Chapter 21. Producing Community Audio Tours

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Like community-based researchers Eli Goldblatt (2007) and Ellen Cushman (1996), I uphold a pedagogy that includes "access, critique, reflection, and connection" with one's community, to foster critical thinking through community engagement (Goldblatt, 2007, p. 151). As Goldblatt identified, students (and their professors) may not be natives of the communities in which their colleges reside and can, therefore, as Cushman (1996) warned, "risk reproducing the hegemonic barriers separating the university from the community" (p. 24). However, when students record and produce audio narrations about important sites in their area, they gain awareness of how a community and its location serve as a powerful literacy sponsor. In turn, a sense of connection with and ownership to their locale may result or be strengthened. This community-based, collaborative (e.g., entire class) project, An Audible Tour of [your community's or region's name], relies on students' willingness to immerse themselves—and their future listeners—in their community.

This project is inspired by Erin R. Anderson's (2017) article on "Oral History, Digital Storytelling and Project-Based Pedagogy" (the article's subtitle), which outlined three scaffolded projects, one that had students soundwrite about sites in their community using the mobile app VoiceMap (http://voicemap.me). Essentially, Anderson's students, all military veterans at the University of Massachusetts Boston, created "a mobile audio storytelling walk of war memorials" (2017, p. 85). This assignment inspired me because of what it asked students to write sound *about*: distinct sites in their community that are shared with a genuine audience. Similar to Anderson's assignment is one introduced by Olin Bjork and John Pedro Schwartz (2009) that they dubbed an activity in "sound-seeing," in which "students created unofficial audio guides for [a museum] as a free podcast" (p. 233). According to the authors, "The activity is called sound-seeing because the listener . . . 'sees' the event or place as it is described in 'sound' by the podcaster. The term privileges the podcaster's experience over that of the podcaster, whose activity may be dubbed as 'sight-sounding'" (2009, p. 232). Unlike Anderson (2017), Bjork and Schwartz (2009) were less interested in audio composing than they were in the affordances of mobile composing. In fact, their work challenged the audio tour's effectiveness for the listener, but praised it for what it teaches the student about writing.

In this chapter, I share a full explanation of a "sound-seeing" or "mobile audio tour" project: a series of 17 exercises that build on one other from the start to

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the completion of the project, and on the companion website, sample projects to guide both teachers and students to capture the sounds and sites of the communities in which they and their universities reside. I envision this project fitting into a course on new media, writing for the web, multimodality, technical writing, or community literacy.

Project Description

Below is the formal assignment prompt for the Audible Tour of [our community's or region's name], which was designed to be shared directly with students. The text introduces the project, establishes project goals and expectations, and provides information on essential technologies and best practices for producing audio.

Project Overview

The goal of this project is to collaborate in soundwriting and audio production to create a narrated tour of our community using the mobile app VoiceMap. This project requires complete participation to plan, scout locations, research, script (or story-tell), record audio, edit audio, transcribe audio, and finally, upload and organize our audio into a logical, cohesive audio tour to VoiceMap.

Our soundwriting project is a series of short, episodic, narrated audio files that coalesce into a step-by-step tour. This audio tour will be unlike a podcast—which can be a linear, multitrack audio file (think highly produced) and typically has a single theme or topic—or an ambient soundscape, which captures the sounds of a given environment in a single audio file. Your audio file will share directions to and information about a specific site in our community. Each clip should be mindful of the genre of mobile, audio composing—namely, clips will consider length (think short) and possess an informative tone.

Goals and Outcomes

Your audio should strive to capture the richness of sound. This means: 1) practicing and refining your speaking voice (think diction and volume); 2) efficient use of ambient noise; 3) careful editing to ensure clarity and efficiency—that is, it must account for listeners' needs and the genre and mode in which they are listening (e.g., mobile app, phone); and 4) produced in a manner that indicates your awareness of high quality, short-form audio.

It bears repeating: *Audience awareness is key*, as you are composing for actual listeners who are reliant upon you for accurate directions and factual information.

Your text must take on a balanced tone of being informative, interpretive, and engaging.

You'll need a title—as this is required for the VoiceMap platform. Ideally, your title is also the name of your location. It can include a relevant and/or quirky adjective if you desire.

You must include a transcript of your audio. According to VoiceMap's suggestions, your script should be a maximum of 450 words: "We've found

from experience that listeners start to drift off and lose attention past this point." Additionally, your script must include directions from your location to the next. Since the listener is only using your voice to get from one location to the next, you must work closely with the classmates whose locations proceed and follow your own to ensure that you include accurate directions in your script and that our potential listeners experience a complete and cohesive tour. Lastly, your script should be written in the present tense and in the second-person point of view.

If you are using "found" sound materials (from the public domain; with a Creative Commons license), you must attribute appropriate authorship.

Your audio text must include a short summary description of the text's meaning, form, and materials (this is where you attribute authorship, if needed).

Equipment

- A set of headphones, preferably a pair that covers your ears or has a microphone (such as the ones that came with older versions of iPhones).
- Your phone for audio recording. Be sure to prep your phone through the following steps:
  a. Turn your phone to "do not disturb" or "airplane" mode to eliminate notifications, texts, or calls.
  b. Find a quiet room or space with minimal ambient noises. This may require some scouting and/or scheduling. Test rooms out prior to hitting record. Conversely, hit record while sitting in the space to test for noises your ear can't pick up.
  c. Plug in a pair of headphones (preferably ones that include a microphone) to your phone. Hearing what your listeners hear, and hearing yourself is helpful. What's more, using a microphone helps reduce ambient noises.
  d. Practice. Listen back. The likelihood of one perfect take is slim.

This assignment was adapted from "The Audio Assignment," authored by The Digital Media and Composition Institute (DMAC), Department of English, The Ohio State University (2018), which is licensed with a Creative Commons BY-NC-SA license and adapted here with permission. Additionally, this assignment was adapted with permission from Erin R. Anderson's assignment Collaborative Medal of Honor Storytelling Project as shared in her article "Voicing the Veterans Experience" (2017, p. 109).

Audible Tour Contribution Assessment Rubric

I've created a basic rubric to guide students to meet the project's requirements. Essentially, this rubric is the language from the "goals and outcomes" portion of the formal assignment sheet. I believe that multiple forms of representation of the same information can help students with differing learning preferences to successfully meet project requirements.

Table 21.1. Project requirements

Required Component	Complete	Incomplete	Suggestions
Audio is an MP3 file.			
Audio is of high quality. No ambient noise.			
Narration is informative, descriptive, and engaging.			
Speaker's voice is clear and well paced and uses an effective volume.			
Speaker uses the present tense.			
The text is of an appropriate length.			
The text includes a title (preferably the site's name or location).			
The text contains a 450-word written transcript of the audio file.			
The project contains a short summary description, written in third person, which includes the text's meaning, form (e.g., audio), and materials (attributes authorship if author used found sounds).			
At a minimum, the text shares the name of the location, describes its features, and provides relevant information about the site, and one "fun fact."			
Acknowledgement of the sequence of the route is addressed at the beginning and at the end, including explicit directions from one's location to the proceeding spot.			

Laying the Foundation for the Audible Tour of [Your Community] Project

Step 1: Gaining Momentum (option 1)

This is an invention exercise that relies on discussion and could proceed or follow the introduction of the assignment.

As a class, or in small groups, identify as many places in your community that

1. make the community unique,
2. may be historically significant, or
3. should be protected.

Consider a variety of places—properties unique to a community and worthy of preservation. Create a working list of places that can be accessed and edited by students asynchronously, such as a course website or course/learning management system.

Gaining Momentum (option 2)

Because it is possible that this step could stump students who lack familiarity with their college town, an alternative option is to have students conduct online research to gather information. Working either individually or in small groups, have students select and study a specific site. Students should be prepared to share their findings with the class.

If online research is a desired component of this step, a suggested resource is The National Park System's National Register of Historic Places Database (https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm). Students can choose to search for historic places by state by choosing the link to an interactive map.

Of course, students may also try their hand at pertinent Google searches for things like "top state landmarks" or "The most Instagrammed places by state" (DiBlasio, 2016).

Step 2: Site Selection

Each student should select a place from the full list of places identified by the class. Prior to selection, the proximity of sites to one another should be considered. It may be a good idea to plot all the locations on a community map (which will be necessary for Step 4). VoiceMap asks for the user to designate the tour's mode of transportation (bike, car, public transport, walking). Based on the distance from one site to another, the class may decide to eliminate sites beyond a certain radius or make a driving tour.

Step 3: Analysis of VoiceMap Audio Tours

Before creating their own audio tour, students should experience an audio tour published on the VoiceMap app. This activity requires students to access their Android or iOS smartphone. The activity could be conducted in small groups or individually.

To begin, students will need to use their phones to download the VoiceMap app on Apple's App Store or Google Play. Once the app is downloaded, students will be asked to create a new account. This process is slightly time consuming, but eventually all of the students should have the app downloaded to their phone in order to complete (submit) their contribution to the class's audio tour.

Upon entry into the app, students are prompted to explore locations to find free audio tours. Yes, that's right. At the time of publication, there were 30 free

tours (only one of which was in the United States). Listening through the app is very user-friendly, as is navigating through the tour through the app's features.

As they listen, a series of prompts could be projected on a screen in the front of the classroom or written on a whiteboard. The prompts should ask students to critique the audio tour's rhetorical features (purpose, context, audience, content, clarity, organization, and its use of ethos, pathos, and logos). Students should take notes and be prepared to share them with their analyses with class.

Step 4: Location Plotting and Route Planning on VoiceMap

Once locations have been chosen and a route has been planned, the next step is to create and plot the class's tour on the VoiceMap platform. VoiceMap (2016) has created the step-by-step video tutorial "Getting Started with your First Route" to explain the entire process.

As the video explains: "Location markers need to be placed exactly on the route line and wherever directions must be provided. Each location marker has its own URL"; therefore, the names of your location markers should be something that is searchable and relevant to the tour (such as the name of your location) (VoiceMap, 2016).

Once a location has been plotted and named, choose "save location" so students can edit their work. By clicking "Save and Submit" you can't make any changes until an assigned VoiceMap editor approves the submission.

Step 5: Exploring Sites

Now that sites have been selected, students are ready to complete the Observation Worksheet below for their location and (if possible) visit the location to become familiar with it. If visiting the place is a requirement, ensure that students get a picture of themselves at the location. Online research will help students complete the worksheet.

This worksheet was modified from the National Parks Service's Teaching with Historic Places materials. Essentially, this is a low-stakes, preliminary opportunity to gather research on students' chosen site. Completing it will help them with planning their audio composition. See a sample completed worksheet on the companion website.

Observation Worksheet

1. What is the name and location of the site?
2. When was it built or created?
3. What, if anything, do you already know about this place?
4. Have you visited this site previously? If so, how often and/or when (approximate date)?
5. What does this place mean to you?

6. Considering the visually observable features of your site, how would you describe it in general terms? Such as size, shape, appearance, setting, condition, and other characteristics?
7. What kind of clues can you find about its age or evolution over time? Where can or did you find this information (observation of site, online research)? List sources.
8. How is it being used today? Do you think the current use is different from the original use? How can you tell?
9. What hypotheses can you make about what people, events, or ways of life this place might have been associated with historically, based on what you can see?
10. What kinds of information would you need to confirm or deny your hypotheses?
11. If the place is vacant, can you think of any way it might be adapted for a new use?
12. If it has been restored, who restored it and why?
13. If it is open to the public as a historic site, what do visitors learn about why it is important? What should they know?
14. If your site is a preserved site, how has the place benefited the community? How has preservation contributed to economic growth in the community (i.e., by providing jobs, enabling businesses to stay downtown, creating homes for new companies, encouraging tourism, contributing to community pride, etc.)?
15. How do you think the community would be affected if it were destroyed or substantially altered? What might replace it? How might the character and appearance of the community or neighborhood change? How might the destruction of these places affect the appearance of the community? What stories about the history of the community and its residents would be lost?

Step 6: Full Immersion and Audio Practice, Take 1

Pulling from their responses in Step 5, students should now synthesize what they've learned into a brief audio response for you to review (covering the who, what, when, where, why, and how of their site), accompanied by a written description of what will be heard in the audio, along with a script and links to any sources consulted. This will give them practice recording and practice accompanying audio with textual writing. Hear a sample audio response on the companion website.

Step 7: Soundwriting on Location: Audio Practice, Take 2

Students are ready to compose a transcript for their site-specific audible tour contribution and record a draft. Their contribution should follow the guidelines es-

tablished on the assignment sheet and rubric. Most importantly, this audio must include directions from their location to the next plot on the class's established route. Hear a sample of this step on the companion website.

Step 8: Peer Review

The following style of peer review (or "studio review") was introduced to me by Dr. Kristine L. Blair and by the facilitators at the Digital Media and Composition Institute at The Ohio State University. It is best conducted in a computer lab so that students can make their audio files readily available. Conversely, if a computer lab is not available, advise students to bring their emerging audio text on a listening device. All students should bring their own headphones.

Prior to engaging in peer review, students will need some direction on how to provide relevant feedback. The following direction set should be given to each student to help them successfully navigate this preparation-heavy activity.

Peer Review Directions

1. Prepare your space.
    a. Power on your listening device and set it up in a way that is easy for a partner to access.
    b. Open a Word document or sticky note on your computer or leave a handwritten note for your classmate, including any necessary directions for listening and/or a specific aspect of your draft you'd like to receive feedback on. Additionally, if your draft needs an explanation (such as how to interact with it or an excuse for its current state), be sure to leave that note in a place all viewers will see.
    c. Leave a means for classmates to leave you feedback (open document, sticky notes, paper).
    d. Also leave a copy of the assignment rubric handy for reference.
2. When you are finished setting up, come up to the front of the class or to an open workspace.
3. Read your classmate's note and then listen to their audio. Leave some feedback on this draft.
    a. Refer to the assignment rubric; does this draft include all the required elements?
    b. Try to craft your feedback through the method of "describe, evaluate, and suggest."[1]
4. After you've completed your review, move to another space and repeat the same steps.

1. "Describe–Evaluate–Suggest" is a model for peer feedback suggested by Eli Review (2014) that encourages students to first describe what their peer is doing, evaluate it according to criteria, and then make a suggestion for revision.

5. Continue moving from space to space, providing feedback, until time has been called or until you have reviewed at least five classmates' work.
6. Once time has been called, return to your original workspace. Read the feedback left by your classmates. Save this information, as you will need to respond to the feedback in a revision plan (see next step).

Step 9: Revision Plan

As a student of Dr. Kristine L. Blair, I completed a "revision plan" after every first draft. Revision plans helped me, and more importantly, they help students; they take peer review more seriously because they must rely on their classmates' feedback to complete this assignment. The revision plan also affords students the opportunity to work through the feedback we provide.

A revision plan is like a grocery list. Students create an outline of the steps they need to take to revise their work.

Revision Plan Directions

Upon receipt of peer and instructor comments on your first draft, write a revision plan before you begin working on your second/final draft. Revision plans take the following form:

In either a bulleted list or paragraph form, explain and synthesize the recommendations you received for revising/finalizing your work. Explain which suggestions you will implement and how you will go about making the suggested revisions. You can indicate the feedback you will not use or did not find helpful, or you can ignore it all together.

Be sure to include any questions or concerns you may have with the revision process.

Step 10: Soundwriting on Location: Finalized Audio Attempt 1

Based on their findings and revision plan from the report brief, students should now be ready to revise the transcript and audio for their site-specific audible tour contribution.

Step 11: Transcript Submission to VoiceMap

The process for submitting transcripts and audio to VoiceMap is recursive and reliant on an external partner (a VoiceMap editor). Provide students with the following directions.

The first step of your submission process is to log into the class's VoiceMap tour. Click on the locations tab (top of page), choose your specific location, and click the open window icon (next to the trash can on bottom right corner). A new window opens that allows you to edit. Here, you can modify your title. (See the goals and outcomes portion of the assignment sheet for advice on titles). Next, copy/paste your written transcript into VoiceMap. When you're finished,

click "save and submit." This will notify our assigned VoiceMap editor that we're ready for their approval. This process can take 48 hours or more.

Step 12: Addressing Editor Feedback

Provide students with instructions on how to revise based on editor feedback, perhaps with language like the following.

> Once you submit your location contribution, our assigned editor will review and in time, make any necessary changes or provide feedback for you to complete. Since I am the primary point of contact for our tour, I will forward the editor's message to your personal email. Once you receive the email, log back into the site, make your edits, and once again "save and submit" for re-approval. If required, this step may need to be repeated until the editor is satisfied.
>
> Once the editor approves the route and scripts, access to upload your audio will be granted.

Step 13: Saving and Uploading Audio

Students may need detailed instructions on uploading their audio to VoiceMap.

> Your audio composition must be saved as an MP3 file. Please name your file location_order#.mp3.
>
> Next, log back into the class's VoiceMap tour. Click on the locations tab (top of page), choose your specific location, and click the open window icon (next to the trash can on bottom right corner). A new window opens that allows you to edit. Upload your MP3 file.

Step 14: Reverberating on Your Audio Contribution

Below are the directions for the last component of the Audio Tour project—a self-reflection.

> **Reverberating* On Your Audio Contribution**
>
> ** The word reverberate (verb) means to vibrate in sound and is synonymous with reflection. Synonyms of reverberate are echo and react.*
>
> Your last step is to compose a self-assessment to evaluate your contribution to the collective effort. This is your opportunity to catalogue and justify the grade you think you deserve. It will also allow you to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the project. Develop your case by providing specific details (evidence) and reflect upon your roles. Please submit this assessment by creating a brief audio reflection that critiques your participation in the audible tour and identifies how this project connects to the course's learning outcomes and key themes.

Sample Projects

1. In an example of the worksheet for Step 5, a student collected information on her chosen site, "Veterans Memorial Park."

2. The second sample contains required components from Step 6's guidelines: an audio description, written transcript, and the student's audio composition.
3. The example for Step 7, an audio composition, is the student's first attempt to direct listeners from the previous location to her site, Veterans Memorial Park. The text ends with a preview to the next student voice and route.[2]

Reflection

Mariana Grohowski: Hi, listeners.[3] This is Mariana Grohowski speaking. In this audio reflection, I weigh the affordances and constraints of the Audible Tour of [Your Community or Region] project—a project that brings together elements of community literacy, mobile or "wireless" composing, and of course, soundwriting. Specifically, the assignment utilizes the mobile app VoiceMap and asks students to plan and execute a narrated audio tour of unique places in their community. While VoiceMap can be accessed through a web browser, it was designed to be used through a smartphone app. Composing sound for and through an app creates new instructional challenges for teachers and composing challenges for students. Scholars Cynthia Selfe, Stephanie Owen Fleischer, Susan Wright, Sylvia Church, and Elizabeth Powell have created helpful resources for preventing and solving potential challenges of working with sound. Their respective chapters in Selfe's (2007) collection *Multimodal Composition: Resources for Teachers* provide invaluable suggestions for "troubleshooting in the face of failure" (Church & Powell, 2007, pp. 134-141) and advice for instructing "students to compose with . . . sound [by comparing how we] teach students to compose with words" (Selfe et al., 2007, p. 18). Even though these suggestions were not designed for mobile composing, they were designed for audio assignments that ask students to compose sound on location.

It is precisely the notion of soundwriting on and about location that excites me about the audio tour project. Bjork and Schwartz (2009) excitingly sell Writing in the Wild or composing audio on location as "relocating writing and publication in the place of the object [which] embraces process-as-product genres . . . so that students will see the world of tamed and untamed writing spaces" (p. 235). Sounds enticing.

But unlike "sound maps" or "soundscapes," which record the sounds of nature (see Yellowstone National Park's Audio Postcards [National Park Service, n.d.]), people (see Sounds of Singapore [Neo, 2017]), and events (see The Religious Soundmap Project [American Religious Sounds Project, 2018]), this assignment

2. Three examples (a worksheet, audio files and descriptive transcripts) can be found on the book's companion website.

3. The audio version of Mariana Grohowski's reflection can be found on the book's companion website.

asks students to become informed about places in the community beyond university grounds—locations that some students would never visit.

I liken this assignment to a community literacy project, with the community off campus serving as the literacy sponsor—a sponsor that teaches students that meaning and communication is shared through various symbol systems. That literacy is collaborative and can inspire civic engagement and cross-cultural communication.

Unlike "traditional" community literacy projects, this assignment does not exactly have students working with a community partner (person/persons from the community). Like community literacy projects, the audio tour assignment when used through the voicemap.me mobile app, does have a sort of community partner in the editor assigned to your class's route. Yes, an actual human being is assigned to you once you establish a route. The editor is responsible for ensuring that your locations have been plotted correctly and that your written transcripts satisfy their requirements. Correspondence with my VoiceMap editor ensures me that they approve submissions in 48 hours or less. But at the time of this recording, I have waited 72 hours without any feedback on my routes. I share this information because having worked with community partners, I know the impatience and frustration students (and their teachers) can experience when having to wait for response from the community partner in order to complete their work. This can be especially concerning when students are pressed to meet a deadline. Which means that teachers of community literacy projects have to allow some permeability or flextime when it comes to deadlines.

As a newer professor, I have had to relocate for work. I share that with my out-of-state students and the students who may live in a state but commute from a town multiple hours away. In the past, I've wanted to implement community-based projects in my writing classes, but these projects can sometimes take months, even years to establish because they rely on becoming informed about one's new community and gaining trust from people within the community. While trying to make those connections, I've experimented with community literacy projects in which—to use the terminology of Thomas Deans (2000)—students "write about" their community and later share with their (global) community. This was not a soundwriting project, and it did not ask students to write about the places that made their community unique; instead, it asked students to investigate the people that made their community unique. Finding ways to help our students compose about community for community inspires in students a sense of agency and connectedness to their surroundings (Deans, 2000). This can be especially important when students are from out-of-town and living on their own for the first time. For me personally, it has helped combat my feelings of being an outsider and made me feel a bit more familiar with my new community. That said, I've not assigned this project and I have not had students use the VoiceMap app and website. But I have used it in writing this chapter. And here's what I've discovered.

I didn't experiment with creating the tour's route through the app. Instead, I used the website, which caused me a lot of frustration. Plotting the locations

was tedious because the site uses GPS technology. Exact locations must be specified and making changes is a finicky, time-consuming process. Per the directions from voicemap.me, plotting your route should take a total of one hour. Once the route is mapped, locations are established with names (that you create), and then "saved" (not submitted). I suggest the teacher plot the route. I also suggest the teacher create an account that the entire class can login to. Why? Because the teacher will want students to be able to login on their own to upload their audio compositions and written transcripts.

For the community literacy project I mentioned earlier, I created a Gmail account specifically for class use and creation of social media accounts. I gave all students the username and password so that they could login in order to contribute their work. I did not experience any problems in doing this, as neither the Gmail account nor the social media accounts were personal to me. Giving all students access and asking them to contribute their work directly to the site gives students the message that you believe they will behave professionally. With their names on the account (something like "Students of Writing 101 at College X"), they assume a sense of ownership over the project when they know that their work is published online and immediately available to a global audience. At least this was my experience in asking students at two different colleges.

The editors at voicemap.me suggest having one point of contact for the tour. This probably should be the teacher but have the username of, again, Students of Writing 101 at College X. This is what Erin Anderson and her students did for their voicemap.me tour of South Boston.

So once the route is plotted, the next step is not about composing audio. Nope, soundwriting takes a backseat when using voicemap.me. The first step is the submission of transcripts. The editor must approve the transcript before granting access to uploading sound files. Yes, this may be cause for concern.

Before we get too concerned, I have yet another constraint to inform you about.

Voicemap.me offers tour creators to charge a fee to users. While any user has to "purchase" a route, some purchases are free, but others cost money and allow the creator to make a profit from sales of their tour. I have yet to explore the fine print on voicemap.me's terms of use pertaining to how big a cut they take from each sale. I've made my tour free, as did Erin Anderson and her students at University of Massachusetts Boston. But I can see the justification for a class charging a fee for their tour, with the intention of raising money for a community organization that maintains a park, monument, or historical center. Of course, the teacher would bear the ethical responsibility of collecting and donating these funds as they trickle in over time.

Overall, I'm left wondering if another platform would be better for emphasizing the audio production portion of the assignment. If the goal is for learning about the rich affordances of audio composition, then do the constraints of the voicemap.me platform help or hinder student learning? Or does having students soundwrite through the constraints of the voicemap.me app help teach students

more about "authentic" soundwriting? It surely teaches them about addressing audience expectations by honoring genre conventions. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, this soundwriting project still honors the recursive process of soundwriting—the planning, recording, listening, editing, re-recording, etc.

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