

Operation Manual for Academic Advisors

Office of Undergraduate Studies

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I. Definitions and Nature of Academic Advising

According to the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO, 1980), an advisor was defined as “a member of the college staff (usually a member of the instructional faculty) assigned to assist a student with academic planning” (p. 8). Similarly, the Noel-Levitz Participant Book/Resource Guide (Houland, Anderson, Noel-Levitz, McGuire, & Crockett, 1997) conceived academic advising as “a process of giving students guidance, support and encouragement” (p. 3) and it helps students “diminish the confusion that comes with a new environment, clarify their goals and get the most out of their education” (p. 3).

According to the Global Community for Academic Advising (NACADA) (2006), “Academic Advising, based in the teaching and learning mission of higher education, is a series of intentional interactions with a curriculum, a pedagogy, and a set of student learning outcomes. Academic advising synthesizes and contextualizes students’ educational experiences within the frameworks of their aspirations, abilities and lives to extend learning beyond campus boundaries and time frames” (Summary Section).

In the above definition, there are **three elements in academic advising**. The first element is **curriculum** (i.e., the “what” of student advising), which includes broad issues such as ideals of higher education (e.g., mission of university education, particularly with reference to PolyU) and narrow issues surrounding subject selection. The second element is **pedagogy** (i.e., the “how” of student advising), which includes preparation, implementation, documentation, evaluation and improvement of the advising process. The final element is **student learning outcomes** (i.e., the “results” of academic advising), which includes what students understand, choose, value and behave as a result of academic advising. Generally speaking, it is expected that effective academic advising leads to the following outcomes: a) development of an educational plan according to one’s abilities and interests; b) ability to use a wide range of information to set educational goals; c) take personal responsibility to meet the academic requirements; and d) appreciate options available in fulfilling higher education and the institutional mission.

Academic advising plays an important role in achieving the mission of higher education. In a broad sense, students learn to reflect their roles and responsibilities as citizens within the university community in reaching their academic goals. In a narrow sense, academic advising helps students fulfill the undergraduate study requirements leading to academic success (Ford, 2003).

II. Aims of Academic Advising

1. Create a supportive and student-friendly atmosphere that fosters success in the study of students.
2. Connect students to the university resources.
3. Help students understand their academic and personal goals.
4. Guide students to develop realistic educational plan in fulfilling the graduation requirements and help them evaluate the attainment of the goals.
5. Provide up-to-date information on the University's policies and procedures regarding the undergraduate study.
6. Help students develop decision making skills and promote their sense of self-direction.
7. Facilitate students to make informed choice about their study and future development.

III. Policy on Academic Advising at PolyU

The background, aims and proposed structure of academic advising under the 4-year undergraduate degree structure at PolyU can be seen in the policy paper (LTC/42/A4) of the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). For the most updated policy paper on the academic advising system, please refer to the website of OUS.

IV. Framework on Academic Advising at PolyU: Philosophy, Core Values, and Operation

Philosophy of Academic Advising

At PolyU, a developmental approach of academic advising is adopted. Advising is considered as a developmental process through which students are assisted, guided, supported and empowered to identify their academic and personal goals, develop plans and strategies to achieve them, and evaluate the outcomes of their own planning. With the assistance of Academic Advisors, students are expected to take personal responsibility to think critically and reflectively to examine available opportunities and resources to determine their study plan. It is expected that academic advising promotes self-understanding which enables students to have an aspiration of academic success and to achieve their academic and personal goals.

PolyU is committed to pursue excellence in academic advising and to build supportive relationships with students which are instrumental to helping students achieve their academic goals. Specifically, PolyU strives to create a supportive and student-friendly atmosphere that fosters success in undergraduate study, encourages students to understand their academic and personal goals, and empowers students to attain their goals.

Core Values of Academic Advising (RESPECT)

- 1. Respect:** The views, decisions and diversity of the students are honoured in the process.
- 2. Excellence in academic advising:** Provision of timely, proactive, accurate, coherent and professional advising with strong student engagement.
- 3. Student orientation:** Focus on the paramount importance of care for the students, confidentiality and shared responsibility. Through academic advising, students are helped to take ownership of their education, including to understand one's own abilities and interests, develop personal and academic goals, formulate study plans, implement them and evaluate the strategies.
- 4. Personal and social responsibility:** Independent thinking as well as personal and social responsibility of the students are emphasized so that students can make informed and responsible choices consistent with their own study and life goals.
- 5. Emphasis on reflection:** Active promotion of self-reflection and personal inquiry in the advising process.
- 6. Collaborative relationship:** The importance of mutual involvement and planning is emphasized.
- 7. Timely advising:** Students are engaged as early as possible. Academic

Advisors will take proactive measures to assist students with greater academic needs.

Operation of Academic Advising at PolyU

At PolyU, each undergraduate student will be paired up with a designated Academic Advisor from their school or department. Students are encouraged to meet with their Academic Advisors for consultation on their programme of study and study plans at least once in a semester.

V. Essentials of Academic Advising

1. **Dimensions of Academic Advising:** According to O'Banion (1994), there are four dimensions of academic advising. These include: a) exploration of life goals; b) exploration of career/educational goals; c) selection of programmes; and d) class scheduling. In particular, academic advising is not simply course selection. How students set their life, career and educational goals would be important consideration for selecting the programme and subject(s) that could facilitate their progress.
2. **Strategies of Academic Advising:** Several strategies are conducive to successful academic advising. These include: a) attempt to have good acquaintance with students; b) explore interests, motivation and academic and personal goals of students; c) have good knowledge about the policies, rules and procedures related to different academic programmes; d) evaluate student motivation; and e) engage students in the process and empower the students.
3. **Departmental Academic Advising plan:** Academic Advisors at the Schools/Departments should follow the departmental academic advising plan as far as possible, particularly with respect to the scope, frequency, confidentiality and documentation of academic advising.
4. **Relationship with the Departmental Undergraduate Secretary:** Academic Advisors at the Schools/Departments are expected to work closely with the School/Departmental Undergraduate Secretary. The School/Departmental Undergraduate Secretary should provide updated information on matters related to the undergraduate programmes and academic advising to Academic Advisors.

For non-academic issues or matters that require more in-depth follow up, Academic Advisors are advised to refer such cases to Counsellors of SAO with consent of the student. In case of doubt, Academic Advisors should consult the Programme Leader or Department Head as early as possible.

5. **Connection to other supporting services:** Academic Advisors should connect students to other support services across campus where appropriate (Details of the student support resources may refer to Appendix 1)
6. **Confidentiality:** The general principle is that personally identifiable information of the student should normally not be provided to a third party without verbal consent and/or written permission of the student.
7. **Quality Assurance of Academic Advising:** Academic Advisors are expected to provide quality academic advising to students. They should meet the training requirements as stipulated in LTC 42/A4 and discuss special cases with Programme Leaders or Department Head as appropriate. Academic Advisors are also required to keep timely and proper academic advising record.
8. OUS will provide training to Academic Advisors, give information on GUR, offer consultation service for student advising, and support the quality assurance of academic advising service.

VI. Roles and Responsibilities of Academic Advisors

The main responsibilities of the Academic Advisor include:

- a) building rapport with students;
- b) being accessible, available and responsive;
- c) helping students clarify their intellectual, professional and personal goals;
- d) helping students develop an appropriate study plan;
- e) alerting students to academic regulations and requirements, particularly those relating to their study (both Major and GUR)
- f) providing early identification of students with special learning needs or signs of learning problems and making necessary referrals;
- g) contacting with students regularly and have at least one face-to-face/online meeting (individually or in small groups) in a semester.
- h) Connect students to university resources.
- i) keep accurate records of the academic advising session¹ via eAcademic or the internal academic advising record keeping system of the Department/School

Accordingly, Academic Advisors should have a clear understanding of:

- i. study pathways;
- ii. discipline-specific requirements;
- iii. General University Requirements (GUR);
- iv. University policies on undergraduate studies; and
- v. opportunities and resources within the University.

¹. According to Folsom (2008), “Advising-session notes create a history of advisors’ interactions with students. Notes enable advisors to recall salient discussions, actions, and decisions from previous student session, and protect both students and advisors documentation of important decisions, actions, and referrals.”

VII. Process of Academic Advising

Before the academic advising session, Academic Advisors are expected to have a clear understanding of students’:

- 1) background and study pathways
- 2) discipline-specific requirements;
- 3) General University Requirements (GUR);
- 4) University policies on undergraduate studies; and
- 5) opportunities and resources within the University.

During the academic advising session, Academic Advisor could:

- 1) start with the casual and positive experiences
- 2) show interests in your students
- 3) explain your role and expectation of meeting
- 4) assess the students' adjustment/ expectation/ learning experience through asking open-ended questions

After the academic advising session, Academic Advisor may follow up with:

- 1) an email to both you and your student(s) with a brief summary of the conversation, the action plan or the advice.
- 2) a referral
- 3) a further discussion with relevant parties e.g., Programme leader

End the process with a timely and proper documentation of the advising meeting (i.e., an advising record)

VIII. Academic Advising Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Through the academic advising, students will be able to:

- understand their curriculum (both Major and GUR) and seek advice and guidance if they face any academic challenges.
- plan their study to realise academic, career and personal goals.
- learn about opportunities, resources and support available on campus to enrich their educational experience and foster their future success.

IX. Roles and Responsibilities of Students in Academic Advising

The academic advising process is an interactive process which students are responsible for their educational choices and decisions. Hence, they are expected to:

- 1) Clarify personal abilities, interests, and goals for academics and life.
- 2) Take an active role to contact and schedule regular meetings with their Academic Advisors each year as required or whenever needed.
- 3) Prepare for advising sessions. Understand and review their academic progress before meeting their Academic Advisor. Study the Programme Requirement Document (PRD).
- 4) Become knowledgeable and adhere to institutional policies, procedures, and requirements.
- 5) Have an open mind and be ready to consider advice given by teachers, Academic Advisors and other staff.
- 6) Read their PolyU e-mails and other important communications from the University and their Academic Advisor.
- 7) Access and use eStudent for academic updates, information updating, registration, and other purposes.
- 8) Accept final responsibility for all decisions made and their graduation requirements.

X. Information for Advising Students on GUR

Information on advising students on GUR (from 2022/23)

1. GUR Framework

For 4-year Degree (4Y) students

Areas	Credits
Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics (AIDA) Requirement	2
Innovation and Entrepreneurship (IE) Requirement	1
Language and Communication Requirements (LCR) English (6 credits) Chinese (3 credits)	9
Leadership Education and Development (LEAD)	3
Service-Learning (SL)	3
Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR) 3 credits from each of the following four cluster areas: Human Nature, Relations and Development (CAR A) Science, Technology and Environment (CAR D) Chinese History and Culture (CAR M) Cultures, Organizations, Societies and Globalisation (CAR N)	12
*Students must also fulfil the Reading and Writing Requirements in English and Chinese	
Healthy Lifestyle (HLS)	Non-credit bearing
Total	30

For Senior Year Intakes (SY) students

Areas	Credits
Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR) 3 credits from CAR (M) “Chinese History and Culture” 3 credits from a specially-designed CAR (A) – English language with English Reading and Writing Requirements Students are required to fulfil the English and Chinese Reading & Writing Requirements	6
Language and Communication Requirements (LCR) (subject to students’ admission background) English (6 credits) Chinese (3 credits)	0-9
Service-Learning (SL)	3
(New) Essential Components of General Education E-modules on: 1. Academic Integrity 2. Artificial Intelligence and Data Analytics 3. Innovation and Entrepreneurship 4. National Education	Non-credit bearing
Total	9 -18

For GUR framework for students admitted in or before 2021/22, please refer to the website of [OUS](#).

2. Study plan for GUR

GUR is one of the graduation requirements. Students should take GUR subjects according to the progression pattern as indicated in the Programme Requirement Document.

Students may make adjustment to the GUR study plan according to their own needs and study goals. Students should consider their study load before deciding on taking a CAR subject or not. Generally speaking, the average study load is 15 credits per semester and the maximum study load is 21 credits per semester.

CAR and SL subjects will be offered in Semester 1, Semester 2 and Summer Term.

Students should discuss their GUR study plan with their Academic Advisors.

3. Subject Registration for GUR

Students will need to register for the following GUR in the subject registration period on eStudent:

- Cluster-Area Requirements (CAR)
- Service-Learning (SL)
- English Language and Communication Requirements (Advanced subjects for 4Y students only)

The rest of the GUR subjects (except HLS) will be pre-assigned by the department. Students should also study the subject description form (SDF) of CAR and SL subjects before registration. Information about GUR could be found in the GUR Subjects Library.

4. Double-fulfillment of DSR/GUR

Students completing a DSR subject with double-fulfilment (i.e., also meeting Cluster Area/ Service-Learning Requirements) would not be required to take a CAR/SL subject which the DSR has already been fulfilled.

However, students must take (an) extra subject(s) to make up the credit requirement. Details of the arrangement could be found in the Programme Requirement Document.

5. Credit Transfer for GUR

4Y students may apply for credit transfer for GUR. Application procedures and details could be found in the Student Handbook.

SY students will not be given further credit transfer for GUR subjects from their previous studies.

6. Waiver for English Reading & Writing (ER/EW) and Chinese Reading & Writing (CR/CW)

Students may apply for a waiver for ER/EW and CR/CW if they can demonstrate the level of accomplishment as stated in “Guidelines for Credit Transfer of General University Requirements Subjects under the 4-Year Undergraduate Curriculum”.

SY students who have been given a waiver for ER/EW will still need to take the specially-designed CAR A subject with embedded English Reading and Writing Requirements.

Application procedures and details could be found in the Student Handbook.

7. Language and Communication Requirements

English LCR subjects will be assigned according to students’ English language proficiency level.

All Chinese-speaking students will be required to take the same Chinese LCR subject. Students may choose to take the Cantonese version of Chinese LCR subject. Students taking the Cantonese version of the subject can take an additional 39-hour non-credit bearing e-Learning course in Putonghua in a voluntary manner.

Non-Chinese speaking students and students whose Chinese standards are at junior secondary level or below (admitted before 2024-25) would need to take another Chinese Language subject for replacement.

Non-Chinese speaking students admitted from 2024/25 might be exempted from the CLCR at the time of admission. They may use a CLCR subject or a free elective to fulfill the credit requirement.

All non-Chinese speaking students could also be exempted from Chinese Reading and Writing Requirements.

8. Healthy Lifestyle (HLS) Programme

- It is a non-credit bearing subject for 4Y students.
- For details and programme structure of HLS, please refer to the website of OUS.
- Students will register for the necessary components of the Programme via POSS. Email for registration will be sent to students by OUS and SAO.
- Students are advised to complete HLS by the end of Year 2.
- Students who have completed a similar subject/course may be exempted from HLS. Please ask them to contact OUS for details.

9. Points to note for CAR

- 4Y students must take one subject from each of the four cluster areas.
- CAR subjects are at Level 1 and Level 2. Some subjects at Level 2 may require students to complete a prerequisite or a foundation subject first.
- Students may take more than one subject from one cluster area. While grades of all attempted CAR subjects will be counted towards students' GPA, the subject with the higher grade (if the student takes more than one subject in one cluster area) will be counted towards the Weighted/Award GPA.
- If a student failed a CAR subject, s/he may retake the same subject or choose another subject from the same cluster area in order to meet the requirements.
- Students retaking the same subject will have the old grade replaced by the new one. Students taking another subject from the same cluster area will not have the grade replaced.

10. Points to note for Service-Learning (SL) subjects

Students may choose a Service-Learning subject from their own department or other departments. (Not applicable to students from departments with double-fulfilment of SL)

Service-Learning is not just volunteer work. It involves course work and assignments.

Some SL subjects may have an offshore service component. Students should note this when they choose such subjects.

4Y students are not allowed to take SL in the first semester of their Year 1 study.

Some SL subjects require students to indicate their interests on eStudent for a pre-selection process. Students should note the details in the briefing sessions organized by SLLO and/or the emails regarding subject registration by AR.

11. Counting of GUR subject grades in students' GPA

Grades of all GUR subjects will be counted towards students' GPA.
The subject level of a GUR subject will affect subject weighting in students' Weighted/Award GPA.

12. Retaking GUR

Students are not allowed to retake a passed GUR subject.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING
RESOURCE MATERIAL**

The Do's of Academic Advising

Attitude

1. Show your interest in students
2. Respect student's pacing
3. Respond in a supportive manner.
4. Be non-judgmental
5. Be patient

Skills

1. Conduct the advising meeting in a relaxed atmosphere.
2. Attend to the responses of the advisee, including voice, gestures and body language.
3. Invite the advisee to respond to your comments and views.
4. Use open-ended questions to help you promote dialogue and create a connection with your students.
5. Use direct leads to explore specific areas (e.g., "what are your thoughts about your study plan?").
6. Demonstrate to the advisee that you are involved by asking clarifying or continuing questions.
7. Encourage the advisee to reflect on the conversations and observations of the advisor.
8. Self-disclosure of the advisor is helpful.

The Don'ts of Academic Advising

1. Keep on talking without listening to the advisee.
2. Not showing empathy (i.e., not putting oneself in the advisee's place).
3. Interrupt when the advisee talks.
4. Not attending to what the advisee says.
5. Focus on the issue rather than the person.
6. Antagonizing the advisee (e.g., destructive criticisms, judgmental attitudes).
7. Jumping to assumptions too quickly (e.g., low academic achievement is a sign of laziness).
8. Over-stereotyping the advisee (e.g., Engineering students have problems in communication).
9. Not aware of one's prejudice.

Guidelines

- [Guidelines on Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs](#)
- [Guidelines for Supporting Students Admitted via Special Talents Admission and Recognition Scheme \(STARS\) \(Except OSRS and SALSA\)](#)
- [Recommendation Scheme \(OSRS\) and Student-Athlete Learning Support and Admission Scheme \(SALSA Scheme\)](#)

Checking Student Advisees' Information

Academic Advisors are encouraged to check their student advisees' background before the advising meeting via **eAcademic and/or Student Lifecycle Management Platform (SLMAP)** so as to give appropriate advice.

Academic Advising Record Keeping

Documentation is required for all advising meetings in which important and/or relevant information is discussed or delivered. Advising meetings including those conducted face-to-face, online, via phone, email, other electronic media. Documentation is a crucial element of quality advising. Keeping proper and timely records of interactions with students is essential for the following reasons:

- Provide an overview of the student's progress and assistance provided
- Refresh Advisor's memory prior to return visit and help when planning next steps
- Increases Advisor's efficiency by focusing on key issues rather than revisiting the all the information
- Communicate information to other University personnel if necessary

Currently, Academic Advisors can keep the advising record via eAcademic or use the [advising record templates](#) designed by OUS. Academic Advisors can also use the format(s) adopted by their home departments if necessary.

General guide for documentation

Documentation should include appropriate details and the date of the interaction, as below:

- Issues raised
- Goals and outcomes of the meeting
- Advice/Recommendations made
- Agreed follow up actions

Academic Advisors should also pay attention to the following:

- Use general and objective language based on facts
- Be as clear, concise, complete, and professional as far as possible
- Avoid using acronyms, abbreviations, and jargon as far as possible
- Do not evaluate, judge or include your personal opinion or assumption
- Consult a supervisor or colleague(s) when you are not sure about what information to include in advising record

PolyU Student Support Services and Resources

General Information

Regarding subject registration, schedule of subject registration, various applications (e.g. minor study, graduation) and students' personal information

Topic	Service/Resource	Responsible Dept/Unit	Website
Updates on Academic Arrangement	Notices to Students (e.g., subject registration, minor selection, application for graduation and etc)	Academic Registry (AR)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/ar/web/en/for-polyu-students/notices-to-students/index.html
Academic Policies and Regulation	Student Handbook (guidelines and regulations)		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/en/ar/students-in-taught-programmes/student-handbook/
Subject Registration/Subject Search	eStudent (study information, timetable, subject search and etc)		https://www38.polyu.edu.hk/eStudent/
Student Personal Record			
Study Information/Reference Checklist			

Academic Information (DSR)

Regarding programme requirements and progression pattern, and information related to academic study such as WIE, secondary major, minor study, credit transfer and academic integrity.

Area	Service/Resource	Responsible Dept/Unit	Website
Curriculum Requirement and Progression Pattern	Programme Requirement Document	Home Department	Check the website/intranet of home department
Work Integrated Education (WIE)	Department's WIE Info	WIE Coordinator	Check the website/intranet of home department
	Careers and Placement Section	Student Affairs Office (SAO)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/cps/
Academic Integrity	Guidelines and online materials on Academic Integrity	Academic Registry (AR)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/ar/academic-integrity/support-and-resources/
Minor Study	List of Minor Study	Minor-offering Department	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/en/ar/students-in-taught-programmes/registration-information/major-minor-study/list-of-minors/
Secondary Major	Information on Secondary Major	Academic Registry (AR)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/ar/students-in-taught-programmes/registration-information/secondary-major/?sc_lang=en
Academic Probation	Student Handbook (Section 6C)	Academic Registry (AR)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/ar/students-in-taught-programmes/student-handbook/#C
Credit Transfer	Student Handbook (Section 5B)		

Learning Support

Various service on campus to support students' learning such as enhancement of language and mathematical skills

Area	Topic	Responsible Dept/Unit	Website
English	Excel@English Scheme	English Learning Centre (ELC)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/elc/independent-learning/ees/
	Writing Assistant Programme		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/elc/independent-learning/wap/
	Speaking Assistant Programme		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/elc/independent-learning/sap/
	Centre for Independent Language Learning (CILL)		https://elc.polyu.edu.hk/CILL/
Chinese	Consultation Service and Chinese Writing Tutorials	Chinese Language Centre (CLC)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/clc/self-learning-unit/consultation-service/
Mathematics	Tutorials and help desk service by Mathematics Learning Support Centre (MLSC)	Department of Applied Mathematics (AMA)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/en/ama/study/mathematics-learning-support-centre/
Past exam papers	Learning Support from Library	Library	https://www.lib.polyu.edu.hk/services/learning-support

Other Learning Activities

Opportunities for students to enhance their learning experience in the University

Area	Service/Resource	Responsible Dept/Unit	Website
Exchange Programmes and Non-local Learning Experience	Academic Exchange	Global Engagement Office (GEO)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/geo/
	International Summer School		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/en/summerschool/
	CAR Subjects in Mainland China	Office of Undergraduate Studies (OUS)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/ous/outbound-opportunities-of-car-subjects/
	Insurance for Students	Finance Office (FO)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/fo/internal/students/insurance-for-students/
Undergraduate Research	Undergraduate Research and Innovation Scheme (URIS)	Graduate School	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/en/gc/ug-research/uris/about-uris/

Student Wellness and Support

Various service on campus to support students of different needs (e.g. emotional, developmental, campus life)

Area	Topic	Responsible Person/ Office	Website
Emotional and Psychological Support	Mental Wellness Clinic	University Health Service (UHS)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/uhs/preventive-care/mental-wellness-clinic/
	Student Counselling Service	Student Affairs Office (SAO)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/counselling-and-wellness-section/student-counselling/counselling/meeting-with-our-counsellors/

Special Educational Needs (SEN)	SEN Support Service	Student Affairs Office (SAO)	https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/student-resources-and-support-section/special-needs-support/campus-resources/
Special Talents	Special Talents Admission and Recognition Scheme (STARS) – SNDAS, SALSA & OSRS*		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/about-sao/contact-us/
Sports Facilities	Sports Facilities Booking System		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/student-resources-and-support-section/facilities/sports-facilities/sports-facilities-and-opening-hours/
Hall Residence	Residential Life		https://www.polyu.edu.hk/sao/student-resources-and-support-section/residential-life/university-managed-accommodations/

** School Nominations Direct Admission Scheme (SNDAS), the Student-Athlete Learning Support and Admission Scheme (SALSA), and the Outstanding Sportsmen Recommendation Scheme (OSRS)*

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