

Effective Club Practices





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Missions, Values, and Promises

Toastmasters International Mission

We empower individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders.

District Mission

We build new clubs and support all clubs in achieving excellence.

Club Mission

We provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth.

Toastmasters International Core Values

- ▶ Integrity
- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Service
- ▶ Excellence

Toastmasters International Envisioned Future

To be the first-choice provider of dynamic, high-value, experiential communication and leadership skills development.

Toastmasters International Brand Promise

Empowering individuals through personal and professional development.

This is the promise Toastmasters International makes to club members. Once we have reached this goal consistently, through all clubs across the globe, we will have achieved club excellence.

A Toastmaster's Promise

As a member of Toastmasters International and my club, I promise:

- ▶ To attend club meetings regularly
- ▶ To prepare all of my projects to the best of my ability, basing them on the Toastmasters education program
- ▶ To prepare for and fulfill meeting assignments To provide fellow members with helpful, constructive evaluations
- ▶ To help the club maintain the positive, friendly environment necessary for all members to learn and grow
- ▶ To serve my club as an officer when called upon to do so
- ▶ To treat my fellow club members and our guests with respect and courtesy
- ▶ To bring guests to club meetings so they can see the benefits Toastmasters membership offers
- ▶ To adhere to the guidelines and rules for all Toastmasters education and recognition programs
- ▶ To act within Toastmasters' core values of integrity, respect, service, and excellence during the conduct of all Toastmasters activities

Welcome



Elected officers of Toastmasters clubs have the opportunity to aid in the club’s success and improve the club experience. Club leaders play an important role in the club mission: We provide a supportive and positive learning experience in which members are empowered to develop communication and leadership skills, resulting in greater self-confidence and personal growth. While all members of the club are focused on achieving this goal, club leaders can enhance it further to create and support a high performing club with a culture that builds member engagement and has its sights set on continuous improvement.

The tools and resources in this handbook can guide club officers in creating strategies for improvement in the following areas:

- ▶ Strong meeting attendance.
- ▶ Member progress in the Toastmasters education program.
- ▶ Better informed members.
- ▶ Entertaining meetings that inspire members to invite guests.

A **high performing club** requires engaged members, and the following suggestions, when implemented, aim to increase member engagement.

Club Strategies

Section 1: Dedicated Members Build Strong Clubs

Strong clubs begin with dedicated members. Dedication should not be confused with speaking skills—it is a matter of commitment to the club’s expectations. The expectations for each member are set out in the **Toastmaster’s Promise**. However, each point of the promise may carry different meanings depending on the individual and their experiences. Club members should discuss the Promise and clearly outline their interpretations. A few questions to discuss are:

- ▶ What is meant by regular attendance?
- ▶ What are some examples of reasonable absence?
- ▶ How often will each member be expected to speak and what kind of support can they expect?
- ▶ What are the expectations of communication and time investment between meetings?

While many clubs “sell” Toastmasters based on what the prospective member can expect of the club and its members, it is important to also convey what is expected of each member before accepting an application and payment. It is a two-way street, and Toastmasters is like a team sport where the actions (or inactions) of one member have an impact on the entire group.

After learning exactly what the expectations of membership are, a prospective member may decide that his or her circumstances do not allow the commitment at this time. As counter intuitive as it may sound, this is a positive outcome because the guest has been given enough information to make an informed decision. Whether a guest transitions to member or not, the intent is to always make the guest feel welcome. In a well-run meeting, members clearly convey that meetings are enriched both by committed members as well as honored guests. Prospective members are encouraged to visit the club as often as they wish, knowing that membership is always an option when personal circumstances support that option.

Once the prospective member clearly understands the expectations, and a decision is made to move forward, the new member orientation begins. The following section explains how to conduct an effective orientation.

Section 2: New Member Orientation

Welcome your new members to Toastmasters. They have joined the world's largest organization dedicated to improving communication and leadership skills. Explain how each club has its own set of officers and that members may be assigned a role to help facilitate a club meeting.

Another key point to explain is the Pathways learning experience, which will guide members on a journey toward greater self-confidence and personal growth. Every level completed will add to their self-improvement.

This guide has a combination of basic information to share with new members and links to available resources.

Joining a Club

Once a prospective member has decided to join a club, have them complete a **membership application**.

At the club meeting, the prospective member returns their application to the Vice President Membership (VPM). Then, the club votes to approve the membership. Next, the Club Treasurer will review payment options. Once the membership has been approved by the club, the application and dues payment should be submitted online to Toastmasters International.

Many high-performing clubs have a formal new member induction or **new member orientation**. Share your club's website and explain how the club stays in touch with members, sends meeting notices or reminders, assigns meeting roles, and helps members in achieving their communication and leadership goals.

Once the member's dues are paid, they will receive a Welcome email from Toastmasters International. Work with the member to set up their profile, choose their path, and assess their goals.

The **New Member Orientation PowerPoint** can assist in facilitating a new member orientation.

Using the Toastmasters International Website

These instructions can be used to walk a new member through the login process.

1. Log into Toastmasters International

Go to toastmasters.org and select "Login". For your first visit select "First time logging in? Create a password" and enter the email address you provided to your Toastmasters club. A verification code will then be sent with next steps.

2. From the Home Screen

After you login, you will be directed to My Home. It includes your start date, member ID number, and a place to upload your picture, if desired. Just below are three large boxes, "Go to Base Camp", "Learning Hub", and "Achievement Board".

The Learning Hub is a good place to start as a new Toastmaster. Once the Hub opens the first box "Choose Your Path" will display. You will select your first path and future paths.

3. Choose a Path

Click on "Digital Resources" to view all path options or take an assessment. If this is your first time selecting a path, it is recommended you choose "Take an Online Assessment". After you complete the brief assessment, you will be provided a list of three recommended paths. You do not have to select one of the recommendations. You may select the path you want. Note, all paths have levels of achievement. Level 1 is similar in all paths.

Let's Get Started

Return to the Toastmasters home screen and select “Go to Base Camp”. This option takes you to an additional prompt to select your club. From there, you will be taken to Base Camp where your selected paths will be accessible. This is available from “Paths and Learning” at the top of the main page. You may return to this part of the website as often as you choose.

Using the Navigator

In the Learning Hub, under the box “View the Navigator”, there are many resources outlining valuable information for the Toastmasters journey, including more about Toastmasters International and club meetings. Encourage new members to spend some time over the next few weeks or months reviewing this information.

How to Get Your New Member Started

Show your new member the basics for a powerful and rewarding Toastmasters journey.

- 1. Match the new member with a mentor.** A mentor is a friendly, experienced fellow member who helps the member with their first few speeches and answers any questions they may have as they begin working in the Toastmaster education program—Pathways.
- 2. The Vice President Education, mentor, or other seasoned member conducts an orientation for the new member.** During the orientation, the new member will learn how the club operates, the learning opportunities available, and their responsibilities as a member. The leader of the orientation should discuss the new member’s goals and explain how the club can help them achieve those goals.
- 3. Encourage the member to schedule their first speech.** The Ice Breaker is the first project in every path. Prior to their first speech, they should try minor roles that require speaking in front of fellow members or volunteer as a Table Topics® speaker. The sooner they begin speaking in the club, the faster they will learn.
- 4. Explain the club meeting structure.** A Toastmasters club meeting consists of three educational sections, along with a club business segment conducted by the Club President or next ranking club officer.

The educational portion of the meeting conducted by the meeting Toastmaster includes:

Prepared speeches: During this portion of the meeting several members present speeches based on projects in the Pathways learning experience. The club may schedule one to four speakers; however, this may change to accommodate member needs for longer speeches, extra evaluation time, or speech contests.

Evaluations: Each prepared speech and leadership role is verbally evaluated by a fellow member in a helpful, constructive manner using given evaluation criteria. In addition, the evaluator prepares a written evaluation. Typically, all members are also invited to submit comments, either on paper, online through Base Camp, or through a chat with the speaker after the meeting. This additional feedback is meant to help the speaker improve. The Toastmasters website has several videos and documents that provide suggestions on effective evaluations.

Table Topics: In this segment, members who do not have a major role in the meeting may be called upon to answer an impromptu question.

Club business: During the regular club meeting, the President or other officer may conduct brief business during the club meeting. This is wonderful time to demonstrate parliamentary procedure. Some club officers will present brief officer reports and updates.

For additional information on meeting roles, visit the [**Toastmasters International website**](#).

Always tell the new member if your club personalizes the meeting roles differently. The order and length of each section may vary, depending on club dynamics and meeting length. Some clubs meet for one hour or less, while some clubs meet for 90 minutes or more. Each club is a little different.

5. Define effective evaluations. Every speech given in the club is evaluated by another member. In turn, new members will eventually be asked to evaluate other members' speeches. Evaluations provide the feedback that all members need to improve their skills. It is important to learn the basics of a good evaluation. Every Pathways path includes a Level 1 project called "Evaluation and Feedback" which provides helpful exercises on giving, receiving, and incorporating feedback into speeches and evaluations. Please remember an evaluation is that member's opinion of a speaker's presentation. Using comments beginning with "I heard ...", "I feel ...", "I saw ...", "I understand ...", and/or "I don't understand ..." allow for personalized evaluations. Additionally, there are training modules available to sharpen evaluation skills.

6. Assist in the new member's first speech preparation. The new member should review the Ice Breaker project in their path, including the evaluation guide and, optionally, work with their mentor to develop a 4-6 minute speech. Encourage them to prepare thoroughly and practice repeatedly. Preparation and practice for every presentation will help overcome nervousness while improving speaking skills.

Toastmaster Success Tip: Remind new members that Toastmasters works best when you prepare carefully, actively participate, and speak as often as possible. If they apply themselves, they will experience the benefits they want in all aspects.

Section 3: Excellence in Club Meetings

While every club is unique, clubs follow a similar meeting format. Club business may be conducted during either the opening or closing of the meeting.

There are nine basic functionaries that are assigned for each meeting (except Table Topics speakers, which are not assigned ahead of time). These roles rotate every meeting so that every member gets an opportunity to serve in each role. The roles are the 1) speaker(s), 2) for each speaker there is an assigned evaluator, 3) Toastmaster, 4) Table Topicsmaster, 5) Table Topics speaker(s) 6) General Evaluator, 7) timer, 8) Ah-Counter and 9) grammarian.

For more information, please read A [**Toastmaster Wears Many Hats**](#).

Club culture can dictate how some of these roles are fulfilled but there are preferred methodologies that create a consistent club excellence. Members learn how to perform the various roles by witnessing how the roles are performed with consistent and regular attendance.

Clubs have the option to vote for Best Table Topics Speaker, Best Speaker, and Best Evaluator. Certificates, ribbons, or traveling trophies are effective recognition tools for the members. Traveling trophies may encourage the winning member to return to the next club meeting. Clubs may add additional roles for variety to the meeting (when there are enough members to staff additional roles without doubling or tripling up), such as: Listener, Joke Master, and Snack Master.

Meeting Preparation and Scheduling

There are two important components to a high performing club: well-run meetings and committed members. Well-run meetings may have various titles to encourage higher member participation and/or higher guest attendance. These meeting titles can be referred to as showcase, open house, club chartering anniversary, end of year celebration, kick off for new Toastmasters year, and many other titles that the club officers choose.

Let's look at the characteristics of preparing and scheduling consistently well-run meeting.

The Vice President Education (VPE) or Toastmaster of the Day will send out the meeting schedule before the meeting. Every club is different with how this is shared ahead of time. Some clubs share the meeting schedule 24 hours before the meeting, while others aim for a month or more before the meeting. Another attribute of a high performing club is to draft and maintain two to four meeting agendas in advance. Members will have ample time to prepare for their roles, especially upcoming speech opportunities and/or meeting themes chosen by the meeting Toastmaster. Committed members will review and prepare for their meeting assignment.

The club decides on the best approach to assign meeting roles. There are two approaches—volunteer signup and VPE-assigned roles. Clubs using the volunteer signup approach should keep in mind that enthusiastic members may sign up for repeat roles while more reserved members wait for a role to be assigned to them. The club officers should pay careful attention to ensure all members get equal opportunities.

When the roles are scheduled and communicated to the club membership, the Toastmaster of the upcoming meeting will begin to work on the agenda, contact participants to confirm they will be able to perform their upcoming role, and coordinate replacements for any roles not assigned.

Speakers and evaluators are encouraged to connect with each other before the meeting. The evaluator can then ask the speaker if there is anything specific they want the evaluator to focus on in addition to the project evaluation. The speaker ensures that their evaluator has access to their Pathways evaluation form to provide written feedback.

Members are expected to fill and prepare for their upcoming roles. From time to time a member will have an unexpected need to miss a meeting for which they have already been assigned a role. Ideally, members should attempt to locate a replacement for their assigned role, preferably choosing from other members of the club who do not have an assignment for the upcoming meeting. Once a replacement is found, the change should be reported to the Toastmaster and VPE so the agenda can be updated.

A draft agenda should be sent to the membership prior to the meeting, again asking for everyone to confirm they will be performing their roles. The same can be accomplished by listing the schedule of roles in one of a number of tools available for this purpose (an online platform, a spreadsheet, or some other agenda management tool) and sending the draft agenda to the members via email.

Best Practice: Send a final agenda to the membership at least 24 hours prior to the meeting, along with attendance details (Zoom or Teams, for example) if online attendance is an option.

Best Practice: The Toastmaster arrives early to the meeting. With an early arrival, they can verify as members arrive that they are prepared for their roles. Sometimes last-minute changes will be necessary. The Toastmaster can seek a volunteer from members who do not have a role before the meeting begins.

Having roles filled ahead of time, even if changes are announced, creates a culture that members appreciate and impresses guests.

Let's Get the Meeting Started

The meeting begins with the bang of the gavel and announcement the meeting is beginning. The Sergeant at Arms introduces the Club President. The Sergeant at Arms leads the applause and exchanges control of the meeting, usually with a handshake.

The following options are dependent on the individual club culture and must be approved by the membership. The Pledge of Allegiance or other national tradition is optional but is not required. An opening message can be motivational, inspirational, or religious but is not required at all clubs. Some clubs may read the club mission. Some corporate clubs may read the corporate mission.

Meeting Agenda: As mentioned above there are several basic parts: prepared speeches, evaluations, and Table Topics. The order of these three can vary based on club culture as to where Table Topics are performed. Some clubs will have Table Topics prior to the speeches, some will place Table Topics between speeches and evaluations, and still other clubs may place Table Topics after the evaluations.

Best Practice: Consider scheduling Table Topics between the prepared speeches and the evaluations section. This provides a few advantages:

1. It gives the evaluators more time to prepare quality evaluations.
2. It allows the Toastmaster to use better time management. If the speeches take more than the expected time fewer Table Topics questions can be asked to set the meeting back on time. Conversely if the speaking portion was quicker than expected then the Table Topics session can easily be extended.

The Essence of a Quality Meeting: The Sergeant at Arms calls the meeting to order, welcomes guests, reminds all persons to silence their electronic devices, and introduces the President. Some clubs have all members and guests introduce themselves. Some clubs have a question of the day for members to share a single sentence/word in their introduction. Some clubs do not have member introductions, only guest introductions. The President conducts the business portion of the meeting at the appropriate time (beginning or ending of meeting). Next, the President

introduces the Toastmaster of the Day. Then, the meeting Toastmaster announces any changes to the agenda. Next, the Toastmaster introduces the meeting functionaries, so they can briefly explain their roles. Project speeches are delivered, Table Topics and evaluations are completed, and guests are asked their impressions of the meeting and are encouraged to return to the next meeting. The Toastmaster of the Day returns control to the Club President for club business (if conducted at the end of the meeting) and closing announcements. With a single bang of the gavel, the meeting is officially adjourned.

Club Business

Most clubs will conduct club business within the a regular meeting. The format, amount of time allotted, and position within the agenda can vary from club to club.

Conducting club business is important for a variety of reasons:

1. Inform members of upcoming events and issues within the club, area, District, and Toastmasters International.
2. Discuss club matters, including but not limited to, finances, approving new members, election of officers, discussion of elections or votes to be held at District or International business meetings, providing guidance to the officers holding votes at those levels, or the possible removal of a member.
3. Welcome new members.
4. Welcome guests.
5. Recognize member achievements.
6. Develop leaders to effectively run meetings and learn parliamentary procedure.

Some clubs will conduct club business at Toastmasters meetings, while others will schedule separate meeting to conduct business as necessary.

One alternative practice for those clubs who don't feel it necessary to conduct business at every meeting is replacing it with the "Officer's Welcome." Typically, the ranking officer would lead this and limit to few items: announcements of upcoming events including reminder of dues collections, welcoming new members and guests, recognizing member achievement, and introduction of the Toastmaster. A more thorough meeting is held for club business when a vote is required by the membership.

Best Practice: Make sure there is a record of minutes for every meeting. The minutes should be available to all members of the club. Maintaining club meeting minutes provides benefits such as a reminder for the VPM to contact guests, for the Vice President Public Relations (VPPR) to publish an update on social media, for a club officer to add new members to the club website, and the VPE to schedule meeting participation and to assign a mentor. Ideally, a club will email the minutes or the VPPR will post the minutes to the member section of the club website for those members who missed a club meeting. This is a decision by the club officers. A club may use the **Club Meeting Minutes Template** provided by Toastmasters International.

The Business Meeting

Board Meeting/Executive Officers Meeting

The meeting for club officers can be referred to as either the Executive Meeting or Club Board meeting. Each club sets the meeting schedule for these meetings. During these meetings, club officers conduct club business, plan club events, and review membership, club finances, the Club Success Plan, and the status of the Distinguished Club Program. This meeting provides an opportunity for club officers to practice parliamentary procedure and leadership skills.

Online and Hybrid Meetings

Clubs have the option of meeting onsite, online, or in a hybrid format.

When a club is deciding which of these meeting formats to use, the first question to ask is “What do the members want?” If the members want to meet in an online, hybrid, or onsite format, then that is the best way for that club to meet.

Clubs that meet online or in a hybrid format must take necessary precautions to safeguard their login credentials (whether they are using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting, or any other platform) to avoid potential meeting disruptions from outside sources. Some clubs provide login access via a registration link, while others share the login through a secure location (such as the club website) that only members can access. Anyone that shares the link with an invited guest should inform the online host that the link was shared. Links should not be shared on social media or posted to any other online public spaces.

Toastmasters provides **suggested guidelines** for running a successful online meeting or hybrid meeting to keep all members engaged through remote technology.

Working with Guests and Future Members

What do you do when guests visit your club?

First, ensure that the guest is welcomed and comfortable. Greet the guests, include them in conversation, introduce them to club officers, ask them how they found your club, and ask what they are interested in learning.

During the meeting, at a minimum, the guest is welcomed by the President, greeter, or Toastmaster, offered an opportunity to speak during Table Topics, and allowed a chance to provide comments in the final section of the meeting.

Ask the guest to provide their contact information. This can be entered into a guest book or collected by the Secretary or the greeter. After the meeting, the VPM or other officer should contact the guest, remind them of the next club meeting, and offer them an opportunity to join the club. If your group goes to breakfast or dinner after the meeting, extend the guest an invitation to join the fun.

It is a good idea to provide guests with some information about Toastmasters and your club, in paper or electronic format, either at the beginning or the conclusion of their visit. The following is a list of some suggested information to include in a **guest packet**:

- Information specific to your club. Do you have a current club promotional flier? Are you a corporate club with dues paid for by the company? Do you change your schedule during the summer months? These are useful items to share with a possible member that may assist in their decision process.
 - ▶ A welcome letter from an officer, usually either the President or the VPM.
 - ▶ Other Toastmasters promotional brochures your club may choose to use:
 - **Find Your Voice**
 - **The Benefits of Toastmasters Membership**
 - **Your Path to Leadership**
 - ▶ A **membership application** with the top section (club name, number, city, and state) pre-filled, will make it easy for a new member to complete the application.

Remember to follow up with your potential member.

Theme Meetings

Adding a theme to a meeting can add excitement while also supporting members' desire for fellowship, variety, and communication.

For a themed meeting to be successful and fun, the Toastmaster coordinates with the Topicsmaster, grammarian, and various other meeting participants. Themed meetings motivate members to think of ways to perform their meeting roles using the theme. Popular among many clubs is "the backward meeting" or the "draw for assignments" (grab bag) meeting.

Other examples include:

- ▶ Silly hats: Members attend the meeting wearing hats, scarves, beanies, and various head gear.
- ▶ Pick a decade: members research to learn what occurred during those years and attend the meeting dressed as such or the manner of speech.
- ▶ Carnival: Very lively meetings with masks and costumes.
- ▶ All in song: Singing meeting, singing speeches, history of songs, Table Topics on singing or lyrics, etc.
- ▶ Movie themed.
- ▶ Holidays.

If your club is short on time but wants to add a theme, you can incorporate it into your meeting in ways that do not necessarily add extra time to your meeting (i.e., Word of the Day or Table Topics). Sometimes simple decorations are enough to make a meeting memorable. The prepared speeches need not follow the theme.

Section 4: Member Retention

Elected officers of Toastmasters

Member retention starts with understanding why a person joined Toastmasters in the first place. There are many reasons why members join a club. Some of the most common include:

- ▶ A person has some level of fear of public speaking and hopes to overcome their fear.
- ▶ A person feels good about public speaking but wants to improve.
- ▶ A person is looking for social interaction.
- ▶ Their boss/coach/someone they admire told them to join Toastmasters.

It is also important to understand how a prospective member finds your club. Toastmaster members come from all walks of life and from all around the world. However, there seems to be one common denominator: the prospect of self-improvement. The greatest selling point in becoming or continuing as a Toastmaster is the idea of surrounding oneself with like-minded people who are dedicated to self-improvement.

As a club officer, you can make a difference in a member's development. What happens when a member becomes discouraged? Often, having an understanding of why a member joined can assist in building a positive and supportive environment within a Toastmasters club. This is vital for all members. Members appreciate caring feedback and encouragement from their fellow members, mentors, and club officers. They normally see improvement in others but do not see improvement in themselves. Genuinely building people up with recognition, positive supportive statements, and words of encouragement will increase member retention and member satisfaction.

What can you do to retain members in your club?

- ▶ Understand their "why." What brought them to the club initially? Secondly, why are they considering renewing or not? Be mindful if you see that their needs are not being fulfilled.
- ▶ If a member is missing meetings, reach out. Stay in touch with your members.
- ▶ Make meetings fun.
- ▶ Reward achievements often as part of the meeting.
- ▶ Meet their needs. Every member's reason for staying in Toastmasters is different, and the reasons may change over time. Make sure your club is meeting members' individual and evolving needs. Consider conducting a member survey.
- ▶ Foster friendship and connection. Camaraderie with fellow club members is key for many Toastmasters. Social events outside the regular club meetings can build friendships and increase member satisfaction.
- ▶ Keep it creative. Avoid becoming stagnant in your club routines.
- ▶ Share the benefits of membership often.

Why do people leave Toastmasters? Some common reason include:

- ▶ They feel like they have achieved all that they can through Toastmasters or have met their personal goals.
- ▶ Something in their personal life changed.
- ▶ Their company changed the level of support for a Toastmasters club.
- ▶ They do not feel that the club culture is the right fit for them.
- ▶ Their available time or finances changed.
- ▶ A person does not believe that he or she is improving.

If a member must leave, be sure to make it a positive departure. Always keep the door open for the member to return at their convenience. Reunion meetings where past members are invited to come back to visit helps build goodwill for the club.

Publicity and Marketing

In addition to retaining members, high-performing clubs should have a plan to attract potential new members. If members are happy to stay involved with the club, they may also be interested in expanding the club.

Clubs should ensure their information on Find a Club, social media, and their website is up to date and accurate. Posting meeting recaps and photos after club meetings helps generate interest and shows a lively and dynamic group. This will encourage more people to consider visiting your club.

Let the World Know is filled with tips for strong public relations, setting publicity goals, and reaching your target audience.

Specialty Clubs

Some clubs are sponsored by corporations, universities, or other organizations. For sponsored clubs, it is a good idea to maintain a good relationship with the sponsoring organization. Sponsoring organizations can provide meeting space, time off for meetings, professional development credit, and coverage of membership dues. Consider inviting a member of the organization's leadership to meetings periodically so they can view the club's success and continue their support.

If you are a club officer of a corporate club, please do not be shy when reaching out to District leaders. Encourage officers to attend training and members to participate in local conferences and contests. Toastmasters may only be something corporate or community members do with their free time during the work or school day, but it doesn't have to be.

Other examples of specialty clubs include storytelling, hobbies, or debate.



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