL learners generally had insufficient capabilities in constructing written passage. Hence, they could not organize the idea in proper means. They are also could not construct several related sentences. Therefore, most of the arrangement of their constructed written passage were not united and coherent.

The EFL learners need to develop their writing ability related to the five elements of writing, such as grammar, vocabulary, language use, organization, and mechanic. In addition, the EFL learners should be taught how to plan and organize the ideas or supporting information in making the composition so that they are able to improve their writing ability.

The activities of constructing written passage as an activity in the classroom incorporate several basic stages of writing, they were planning, drafting, revising, and last but not least, editing.<sup>5</sup> In the previous study, defined the EFL learners' writing problems in recount text and found that the 8<sup>th</sup> graders of State Junior High School 2 Purworejo, academic year 2009/2010 had lexico-grammatical problems on constructing written recount passage. They wrote the recount texts in the way they do. Therefore, the EFL students in this study conducted errors in terms of omissions, additions, misinformation, as well as misorderings. It was discovered that they were confused in constructing appropriate grammatical sentences and they only had limited vocabulary. Another study conducted also indicated that EFL learners need more understanding of basic knowledge in writing. They must increase their capabilities in basic writing skill in order to construct more writing that has better quality with great idea according to the kinds of writing needed.

As for this study, the researcher will be focused on discovering EFL learners' problems in constructing paragraph in recount text with the indicator of recount text as a basis. The indicators are related to generic idea, structure or organization, vocabulary, and lastly, language feature or grammar. Hence, the problem for this study can be formulated as follow: "What are the EFL learners' difficulties in constructing written recount passage at the tenth-grade of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin school year 2017/2018?"

<sup>3</sup> N Sari, F Mu'in, M Yamin. 2019. An Analysis Of Intralingual Grammatical Errors Made EFL Students - LINGUA EDUCATIA 1 (2), 138-150.

<sup>4</sup> Abdul Muth'im. 2007. Developing Writing Skill. Banjarmasin: Universitas Lambung Mangkurat

<sup>5</sup> DN Arini & A Muth'im. 2018.

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## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Descriptive qualitative was implemented as the method of the study and the cluster random sampling was implemented the sampling technique. The subjects of this study were X-A Accountancy class as the trial and class X-B Accountancy class that had been given a test. To ascertain the dependability of the data, the researcher implemented the triangulation technique. The researcher started this study with an interview with the teacher and documented the syllabus used at the school for making lesson plan. Next is followed by distributing a writing test to the EFL learners. They were asked to construct a simple recount text in 60 minutes. After gathering the data, the researcher interviewed 15 EFL learners to ascertain the test result.

For checking the validity, the researcher used expert validity by asking two experts to validate the study instrumentation. In order to ascertain the reliability of test's scores and to avoid the subjectivity of the research, the researcher conducted inter-rater reliability by using Pearson Product Moment formula from the first test of X-A Accountancy on August 21, 2018. The rubric implemented for the writing test is a writing scoring rubric.

As for analyzing the data, the researcher checked the data from the test, classifying EFL learners' achievement by using writing scoring rubric, calculating the percentage of problems found, and lastly draw the conclusion.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Overall Score Result**

The researcher administered the test to measure and discover the EFL learners' difficulties in constructing a written recount passage. The test was conducted on August 21, 2018, and the researcher focused on five aspects of writing in testing the EFL learners. Those are content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and lastly, mechanics. The researcher administered a written test to discover the EFL most dominant difficulties in constructing a written recount passage.

The result of the administered test as the document analysis in this research. The researcher asked the EFL learners to write recount text about an inspirational story, a memorable, an embarrassing moment and my ambition when I was a child (the student choose one topic), then collected the test as a part of documentation document. The result discovered that the EFL learners' writing capabilities are categorized into six categorize of interval score.

The test showed that there were five EFL learners who were in the last interval score (0-49). These EFL learners represent the low interval capabilities in constructing recount passage. Next, the majority of the choosen participantss were in the fifth interval (50-59) that consists of ten EFL learners that composed the biggest frequencies in capabilities in constructing recount passage. The next interval range was from 60 - 69 with two EFL learners in this interval. After that, there were six EFL learners in the interval 70-79.

Next Interval range was 80-89 with five EFL learners. The last interval capabilities in constructing recount passage were  $\geq 90$ , which represents the highest interval with four EFL learners in the last interval rank. The chosen schoolstated that the score for passing English subject is 75.

Therefore, from the EFL learners' writing result, the researcher discovered that 20 EFL learners got a lower score than the passing grade and only 12 EFL learners could pass the passing grade. That fact shows that most of the choosen participantss still faced difficulties in constructing written recount passage. The more specific results of the choosen participantss' problem is explained in the following explanation.

Since the test result above is not strong enough to establish what are the problems of the chosen participants in writing recount text are. It needs more description that is deeply showing the problems and the table below shows the EFL learners' score in constructing written recount passage through the five components of writing.

Table 1. The Students' Average Score

Content	
Rater 1	84
Rater 2	84
Average	84
Grammar	
Rater 1	62
Rater 2	65
Average	63.5
Vocabulary	
Rater 1	77
Rater 2	77
Average	77
Organization	
Rater 1	81
Rater 2	78
Average	79.5
Mechanics	
Rater 1	80
Rater 2	83
Average	81.5
<b>Total average score</b>	<b>385.5</b>

After getting the data, in order to discover the difficulties faced by EFL learners in constructing recount passage, the researcher presented the data based on the documents by writing all EFL learners of X-B Accountancy. It consists of five items problems, such as content, grammar, vocabulary, organization, as well as mechanics.

After that, the researcher presented the data of each problem in constructing written recount passage into the table, to understand the result of problem's percentage of each the problem, can be seen in this following discussion:

a) *Content*

According to the result from EFL learners' written test, it shows that the average score of the chosen participants in content is 84. Content in constructing written recount passage refers to the paragraph appropriateness of the topic with the idea, which should be in unity. However, it was discovered from the result of the chosen participants' writing that they have difficulties in making a good idea or good content. Here is an example of EFL learners' writing result in content of recount text:

*On time when I was in junior high school hold holiday which is very pleasant namely One School Vacation in Tangkisung. The holiday to beach is fun thing because I am could know the world.*

From the example above, these sentences refer to a background of information about who, what, when, and where the experience happened. The "who" is clearly written in this sentence that "when I was in junior high school", it tells about was

involved in the text. Then, the word “in Tangkisung” tells about where it happened.

However, from the sentences, it can be identified that there is no illustration development of the story; the EFL learners also cannot elaborate on her story in her written passage. The reader also cannot understand what the EFL learner was trying to share from her holiday.

b) *Grammar*

According to the result, from the EFL learners’ written test it could be discovered that the average score of the chosen participantss about grammar is 63.5. Grammar refers to appropriate and correct sentence and grammar that is used by the EFL learners in constructing written recount passage. Hence, it could be formulated that the EFL learners did not know or forgot to use the past tense to retell the events.

Some samples:

1. *We stay overnight for 2 days.*
2. *There, I and friend take the photo*
3. *We use a car*

The correct sentences:

1. *We stayed overnight for two days.*
2. *There, my friend and I took the photo*
3. *We used a car.*

c) *Vocabulary*

According to the result, from the EFL learners’ written test it could be discovered that the average score of the chosen participantss in vocabulary is 77. Vocabulary consists of word choice of a word which appropriates when the student writes a text.

See the examples below:

1. *Then, we displaying Indonesia traditional dances.*

The underlined word should be “*The, we performed the traditional Indonesia dance.*”

2. *A few hours later we arrived at the beach, we toured the beach”*

In this sentence, there are two events told *arrived* and *toured*. To combine those events, the students could use the appropriate conjunction “*and then*”.

d) *Organization*

According to the result, from the EFL learners’ written test it could be discovered that the average score of the chosen participantss in the organization is 79.5. Writing a recount requires text organization. There were three aspects that the students had to write, consists of orientation, events, as well as re-orientation. Here is the example of student’s writing related to organization:

**A Memorable Vacation ( To The Beach)**

*On my vacation never things is when going somewere what is so extraordinary in amazing beautiful and free much the view and the pplace are very clean and clean many wow girls. There, my sister and I relaxed casually*

*Never things a I and sister beach, never things beach because it’s the same not ever to the beach whahahaha and my time it.*

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*Sister I challenge or duel. In sister I' am who is our trip was smooth beacuse we arrived until I saw around me there was a because I was too far in the middle of I was drinking see water. (There is no conclusion/re-orientation).*

From the recount text above, the researcher discovered that the EFL learner did not make the end of this writing. He also could not make re-orientation or conclusion well. It means that some students did not understand how to make good writing, although their teacher had taught it before. They could make a long content in his writing and they had enough vocabularies, however they did not keep an eye out of recount text's organization itself.

*e) Mechanics*

According to the result, from the EFL learners' written test it could be discovered that the average score of the choosen participantss in mechanics is 81.5. In writing, mechanics are related to the rules of written language like punctuation, capitalization, as well as spelling. Those aspects are also necessarily important in writing to produce good quality writing. Here are the examples of the choosen participantss' problem in mechanics aspect:

- a) *One day I'm and friend go to beach for vacation*
- b) *The last holiday I wan to the city of Beach Takisung.*
- c) Title "A Memorable Vacation ( To The Beach)"

The correct sentences:

- a) *One day, my friend and I went to beach for vacation*
- b) *The last holiday, I went to the Takisung Beach.*
- c) Title " A Memorable Vacation (To the Beach)"

### **The Description of the Interview Result**

According to the result, from the interview section, we could describe the EFL learners' problem in constructing written recount passage. The interview section result is described separately between the interview for the teacher and the EFL learners.

The interview with the teacher and EFL learners were conducted in the teacher's room and classroom of SMK 1 Muhammadiyah. From the interview section, the problems that came from the EFL learners and the teacher was discovered. The teacher seemed pessimistic about the EFL learners' capability. She argued that EFL learners of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 had low motivation in writing. They tended to be lazier. Thus, the teacher usually could not execute EFL teaching maximally. Furthermore, she argued that she had too many activities in EFL teaching-learning process. Hence, her EFL learners did not have much time to write in English. In addition, it was found out that she did not prepare the time and resources for the EFL learners to personalize themselves, such as modules or handout about writing. She just focused on reading comprehension and answering the question if she had material about long text.

Moreover, the teacher just used reading and translation techniques in teaching writing. She did this in the hope that it would make them comfortable to pronounce words. Then, it would have impact to enhance the EFL learners' capability. When

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writing a text, the teacher usually writes a sample text and it is similar to her EFL learners' handwriting. She also used translation method. She often asked EFL learners to translate the text in order to make her EFL learners have rich vocabulary mastery. However, in fact, the EFL learners she taught tended to use google translate the text. It was confirmed by the teacher, she said that "Usually, they wrote in Indonesia and translate it using google translate. They rarely open the dictionary. Most of the choosen participantss did that. I knew that technology made them easier to solve their work. But, this makes them addicted and they have difficulty in changing this habit."

Next, the teacher was rarely teaching writing in the classroom, it is due to the fact that writing skills are not measured in the national examination. In order to discover problems faced by the tenth-grade EFL learners of SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Banjarmasin, the researcher also interviewed the EFL learners. The researcher chose 15 sample EFL learners to get essential information. According to the result, from the EFL learners' interview section, it was discovered that they feel difficult to express and develop idea in recount text. Most of EFL learners' difficulties were related to vocabulary. In writing, the EFL learners have difficulties in conducting the title into English form, as well as to write down their idea into sentences and paragraphs.

The red line of the problem faced by the EFL learners in constructing written recount passage was that they have difficulties in exploring and adapting the topic about recount text. In terms of the difficulty of exploring, the EFL learners had limited knowledge or story to develop the topic or story. In adapting, the EFL learners still hard to relate the themes with their own experience or knowledge.

### **Problem of Content**

The result collected from the EFL learners' writing shows that they actually do not have a serious problem regarding content. This study found out that just some EFL learners know about how to start a recount text where they should provide an introduction by introducing the subject and setting of the previous experience, some EFL learners actually have understood enough theoretically.

The EFL learners can mention and explain orientation and events, as it is the most important part of the recount, being its generic structure. Although they understand enough about how to make good content for their writing, the fact that they only had small chance to conduct a writing practice made them face the problem in content aspect. Based on their writing, the researcher found that there is student that just focus on her relationship with the object.

Some EFL learners also had difficulties in constructing their written recount passage, especially regarding the elaboration of their idea or information about the story in their writing. As a result, their writings are unstructured, random, and often too short. The content aspect is related to the EFL learners' connection between the sentences in their text with the story that should be told by the EFL learners. Based on the EFL learners' writing result, some EFL learners failed to tell something because the EFL learners do not know the story details. Therefore, in content aspect, sometimes the EFL learners have difficulties due to not knowing the thing that should be described by them. Another example from the EFL learners writing result

is that one of them wrote directly on her text “when school, I go together friends. Then we and I in class, then come teacher, then we and I stand up, then I sit down”. He depicted the situation but just focus on his relationship with the situation; he did not mention the specific story of the situation. On his text, he just mentioned that the subject I and we, stand up and sit down.

### Problem of Grammar

EFL learners language in constructing written recount passage are including how they make a sentence base on the grammatical rule of English as grammar aspect and how their variation to choose the words to make the sentence easy to understand by the readers as diction aspect. Based on the EFL learners’ writing result, grammar aspect gets the lowest total average score and even less than half of the maximum average score. It indicated that grammar is the main problem for EFL learners. In grammar aspect, it was discovered by the researcher that they have two difficulties in this term. First is related to how to add *-ed* as suffix used to change present verb into past verb, it was in accordance with the result of interview that was conducted to the EFL teacher of the chosen participants. While the second difficulties are that they do not understand enough and forgot to use about part of regular, as well as irregular verb of verb II (past tense). It happened due to the EFL learners did not understand well yet regarding tenses that should be used in the past when they want to construct a written recount passage.

As an example, a student wrote “*she loves the movies*” when she was asked to construct a written recount passage. Based on the rule between English grammatical and recount text, her sentence was considered wrong due to the usage of the simple present tense, it means that her love the movie but it happened in the present (now or today), and not happened in the past.

Another example forms an EFL learner who wrote “*I arrive at the beach.*” According to the grammatical rule, this sentence should use “arrived” as he was asked to construct a written recount passage. Hence, according to the analyzed result, some EFL learners still did not have enough understanding regarding how to use action verb well, especially in term of the usage of irregular verbs and regular verb.

When the EFL learners wrote action verbs, they failed to organize irregular verbs well, for example:

- a. He *choosed* the red one because it was his favorite color.
- b. I *learned* the experience

It could be seen from the first example above, the EFL learners could not identify whether the verb should use an irregular verb or not due to it was not easy for them to remember many words without opening a dictionary. They assumed that the chosen verb should add “*-ed*” instead of choosing the irregular form. While in the second sentence, the EFL learner failed to figure out the past forms. They do understand the recount passage they construct should follow the rules of past tense (S + verb2 + O). However, they did not have a clear understanding its usage.

### Problem of Vocabulary

Based on the result of the total average score. It was shown that the EFL



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learners have vocabulary problem in constructing written recount passage. It was strengthened with the interview result with the EFL learners where they stated that vocabulary aspect becomes the difficulties for their writing. The EFL learners' difficulties in this aspect were related to the choice of vocabularies, which are not suitable, not familiar to the reader, and sometimes not appropriate with the chosen or given topic. For example, the word class of adjectives, adverbs, nouns, as well as verbs, sometimes are not correct nor appropriate with their function.

### **Problem in Organization**

Organization in written recount passage consist of orientation, events, as well as re-orientation. The researcher discovered that EFL learners could not achieve good organization level in their test of constructing written recount passage. EFL learners have difficulties in composing a paragraph in written recount passage.

In *orientation*, it was discovered by the researcher that EFL learners did not explain the general information they know in orientation paragraph based on the topic well. In other words, they know that a beginning of a recount text should provide an introduction by introducing the subject or participant, the place, as well as the setting that is appeared in the past experience they wanted to retell.

In *events* paragraph, it was discovered by the researcher that just a few EFL learners got difficulties in composing this part, even some EFL learners could achieve the second stage successfully and could retell series of events, which happened in the past. EFL learners' writing should include at least two events. For each event, the EFL learners made a good events paragraph. They made it in chronological order. In addition, they wrote specific information based on the topic as well.

The last functional stage is *re-orientation*. In re-orientation, it was discovered by the researcher that just a few EFL learners could use re-orientation to make their writing texts better and could achieve all function stage completely. Although it is just an optional part which the student could choose to include or not in their writing. Based on the result, some EFL learners wrote the sentences written passage that shown the re-orientation which could be used as a conclusion that might include a personal comment or closure of events.

A good recount text should begin with orientation and then followed by chronological events, as well as the re-orientation. However, based on the EFL learners' writing result, some EFL learners did not write it well.

### **Problem in Mechanics**

The EFL learners' average score in writing showed that the mechanics aspect was not really their problem in constructing written recount passage. Still, some EFL learners had problems in spelling, punctuation, as well as capitalization. Those problems are related to the details of writing. Sometimes, the EFL learners would put aside this aspect while trying to be more focus on the other aspects.

However, it was discovered that even though EFL learners have an extensive amount of vocabulary, the fact that it is still essential to know the true spelling of a word cannot be avoided. It is due to writing is something that we can see. Hence, it is different from speaking. As a result, misspelling may lead the reader in failing to

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understand the writing. Their lack of experience in practicing writing skill might be the reason why they still face difficulties in mechanics aspect.

### **Overall Problem**

According to the total average score of the chosen participantss' writing and interview result from teacher and EFL learners, it could be derived that the EFL learners have problem mostly in vocabulary and grammar. Especially for grammar, the average score is less than the maximum average score. The finding is in contrast with the previous research, where the most occurred problems in writing are grammar and a limited amount of vocabulary.

The EFL learners were unable to implement their knowledge about past tense, even if they have learned that before. This problem is related to vocabulary problem that the EFL learners had. They did not know the second form of the verb that they wanted to use. In addition, the problem in vocabulary also made the EFL learners unable to use variety of words in their writing.

As for the other problems like content, organization, as well as mechanics, it was proven by the other researchers that those problems also exist in EFL learners' writing as that most EFL learners just write everything they want without deciding which words that can be used, which usually lead their writing into one that lacks careful development as well as clear organization. Some EFL learners in this study also faced problems in mechanics as in spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Regarding the problems found in this research, the EFL learners with poor category of writing could increase their score when composing recount text after they had learned recount text more than four meetings. In addition, EFL can reinforce her EFL learners' capability by using more serious explanation.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **Conclusion**

As one of the language skills, writing has become important to be analyzed substantively. EFL learners still face many problems in writing. There are several common problems that are occurred in their writing especially when composing written recount passage. This study has a purpose to discover and describe the difficulties occurred when EFL learners construct a written recount passage. After conducting the documentation, test, as well as interview, then classifying and analyzing the data. From these steps, the researcher concluded that grammar and vocabulary are the main problems for the EFL learners at tenth-grade of The chosen schoolschool year 2017/2018 when they are composing written recount passage.

The reason behind the grammar problem is that most of EFL learners did not use past tense (verb II), due to not knowing or forgetting the past form of the chosen verb. Meanwhile, the problem in vocabulary was caused due to the laziness of EFL learners to open a dictionary. Instead, they used Google translate. The ease of the online translation finally made the EFL learners lazy to remember vocabularies to be used in their writing.

In addition, some of the chosen participantss had difficulties in elaborating and organizing the idea of their writing that made their paragraphs had no unity for content aspect. They also did not take notice of the organization in the constructed written recount passage. As a result, some EFL learners forgot to write conclusion in

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the last paragraph of their constructed written recount passage in the content aspect. The last, several EFL learners also faced problem in capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

### **Suggestion**

The problems that have been found in this study are suggested to get more attention from the teacher. For teacher, teaching constructing written recount passage is not only teaching the generic structure as well as the language use but also teaching about the content and implement a good and linear content with their activity or experience in daily life. The EFL learners also should develop their ability to write English writing, especially in constructing written recount passage. It is compulsory to conduct further study with the same object and different perspective in another writing type, because many EFL learners still face difficulties in constructing good writing in English. Then, the researcher also recommends other researchers to conduct further study to figure out the solution for the EFL learners' problem in constructing written recount passage.

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