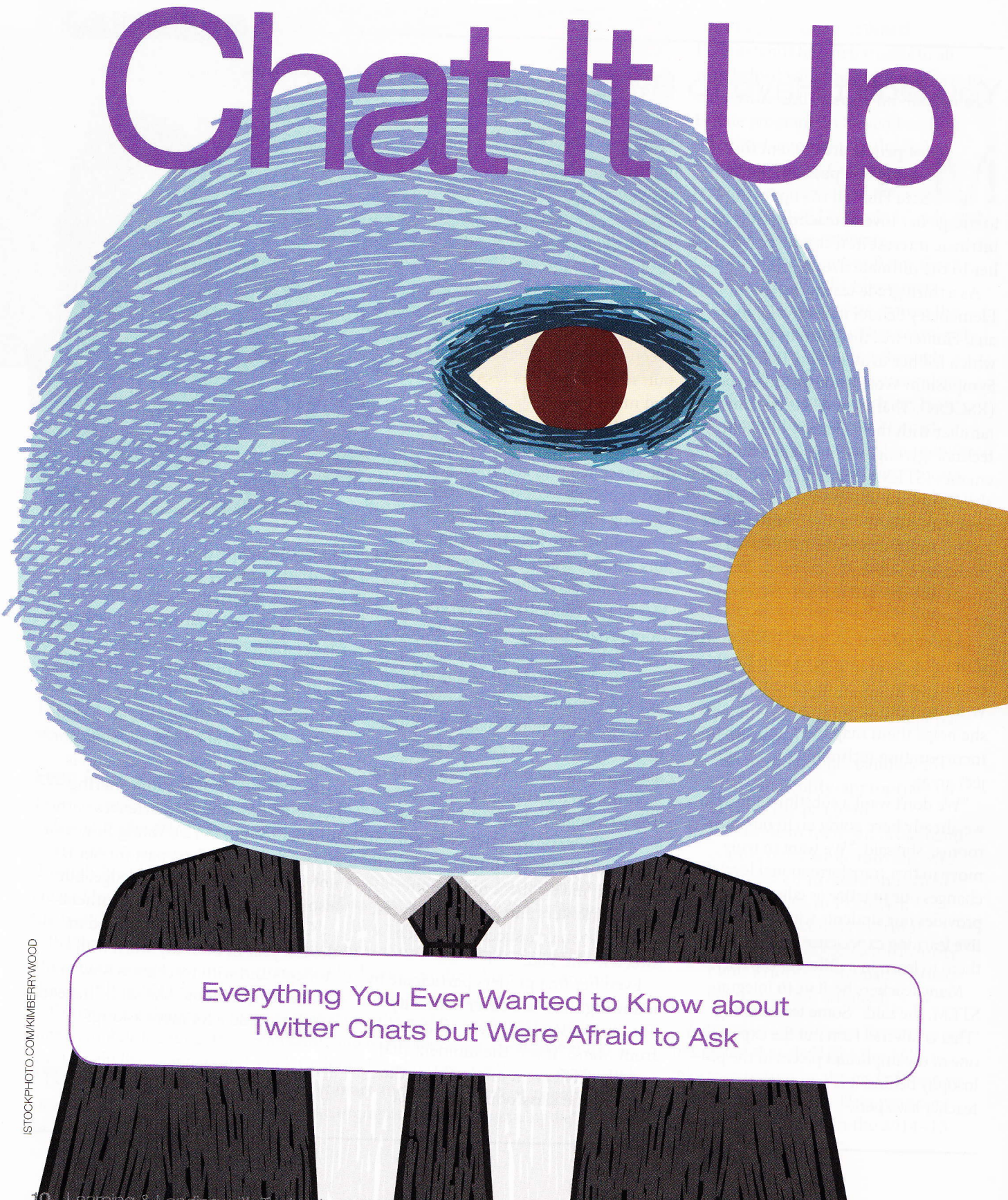


By Jeffrey P. Carpenter and Daniel G. Krutka

Chat It Up



Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about
Twitter Chats but Were Afraid to Ask

Did you know that you can access more than 150 free online professional development workshops each week—and you don't even have to leave the comfort of your home or school to attend them? Learn how to find, participate in, and start your own Twitter chats with this easy-to-follow FAQ.

Unless you've been living under a rock for the past five years, you have undoubtedly heard of Twitter. Beyond its entertainment uses, the free service has been a major boon to educators, who use it to connect with colleagues, share resources, communicate with experts, and personalize their professional learning.

In fact, we authors met because we were both using Twitter with our teacher candidates. Even though we live 1,000 miles apart, we have collaborated on several projects while continuing to learn from each other via tweets.

Using a service that limits communication to 140 characters may seem like a strange way to get professional development (PD), but educators have found it to be a powerful digital learning space where they can connect around shared interests. Scheduled Twitter chats, in particular,

have become a popular professional activity for many tweeting educators.

Why, you ask? And how? Read on to find the answers to your questions about Twitter chats.

Why Twitter?

First of all, Twitter is not just limited to 140 characters. In addition to text, tweets can include images, short videos, and hyperlinks. Educators can also tweet links to recommended articles, blogs, websites, and other teaching resources. And Twitter's 24/7/365 accessibility from multiple platforms, such as Twitter.com, HootSuite, TweetDeck, and several mobile apps, makes it easy to use anytime, anywhere.

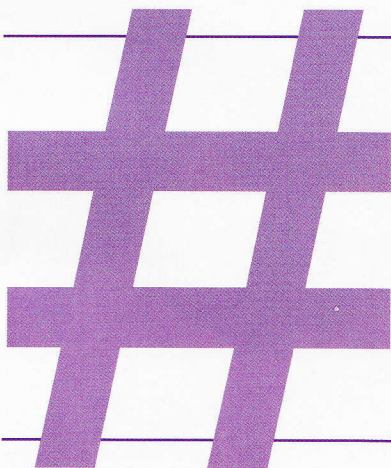
Twitter is also an open social network. While Facebook friend requests from strangers cause suspicion, on Twitter it's normal to follow and be followed by people you don't know. That means that far-flung educators who might otherwise never meet, but have some common interests, can still easily

connect through the medium. It is not uncommon for educators using Twitter to interact virtually for some time and then eventually meet face to face at educational conferences or teacher-driven unconferences or edcamps.

What Is a Hashtag?

Hashtags help connect educators with similar interests. A hashtag is a keyword or phrase preceded by the # symbol, which indicates that a tweet includes content on a particular topic. For example, users sending tweets related to the flipped classroom model might add the *#flipclass* hashtag.

This mechanism allows educators to join ongoing discussions with others tweeting on similar topics and direct their messages and resources to those who have a shared interest. Hashtags are usually determined organically by users, and educators on Twitter have established and make frequent use of a wide variety of education-related ones (see "Hash It Out" below).



Hash It Out

Hashtags don't have to be associated with live chats. Educators can keep the conversation going about their favorite topics asynchronously over Twitter by starting their own hashtags or by using an established one. English-as-a-foreign-language teacher and blogger Chiew Pang (@aClimbToClimb) maintains a public Google Doc at goo.gl/4CVDW that tracks

many of the most popular education-related hashtags in use. Here are a few of our favorites:

#edreform
#elearning
#edtech
#flipclass
#highered

What's a Twitter Chat?

The term *chat* in the context of Twitter refers to synchronous events where many users participate in a discussion via tweets on a specific topic, usually using a predetermined hashtag at a designated time. Although the Twitter environment continuously evolves, a chat is typically a weekly one-hour live discussion that focuses on a specific topic. And they're very popular: In a recent survey we conducted of 755 educators who use Twitter, 73% of respondents reported they had participated in a chat.

Chats often encourage a more substantive and dynamic exchange of ideas than traditional, single-tweet activity. A new user who sends out an individual tweet may have little sense of the audience for that tweet and may not make any new connections with it. But taking part in a chat will let her get into immediate interaction and discussion and quickly expand her personal learning network (PLN).

Larger chats can involve hundreds of participants and thousands of tweets during a single hour. If that seems overwhelming, keep in mind that many newbies just "lurk," or follow chats without tweeting, while others find smaller chats to participate in at first.

Why Chat?

Participants join chats for many reasons, including resource sharing, networking, emotional support, community building, and contributing to their profession. The collective intelligence of a chat can provide educators with classroom-tested lessons, a variety of perspectives on specific problems, or an introduction to emerging technologies. Chats offer leaders opportunities to expand their audiences and influence, and they give voice to teachers who might not otherwise have the chance to exercise leadership outside their classrooms or schools. Educators also appreciate

that the medium is concise, immediate, and easily personalized to their professional needs.

In contrast to traditional PD that often casts teachers into passive roles, chats can be dynamic, engaging, and even "oddly invigorating," as one of our students said. Chats provide opportunities for teachers to interact with a variety of educators and other stakeholders in ways that are sometimes rare in schools, and they provide spaces for democratic and equitable interaction and collaboration. Plus, participation in chats aligns with the ISTE Standards for Teachers because it supports professional growth and leadership and allows educators to model digital citizenship and responsibility.

Who Organizes Chats?

Most chats are started and facilitated by a small group of self-nominated leaders, and some involve a companion blog or website with chat schedules, topic polls, and archives. For example, when several Oklahoma educators attending an edcamp decided in February 2013 to start using #OklaEd for a weekly moderated chat, they created a website (oklaed.blogspot.com), archiving account (storify.com/OklaEd), and private Google Doc to help organize and sustain the chat.

Chats typically have one or two moderators. Some chats retain the same moderators for every session, while others regularly rotate moderators, feature guest moderators with expertise relevant to a particular week's topic, or actively seek out moderators among regular chat participants.

Moderators generally create the slate of questions or prompts for the chat beforehand. At the outset, they collectively welcome participants to the chat and often ask them to introduce themselves. After that, they periodically ask the predetermined questions and interact spontaneously

Give a Cha

As of this writing, we are aware of more than 150 education-related Twitter chats. The most up-to-date list (bit.ly/officialchatlist) is maintained by tech director Thomas Murray (@thomasmurray), learning coach Chad Evans (@cevens5095), and writer/educator Jerry Blumengarten (@cybraryman1).

Some chats, such as #edchat, tackle a broad range of education issues, while others are based on shared interests in a particular topic, content area, grade level, job type, or geographical region. Here are a few of our favorites:

General Education Chats

#edchat: This popular chat, moderated by Tom Whitby (@tomwhitby), Steven Anderson (@web20classroom), and Shelly Terrell (@ShellTerrell), hosts two discussions on a pre-arranged education topic every Tuesday at 9 a.m. PT/noon ET and 4 p.m. PT/7 p.m. ET. Find out more at edchat.pbworks.com.

#satchat: This chat gets its name from its regularly scheduled time, Saturday mornings. Billed as a "global discussion for current and emerging school leaders," the chat, co-founded by Brad Currie (@bcurrie5) and Scott Rocco (@ScottRocco), happens every Saturday at 7:30 a.m. PT/10:30 a.m. ET. It was so popular that it's spawned two geographically specific offshoot chats, #SatchatWC for West Coasters and #SatchatOC for educators living in Oceania (Indonesia, Polynesia, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, etc.). Learn more at www.bradcurrie.net/satchat.html.

Content-Area Chats

#engchat: This chat for English teachers to connect and share ideas, resources, and inspiration happens every Monday at 4 p.m. PT/7 p.m. ET. Find out more at www.engchat.org.

#mathchat: This UK-based chat is for anyone involved in mathematics, including students as well as teachers. It happens twice a week, at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET on most Thursday nights and 5:30 p.m./8:30 p.m. on Mondays. You can also follow @mathchat and visit the wiki at mathschat.wikispaces.com.

a Chance

#sschat: This weekly chat for social studies educators happens Mondays at 4 p.m. PT/7 p.m. ET. You can follow chat leaders Dan Krutka (@dankrutka), Melissa Seiderman (@melissaseiderman), and Michael Milton (@42thinkdeep) for updates or visit the sschat.ning.com site for archives of #sschat and other social studies chats, including #wrldchat and #hsgovchat.

Job Type/Role Chats

#cpchat: The "cp" stands for *connected principals*, and the chat is moderated by a different team of moderators in that role each Wednesday at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET. Read the Connected Principals blog at connectedprincipals.com.

#ntchat: This chat for new teachers founded by ed tech blogger Lisa Dabbs (@teachingwithsoul) takes place on Wednesdays at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET. Read all about it at www.teachingwithsoul.com/ntchat.

Grade-Level Chats

#kinderchat: As its name suggests, this chat is for anyone involved or interested in kindergarten and early-childhood education, including teachers, administrators, parents, and organizations. It was founded by kindergarten teachers Heidi Echternacht (@hechternacht) and Amy Murray (@happycampergirl) and takes place every Monday at 6 p.m. PT/9 p.m. ET.

#1stchat: This chat about first grade teaching, facilitated by Valarie Ruckes (@valruckes) and Laura Comos (@lauracomos), happens on Sundays at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET. Learn more at 1stchat.wikispaces.com.

#mschat: My Middle School Chat, founded by seventh grade science teacher Todd Bloch (@blocht574), covers a variety of topics of interest to middle school educators. Check it out on Thursdays at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET and read about it on Bloch's blog at sweattoinspire.com.

Topical Chats

#pbchat: Project-based learning fans, unite and discuss on this chat moderated by Geoff Krall (@emergentmath), Theresa Shafer (@TheresaShafer), Mike Kaechele (@mikekaechele), and Andrew Miller (@betamiller). Tune in to tweet on Tuesdays at 6 p.m. PT/9 p.m. ET, contribute a topic idea at goo.gl/2KxNbi, or see a chat archive at storify.com/newtechnetwork.

#sbgchat: This chat, founded by Tom Murray (@thomasmurray), connects educators interested in standards-based grading every Wednesday at 6 p.m. PT/9 p.m. ET. See an archive at storify.com/thomasmurray/sbgchat.

Organization-Sponsored Chats

#DENchat: Discovery Education Network (DEN) hosts its own general-interest education chat on Thursdays at 5 p.m. PT/8 p.m. ET. Read about it on the DEN blog at blog.discoveryeducation.com/blog/tag/denchat.

State Chats

#CAedchat: California educators are invited to discuss education topics relevant to the West Coast on Sundays at 8 p.m. PT. Visit the companion website at sites.google.com/site/caedchat.

#NCed: This chat connects educators across North Carolina on Tuesdays at 8 p.m. ET. Check out the companion blog at ncedchat.blogspot.com.

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with participants. Most moderators pose 5–10 questions, but supplementary questions, diversions, and side conversations are common too.

Although the moderators contribute important ideas to the chats, they usually try not to dominate discourse or control the flow of conversation to the same extent that a presenter might in a traditional PD workshop. In fact, some chat organizers empower participants by allowing them to select each week's topic through an online poll that they tweet out and/or post on the chat's website.

How Do I Participate in a Chat?

A diverse array of education chats is continuously emerging (see “Give a Chat a Chance,” pages 12–13). Some chats end up attracting participants, while others fail to find a long-term audience. Last year many state-based chats, such as #KSed for Kansas educators, sprung up as opportunities to connect and share resources with nearby educators. Numerous book group chats, which tend to be ad hoc conversations that typically exist for a short period of time, also started last year. For example, Dave Burgess's

(@burgessdave) *Teach Like a Pirate* spawned book chats that he led as well as several spinoff chats that centered on applying the ideas of his book to specific educational contexts. And Clinton Public Schools in Oklahoma uses chats to connect educators within and across schools with the hashtag #cpsreds.

It's easy to take part in a Twitter chat. First, be sure your privacy controls are set to make your tweets public so all chat participants, not just your followers, can see them. Although it is possible to participate in chats using the regular Twitter interface, we recommend setting up a third-party account with a service like HootSuite or TweetDeck. These free services link to your Twitter account and allow you to more conveniently manage tweets and chats by creating multiple “streams” or columns that aggregate tweets by hashtag or search term. This will make it much easier to follow the flow of a chat and contribute.

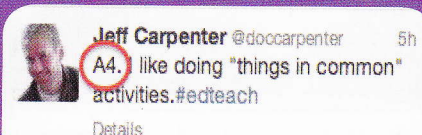
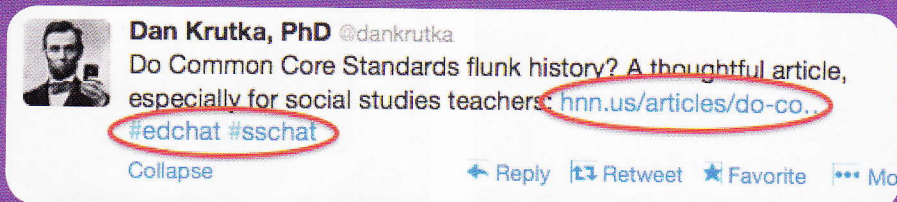
To keep track of which answers go with which questions, moderators typically label each question with Q1, Q2, and so on. Participants, in turn, preface answers with A1, A2, etc., so it's clear which question they are answering.

This approach allows participants to join chats late, discuss a particularly interesting question beyond the designated chat time, or catch up with conversations. Although anyone is welcome to ask questions of all participants, it's good etiquette to generally respect the moderator's role of guiding the conversation.

Chats are generally welcoming environments, and many chat moderators support and encourage new chatters. Researchers Ceren Budak and Rakesh Agrawal, who have studied Twitter chats, found that newcomers feel socially included when fellow chat participants mention and retweet them.

But they warn that more established chats with numerous regulars can be less inviting to outsiders and that the quantity of tweets or links shared might initially be overwhelming. Twitter has been compared to a waterfall: Users can hold out their cups to collect the water they need but shouldn't worry about everything that passes by. Twitter chats, in particular, involve an immense amount of information and educational ideas, so keep in mind that it is pretty much impossible to digest it all.

Chatology



(Top) Twitter lets educators easily share links to helpful resources and categorize their tweets by topic using hashtags.

(Left) Chat moderators often number their predetermined questions, to which participants align their answers.

(Right) Free services such as TweetDeck let you sort your tweets by hashtag into columns, making it much easier to follow and contribute to a chat.



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What If I Miss a Chat?

Although the live, dynamic nature of chats is part of their appeal, many chat transcripts are also archived on a companion blog or website. This is a valuable service for participants who want to review tweets because of the fast pace of chat or for those who miss a chat altogether. Users can also archive important individual tweets from chats they would like to view later by using Twitter's "favorite" feature. Free apps like Evernote can also help you store tweets and links for later reference.

How Do I Start My Own Chat?

If a hashtag doesn't already exist for a topic of interest, any user can claim it for a chat and spread the

word to others interested in the topic. But don't forget that no one owns a hashtag. So if you decide to start using #MHSchat, for example, for a chat among teachers at your high school, don't be surprised if teachers from a different "MHS" start using the same hashtag. That's why it's wise to choose a hashtag that others are unlikely to apply to a different topic.

Twitter chats are a great way to model participation and innovation in a digital age learning culture. While Twitter is no panacea for professional development, an increasing number of educators turn to the free service again and again to energize learning and collaboration with their colleagues. And given the many demands on educators' time, the sheer volume

of their voluntary participation is a testament to the value of chats.

If you're ready to join them, then find—or start—a chat that meets your professional needs. You may be surprised by what you can learn 140 characters at a time!



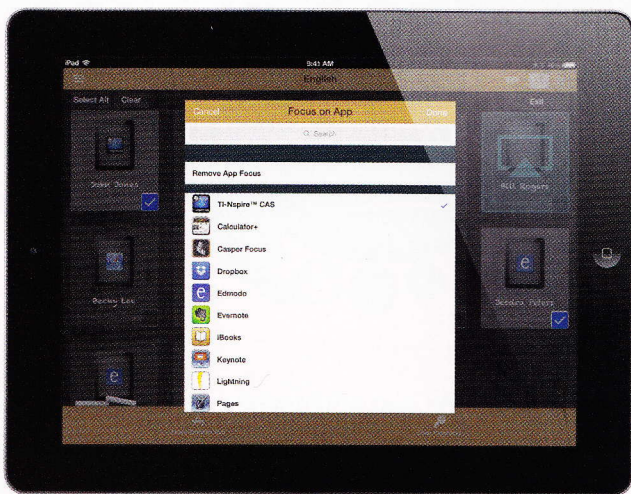
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