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CYSE 368/Internship

Spring 2026

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TA Joshua Russell

Chronicles from the Help Desk: A Student's Experience

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 3-4
Management Environment.....	Page 4
Major Work Duties.....	Page 4-8
Knowledge Gained During the Internship.....	Page 8
Preparedness from ODU's Curriculum.....	Page 8-9
Fulfillment of My Internship/Career Goals.....	Page 9
Most Exciting Aspects.....	Page 9
Most Discouraging Aspects.....	Page 9
Most Challenging Aspects.....	Page 10
Recommendations.....	Page 10
Conclusion.....	Page 10-11
Work Cited Page.....	Page 12

Introduction

During the Spring 2026 semester, I had the privilege to intern as a Student Worker at Old Dominion University's Information Technology Help Desk. I decided to intern at this business because I needed to intern for a business/organization as a requirement for the CYSE/Internship class, as a prerequisite for Old Dominion University School of Cybersecurity, so I could complete my degree program: Bachelor of Science majoring in Cybersecurity. Additionally, I have had the urge to gain IT-related experience because I have never worked in this field before. After doing my own research, it seems that entry-level jobs can feel saturated and highly competitive, especially here in the Hampton Roads area. After doing even more research, I learned that the regional job market has weakened overall. This creates more competition for available jobs, particularly in IT/Cybersecurity tied to federal work. (Report: Hampton Roads lost about 6,300 federal civilian jobs in 2025 (Josh, 2026). I was fortunate to be selected to work and gain firsthand experience in this role because it gave me related job experience to add to my resume. This alone would make me more marketable, aside from completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Cybersecurity, having federal work experience, security clearance, and passing my CompTIA Security + certification. The scheduling is very flexible, offering different options for me to complete my hours. I work with a staff of my peers; students who are also in the same program as myself and are nearing the end of their college career, as well as I am.

At the start of my student-worker position at ODU's IT Help Desk, I came up with three objectives I hoped to achieve. My first objective was to provide technical support with IT-related issues. My second objective was to be proficient in using software tools to help support and manage tickets effectively. Lastly, my third objective was to work with students and faculty to resolve their issues remotely while learning new and improving on existing technical skills.

The Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) handles communications, computing, and technological services for students, faculty, and staff at ODU (sbookman, 2024). Their main locations are in the E.V. Williams Engineering and Computational Sciences Building, Monarch Hall, and Webb University Center. The Monarch Hall location is the main hub for the Help Desk. ODU's IT Help Desk is notorious for solving customers' technology issues as quickly and as accurately as possible. Previously, ITS was known as The Office of Computing and Communications Services (OCCS) before the name change in 2013 (sbookman, 2024). Information Technology Services began absorbing the Eastern Virginia Medical School (EVMS) on July 1, 2024, (sbookman, 2024).

The Help Desk operates 24/7 online. Some of the services the IT Helpdesk provides would be assisting the organization with network outages, server outages, or central application issues that involve campus-wide systems like Banner or email. Some of the lower-priority tasks include initiating password resets and making sure users are set up with Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) on their accounts. The Help Desk works hybrid (on-site and remotely). They have an online portal for users to open an incident directly with the Help Desk team. There is also a knowledge base link for self-service. This is found on the ODU's website under Technology Services (IT)/ IT Help Desk.

In the first few weeks of my internship, I went through my initial orientation and training. I signed the required paperwork for onboarding and was required to complete a set of modules during orientation through ServiceNow. I learned to use their software—ServiceNow, for their ticketing system. Some impressions that I gathered before I started working for ODU's IT Department were that I was relieved to have been hired. I never knew where the actual location of the Help Desk was because I took all my classes online. Because I was hired, it gave me a reason to step foot in the IT Help Desk room in Monarch Hall.

Management Environment

There are many distinct roles at the Help Desk. Most people start as a student employee, which is the position I took. After that, they can work their way up to be a Part-time Technician. As a Part-time Technician, they have similar responsibilities as a regular student employee except that they work after hours and/or weekends. The next level position is known to be the Virginia Health Sciences (VHS) Help Desk Technician. Then, there is the Help Desk Manager and Interim Help Desk Technical Lead/Student Supervisor. In this position, this individual would help with the hiring process of the Help Desk staff. They conduct interviews with applicants and make decisions on who to offer employment. Another one of their core functions is to handle the tickets that are escalated to them from the ticketing queue. Next, the student would then be promoted as a full-time staff employee known as the Executive Director of Client Services after the student graduates with a four-year degree. Typically, the Help Desk prefers to hire prior students for this job. Lastly, there is the Deputy Chief Information Officer (DCIO).

Based on my time working as a student employee, I was able to meet most of the people who are titled with these positions. I was able to learn some of the tasks from the roles mentioned above, but during my time, I did not meet the Executive Director of Client Services or the Deputy Chief Information Officer. Therefore, I am unsure of the type of duties assigned to them. I was supervised by the Student Supervisor, with whom I had direct contact when I was told not to report to the Help Desk. In addition, I worked alongside other Part-time technicians and VHS Help Desk Technicians. I genuinely got along with the higher-ups, and I was able to shadow and learn a lot from them. There was a cordial atmosphere among the staff. We all supported each other and strived to achieve the department's day-to-day goals. I enjoyed being in this type of environment and contributing to this type of organizational culture. It made it easier for me to grow as a professional and motivated me to continue working hard in my career.

Major Work Duties

I worked primarily as a Tier 1 technician using the Windows 11 operating system to troubleshoot user issues. There were instances where there were people who used MacOS. I helped patrons with login issues, specifically password resets. Essentially, if someone came into the IT Help Desk, I would first greet them and ask, "How can I help you today?" If they called, I would say, "Thank you for calling ODU Help Desk, this is Tristan Cole, how may I help you?" If the person were locked out of their account, I would verify their identity over the phone, and then I would reset the password and provide them with a temporary password so that they could use it and create a new password. I was required to answer calls and escalate them if I could not

solve their problem to my superiors. The way I did this was through a program called ‘ServiceNow.’ A ticket is created from either a user who calls, a walk-in to Monarch Hall/EDBMs building, through email, or if they manually create a ticket through the Help & Support link on the IT Help Desk website after logging in to their MyODU portal. After that happens, the process then becomes where we see it populate through our ServiceNow platform architecture. We would see where the user described the nature of their issue, and then we would use knowledge base articles to try to resolve it. Sometimes, knowledge base articles would help us fix the patron’s issue quickly and efficiently. In other cases, the knowledge-based articles required us to escalate the ticket to another assignment group.

During my internship, I was assigned a minor task in which I used Microsoft Excel to grade existing data. My assignment was to grade previous tickets. I was given an Excel spreadsheet that had numerous tickets and how the agent handled each of those tickets. I was tasked with investigating each ticket and seeing if there were errors made, and how to adjudicate them. My mentor, who assigned me this task, is a lead, so he has profound knowledge of how to grade each ticket.

Incident After Hours Overview - Last Modified: at 10:53 PM														
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AutoSave On PhishingMonthTracking - Last Modified: April 1

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Automate Help Acrobat

Clipboard: Cut, Copy, Paste, Format Painter

Font: Aptos Narrow, 11, Bold, Italic, Underline, Color, Background Color

Alignment: Wrap Text, Merge & Center

Number: General, Percentage, Number, Currency, Text, Date, Time, Fraction, Scientific

Conditional Formatting: Check Cell, Explanatory...

Styles: Normal, Bad, Go

MONTH	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	Replace the below with peak activity months, and the # column with the number of tickets on those weeks.	MONTH (25-Jun)	#	MONTH (24-Nov)	#	MONTH (25-April)	#	MONTH (25-Oct)	#	MONTH	#	MONTH	#
23-Jan	54		1	89	1	418	1	8	1	13	1	1		
23-Feb	52		2	188	2	200	2	16	2	221	2	2		
23-Mar	153		3	756	3	150	3	14	3	36	3	3		
23-Apr	34		4	55	4	36	4	523	4	295	4	4		
23-May	87		5 (2 days)	5	5 (2 days)	5	5 (2 days)	55	5 (3 days)	34				
23-Jun	52			1093		809		616		598				
23-Jul	36													
23-Aug	24													
23-Sep	34													
23-Oct	107													
23-Nov	80													
23-Dec	55													
24-Jan	61													
24-Feb	129													
24-Mar	90													
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26-Feb	119													
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	7020													

Figure 2

AutoSave On PhishingMonthTracking - Saved

File Home Insert Draw Page Layout Formulas Data Review View Automate Help Acrobat

Clipboard: Cut, Copy, Paste, Format Painter

Font: Aptos Narrow, 11, Bold, Italic, Underline, Color, Background Color

Alignment: Wrap Text, Merge & Center

Formula Bar: =SUM(B3:H3)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	Jun-25									
2									Total	
3	Day 1 - Day 7	0	3	2	74	8	1	1	89	
4	Day 8 - Day 14	0	18	12	109	42	7	0	188	
5	Day 9 - Day 21	0	9	91	8	220	355	73	756	
6	Day 22 - Day 28	8	21	11	7	1	6	1	55	
7	Day 29 & Day 30	1	4						5	
8									1093	
9										

Figure 3

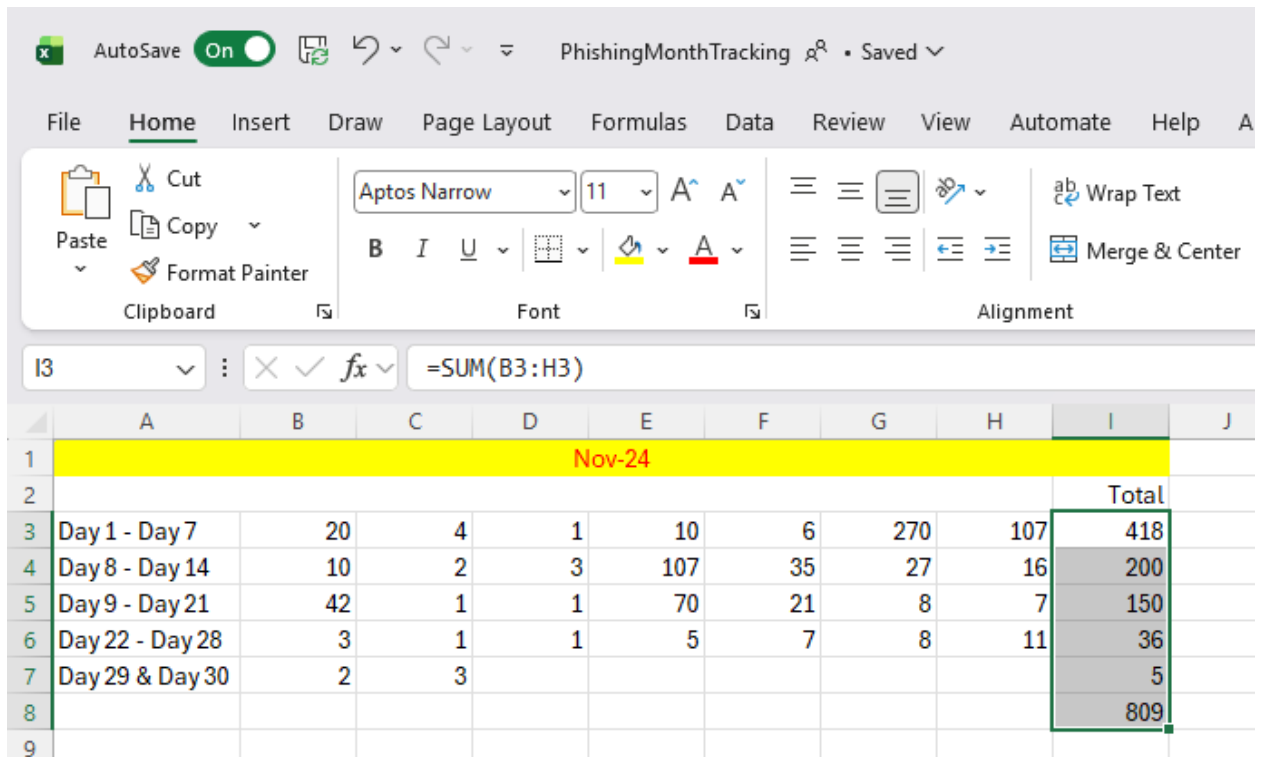


Figure 4

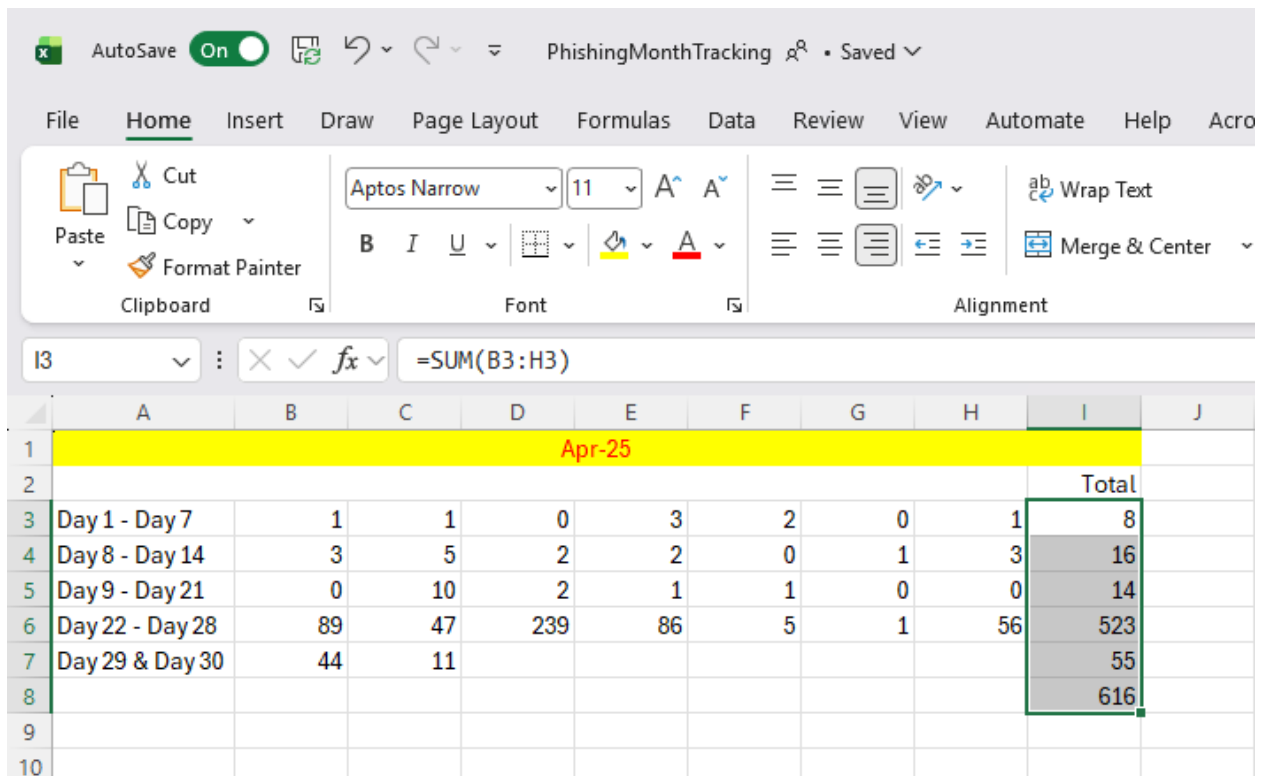


Figure 5

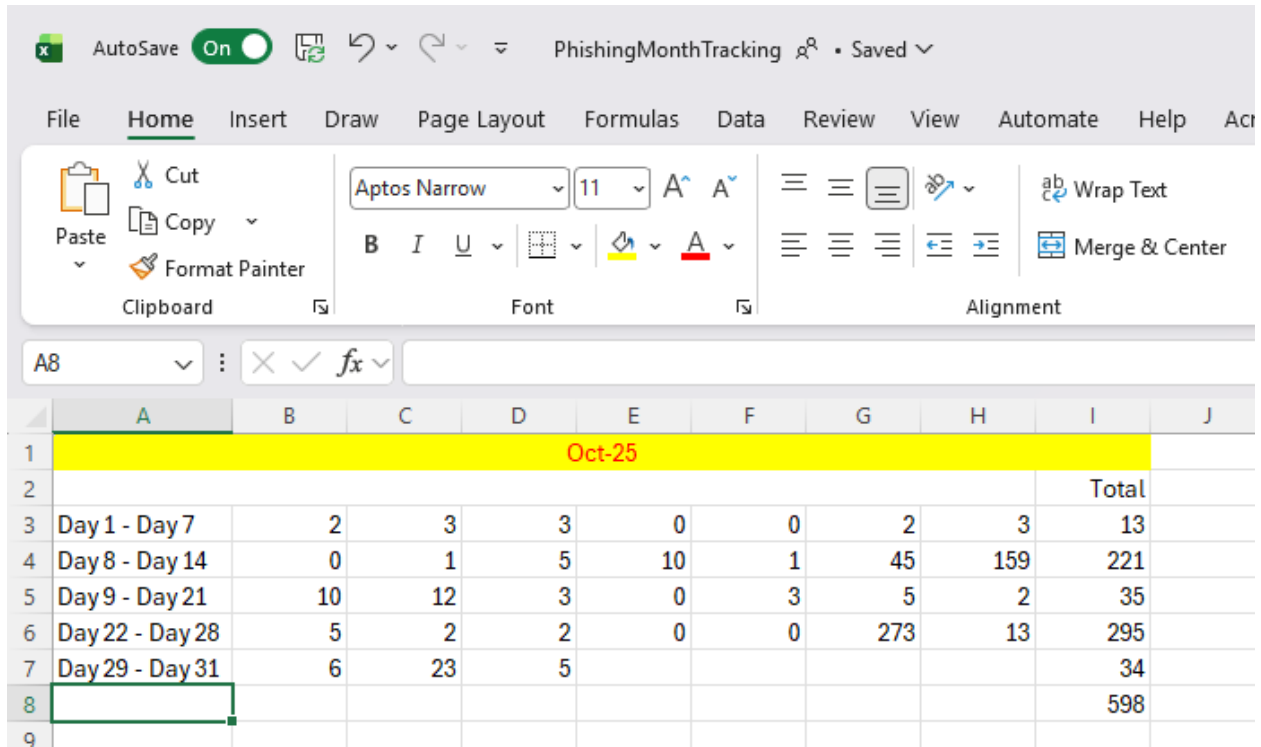


Figure 6

Knowledge Gained During the Internship

I had a lot of soft skills before starting this internship. Some of those soft skills were communication, people skills, problem-solving, and detail orientation. I already had technical skills from my current federal employment, which was data entry, and from my own personal work at home. I can start up the initial setup for printers, laptops, and monitors. I was able to set up a basic router, such as a TP-Link, for my home network. In previous classes, I was able to configure Firewall rules,

One soft skill that I had to learn on the job was speaking to customers over the phone. I struggled with this at first, but over time and with practice, I got better at it. I was able to be exposed to Active Directory utilizing ServiceNow. My on-the-job experience with this content area has changed my understanding of IT/Cybersecurity. For example, I learned a lot more customer support skills. I was able to help customers directly as the first point of contact.

Preparedness from ODU's Curriculum

The ODU Cybersecurity curriculum prepared me for this role. Along with the CYSE/Internship course, I also took another class in the Spring 2026 semester, known as ServiceNow Admin and Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) Fundamentals. In this class, I used the fundamental elements of how ServiceNow works. I learned an abundance of administration skills, such as IT Service Management Overview, managing applications, managing architecture, service operations, how to use a service catalogue, managing incidents

and problems, instance configuration, using environment lists and filters. I learned table administration, access control, and how to import data from outside sources.

Fulfillment of My Internship/Career Goals

I fulfilled my objectives, which were one: to provide technical support with IT-related issues. I did this by walking customers through password resets and two-factor authentications. Second, to be proficient in using software tools to help support and manage tickets effectively. I did this by learning the ServiceNow program, which helped me to navigate the system. Lastly, it was to work with students and faculty to resolve their issues remotely while learning new and improving on existing technical skills. I assisted faculty in classroom issues such as troubleshooting computer repair issues or gaining access to certain shared folders.

Most Exciting Aspects

I thought that one of the most exciting aspects was learning the salaries of some of my colleagues who worked full-time. I was unaware that some technicians who worked at the help desk made approximately \$50,000 annually. For some reason, I thought that people at that level would not make as much; I thought they would have made fewer. Another exciting aspect was that the scheduling is very flexible, offering different options for me to complete the hours required for the class. I worked with a staff of my peers; students who are also in the same program as myself and are nearing the end of their college career, as well as I.

I learned how to diagnose issues the customers had over the phone. It was rewarding to be able to walk a person through a password reset or two-factor authentication without having the ability to see what the customer was doing. If we were having difficulty with a walk-through, we could do a Zoom call with the customer and help them visually.

Not knowing what each shift would bring is exciting because there is always some new challenge to overcome as a help desk technician. These challenges also instill and improve team camaraderie. As a new technician, I have a mentor who works with me to improve my confidence and increase my grading score. Working with my peers made us more of a team. We were able to overcome each other's weaknesses and each other to become better.

Most Discouraging Aspects

Some of the discouraging aspects of working are that I am disappointed by the fact that my internship will end because I will be graduating. I was informed that lower Help Desk positions are meant for students, and because I was there for such a brief period. I could not be promoted. I remained at a tier-one level and was not advanced to tier-two. There was much to learn through experience, and I will miss out on that.

Most Challenging Aspects

I found it challenging to talk to people over the phone. I had a script I had to follow when answering the calls. It was also difficult to understand the caller's problem without seeing what they saw on their computer screen. There were times when the team and I needed to assist users who used MacOS. I am not savvy with this operating system, so I escalated the issues to coworkers because it was beyond my scope. I was able to overcome challenges by continuously practicing and getting feedback from my peers and supervisors. I noticed I got better when I was more fluent in conversation with callers on the phone without needing to have someone else take over.

Recommendations

Some of my recommendations for future interns would be to always show up on time for your shift and, if possible, arrive a few minutes early. Make sure to contact your lead/supervisor if you cannot be at your shift. It is best to coordinate with them if you are unable to attend, unless there is an emergency or unexpected illness. Another recommendation would be to keep a journal and write in it at the end of each shift, explaining how your day went. Here, you can be as detailed as possible to refer to. Be an attentive listener and do not be afraid to ask questions. Learn to be assertive and confident. Act as a sponge and absorb as much information as you can. I would say do not be afraid to make mistakes! It happens, and you can learn from your mistakes. Remember, you most likely know more than the customer who is calling, but do not be afraid to admit you are wrong and ask for help. Approximately 80% of people in the IT field began at Help Desk, so do not believe that it is beneath you; do it, or wait to get in. Be open to constructive criticism

Help Desk will give you a lot of the soft skills needed to move forward, and many employers see Help Desk as valuable firsthand experience at the entry-level position. Learn to explain things to someone who is not as technical as you are. Try to use non-technical language to explain a technical solution to your customer. When giving instructions, use detailed steps that are simple to follow logically. Lastly, make sure to take the CYSE/Internship in your junior year because it will allow you to work longer at the Help Desk, and you could be promoted to tier 2. This is great to be able to add to your resume. A lot of employers want to see that a candidate has had at least one year of Helpdesk experience.

Conclusion

The main takeaway from the internship is to learn all that you can from Help Desk. It is the steppingstone to any IT career and is pivotal in creating a foundation on which a person can build upon. I learn to work with the strengths and weaknesses of my peers by troubleshooting over-the-phone calls. Now that I have completed my internship, I can carry over this experience to apply the skills I learned at a new opportunity. Overall, my internship fell nothing short of rewarding and impactful. I was fortunate enough to have so much guidance.

The internship will not influence my remaining time at Old Dominion University because this is my last class before graduation. But had I taken the class earlier in my college career, it would have helped me to choose what classes that I should take. Ensuring that I took classes with more direct experience. I would have chosen a class that has certifications that are tied to them. The internship showed me what skills I need to reinforce. The internship will influence my future professional path by redefining my long-term goals. I still want to work cybersecurity for the DOD or federal government.

Works Cited

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