AP Music Theory: Tales & Tips from the Trenches

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Session Overview

- How to develop AP Music Theory course
- Resources for students and teachers
- Strategies for success on the AP Music Theory exam
- Benefits of AP Music Theory to overall music program
Developing an AP Music Theory Course
Things to Consider Before Offering AP Music Theory

- Do you have a fairly healthy music program that provides a viable pool of students for the AP Music Theory course?
- Do you have time to devote to prepping for this college-level class?
- Does your school administration support the Advanced Placement Program?
What are the requirements for AP Music theory?

- AP College Board Requirements
  - AP College Board is responsible for setting curriculum for all AP courses and developing the assessment that will award college credit
  - No requirement for specific degree or training to be an AP teacher
- Complete a course audit and submit a syllabus for approval with AP College Board
  - Detailed chronological review of curriculum to cover in syllabus
  - Title of textbooks used in class (primary resources)
  - Bibliography of resources to support curriculum, including technology resources
  - Teaching strategies for the course
  - Plans for assessment
Course Framework

- Curriculum is comprised of eight units:
  - Unit 1: Music Fundamentals I: Pitch, Major Scales and Key Signatures, Rhythm, Meter and Expressive Elements
  - Unit 2: Music Fundamentals II: Minor Scales and Key Signatures, Melody, Timbre and Texture
  - Unit 3: Music Fundamentals III: Triads and Seventh Chords
  - Unit 4: Harmony and Voice Leading I: Chord Function, Cadence and Phrase
  - Unit 5: Harmony and Voice Leading II: Chord Progressions and Predominant Function
  - Unit 6: Harmony and Voice Leading III: Embellishments, Motives and Melodic Devices
  - Unit 7: Harmony and Voice Leading IV: Secondary Function
  - Unit 8: Modes and Form

- Details on these units can be found here
AP Music Theory Syllabus

- Syllabus is reviewed and approved by AP College Board
- Where to find examples of approved AP Music Theory syllabi
  - Some examples are generic and simply reflect the curriculum, some are aligned to a specific text book
  - You can adopt one of the sample syllabi as the material for your course
- Suggestions on developing your own syllabus
- [College Board Sample Syllabus](#)
How do I implement an AP Theory course?

- Potential to transition and grow a general music theory course to AP Music Theory
- Prerequisites for AP Music Theory
- Suggestions for recruiting and enrolling students in the course
Final Steps

- Develop a clear course description
  - Overview of curriculum
  - Statement about required skills

  Note: A student’s ability to read and write musical notation is fundamental to this course. Additionally, it is also necessary for each student to have acquired at least basic performance skills and musicianship in voice or on an instrument, such as through participation in a CFHS vocal or instrumental ensemble. Students not meeting these criteria must receive permission from the instructor to enroll in the course. This course is strongly recommended for students considering pursuing music studies at the college level.

- Obtain textbooks and supplemental materials as outlined in your approved syllabus
Resources for Students & Teachers

GETTING STARTED

CLASS STRUCTURE FOR SUCCESS

RECOMMENDED MATERIALS
Getting Started - Establishing a Common Starting Point

ADDRESSING VARIOUS STUDENT STARTING POINTS

Student information sheet and skill inventory
Value of a pretest
Quarter 1 ‘rudiments’ experience
Fluency and basic literacy of all notation - ‘summer reading’ expectations

1. I can read treble and bass clef.

2. I can identify key signatures.

3. I can draw key signatures

4. I can draw the circle of fifths.
Getting Started – Aural Skills

Sight-singing
Melodic Dictation
Harmonic Dictation
Getting Started - Organization

Online platform to organize materials
Google classroom
Teacher website
AP classroom
Course Structure

- Purposeful Seating
- Homework
- Written Assessments
- Aural Assessments
- Daily Classroom Activities
We are in Chapter 5 of Tonal Harmony, titled *Principles of Voice Leading*.

- Students enter the room and begin to put answers on the smart board from last night’s homework. We review answers as a class and students check their own work.

- We continue our discussion of motion and basic part writing rules. A new homework assignment (20 questions max) is assigned for homework.

- We sight sing scale patterns and one or two melodies from our sheet of the week. (We are generally focused on one skill at a time – i.e. minor, common patterns, outline of triad, etc.

- We complete one or two dictations emphasizing similar skills.

- We finish with a listening exercise – i.e. scale identification, listen to an excerpt and identify tonality/meter/cadences, etc.
Pacing the Curriculum

- How do you get through all of the material in the course and still have time to prep for the exam?
  - Quarter 1 & 2 (up to December): Rudiments
    - *Alfred’s Essentials of Music Theory* (complete)
    - Supplement to teach cadences, nonharmonic tones, analysis and beginning composition
  - Midterm exam (December) will cover all materials for Chapters 1 & 2 of *Tonal Harmony* (essentially pitch and rhythm)
  - Quarter 3 (up to spring break)
    - Chapters 3 – 17 of *Tonal Harmony* (basically one or two chapters per week)
  - Quarter 4 (post spring break) – NO NEW MATERIAL
    - Daily test prep
    - Daily aural work
Resources – General Information

- **Teoria** – free, includes tutorials on topics and aural exercises
- **MusicTheory.Net** – free, includes tutorials on topics and aural exercises; you can customize an assignment for students and post link
- **Worksheets** – free, includes worksheets and answer keys on numerous theory topics
- **Music Teacher** – worksheets and activities on basic theory concepts; a good resource for the beginning of the year
- **Fundamentals** – a great resource for explanations on a variety of topics
- **Sound Patterns** – more information than you will need for the course, great resource for advancing students
Resources – Musical Examples

- **Theory Examples** – database of musical examples (aural and written) classified by topic (i.e. chord progressions, cadences, nonharmonic tones, etc)
- **Hymns** – database of hymns
- **IMSLP** – endless examples of scores
- **Noteflight**
Resources – Aural Skills

- **Dictation** – great resource for harmonic dictation
- **Earbeater** – excellent website where students can practice identification of intervals, chords and scales
- **Sight Singing** – numerous musical examples, can adjust difficulty
- **Sight Reading Factory** – paid subscription; can generate sight singing exercises based on criteria you enter
Resources – General Classroom Tools

- Kahoot
- Quizlet
Resources – Online Communities

- AP College Board - Music Theory – online forum for current teachers with approved syllabus
- Facebook group – I Teach AP Music Theory
Strategies for Success on the AP Music Theory Exam

TEST STRUCTURE

APPROACHING FREE RESPONSE QUESTIONS
# Exam Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Question Type</th>
<th>Number of Questions</th>
<th>Exam Weighting</th>
<th>Timing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td><strong>Part A</strong>: Multiple-choice questions: Aural</td>
<td>41–43</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>approx. 45 minutes (timed recording with repetitions and pauses)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part B</strong>: Multiple-choice questions: Nonaural</td>
<td>32–34</td>
<td></td>
<td>35 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td><strong>Part A</strong>: Free-response questions</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 1: Melodic dictation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 2: Melodic dictation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>approx. 25 minutes (timed recording with repetitions and pauses)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 3: Harmonic dictation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 4: Harmonic dictation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Question 5: Part-writing from figured bass</td>
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<td>Question 6: Part-writing from Roman numerals</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions 7: Harmonization of a melody</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45 minutes total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Part B</strong>: Sight-singing questions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>approx. 10 minutes (timed recording with repetitions and pauses)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Facts About the AP Exam

According to data from the 2018/2019 AP exams:

- **Passage Rate**
  - 64.1% of students who took the exam earned a 3 or higher on the nonaural portion of the exam
  - 63.4% of students who took the exam earned a 3 or higher on the aural portion of the exam
  - 63.7% of students who took the exam earned a 3 or higher overall on the exam

- **Earning a 5**
  - 20.3% of students who took the exam earned a 5 on the nonaural portion of the exam
  - 21.5% of students who took the exam earned a 5 aural portion of the exam
  - 21.2% of students who took the exam earned a 5 overall on the exam

When comparing this data to that of other AP exams, it is neither the most difficult exams to pass nor the easiest to pass.
Strategies for Success

- Timing is everything
  - Note reading (all clefs)
  - Key signatures (identify and draw, all clefs)
  - Intervals (all qualities)
  - Triads and seventh chords (all qualities and inversions)

- Words have meaning
  - Vocabulary lists to utilize
  - Note cards with a purpose
Questions 38-42 are based on an excerpt for concert band. The first section of the excerpt, which consists of the introduction and first main section, will be played once; then the second section will be played twice. Finally, the entire excerpt will be played once. Before listening to the first section, please read Questions 38-40.

38. The texture of the introduction is best described as
   (A) monophony
   (B) homophony
   (C) imitative polyphony
   (D) nonimitative polyphony

39. The tempo is best described as
   (A) largo
   (B) andante
   (C) allegro
   (D) prestissimo

40. In the repeat of the main section, the performance features which of the following compositional devices?
   (A) Ostinato
   (B) Countermelody
   (C) Pedal point
   (D) Canonic imitation

41. The second section begins with an ascending melody that is heard twice. The melody ascends, respectively, to scale degrees
   (A) 1 and 2
   (B) 4 and 5
   (C) 5 and 6
   (D) 7 and 1

42. Over the course of the second section, the meter
   (A) changes from simple to compound
   (B) changes from compound to simple
   (C) remains simple throughout
   (D) remains compound throughout

Now listen to the second section for the first time and answer Questions 41-42. 

The second section will now be played again.

Now listen to the entire excerpt and check your answers to Questions 38-42.
Multiple Choice - Nonaural
Sample Questions

45. In measure 45, the boxed interval between the violin and viola pitches is a
   (A) minor third
   (B) major third
   (C) perfect fourth
   (D) perfect fifth

46. The phrase structure of measures 42-47 can best be described as a
   (A) parallel period
   (B) double period
   (C) single phrase with cadential extension
   (D) single phrase with sequential repetition

47. At measures 48-49, there is a temporary tonicization of
   (A) D minor
   (B) G minor
   (C) A major
   (D) E major

48. In measures 48-51, which of the following compositional devices is used in the first violin part?
   (A) Disjunct motion
   (B) Literal repetition
   (C) Melodic inversion
   (D) Melodic sequence

49. The nonchord tone circled on the downbeat of measure 51 is
   (A) a suspension
   (B) an anticipation
   (C) an appoggiatura
   (D) an accented passing tone

50. The excerpt ends with which type of cadence?
   (A) Half
   (B) Plagal
   (C) Perfect authentic
   (D) Imperfect authentic
Strategies for Melodic Dictation

1. Don’t listen to directions.
2. Set up the problem.
   1. Counting System
   2. Major/minor
   3. Chord List
   4. Predict cadences

Answer questions 1–7 in the space provided. If you choose to use the facing pages of manuscript paper for scratch work, be sure to save time for writing your final answer in the staves provided directly below each question. If you need to rewrite your answer to any question, use the facing page of music manuscript paper and indicate on the page with the question that your answer is on the facing page.

Questions 1-2

For each of these questions, you are to note on the staves provided the correct pitch and rhythm of a short melody that you will hear. Make sure that any accidentals you use are appropriate for the key signature provided. In each case, the pulse will be established before the first playing of the melody.

**Question 1.** The melody will be played three times. There will be a pause of 30 seconds after the first playing and a one-minute pause after each subsequent playing. The melody you will hear uses all four of the measures provided below and contains no rests. The melody will be played on a cello.

The pitch of the first note has been provided. Be sure to note the rhythm of that note. Now listen to the melody for the first time and begin working.

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Moderato
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The melody for Question 1 will now be played a second time.

The melody for Question 1 will now be played a final time.
Scoring Guidelines for Melodic Dictation

0–9 points
Always begin with the regular scoring guide. Try an alternate scoring guide only if necessary. (See I.D.)

I. Regular Scoring Guide
A. Award 1 point for each segment correct in both pitch and rhythm.
   • A “segment” is any half measure of the original melody, even if occurring over a bar line or beginning on a metrically weak pulse. (In common time or cut time, a segment is any set of two contiguous quarter-note beats; in compound meter, a segment is any set of three contiguous eighth-note beats.)
   • To receive credit, a segment must not overlap with any other segment receiving credit.
   • Do not subdivide a note to identify a segment.
   • To receive credit, a segment may be metrically shifted from its original position.
   • Give no credit for the final half note if notation of pitches continues thereafter.
B. If at least one segment is correct in pitch and rhythm, add 1 point to the total. For example, a response that is correct in all aspects receives a score of 8 + 1, or 9. Exception: Do not award a 9 unless all measures have the correct number of beats. Award an 8 (i.e., do not award the extra point) to an otherwise perfect response that does not use bar lines correctly.
C. Record any score of 4 or higher and ignore the alternate scoring guides.
D. If after applying I.A. and I.B., the score is less than 4, try an alternate scoring guide.

II. Alternate Scoring Guides (Do not add the extra point to the total.)
A. Award 1¼ point per segment of correct pitches. (Maximum of 4 points)
   OR
B. Award ¼ point per segment of correct rhythm. (Maximum of 2 points)

III. Rounding Fractional Scores
A. Half point totals round down with one exception: A total score of 1½ rounds up to 2.
B. Quarter points should be rounded to the closest integer.

IV. Scores with Additional Meaning
1. This score may also be used for a response that does not have one segment correct in both pitch and rhythm but has two or more redeeming qualities. (Do not add the extra point.)
2. This score is used for a response that demonstrates an attempt to answer the question but has no redeeming qualities (or only one) or a response that is off-topic or irrelevant.
   — The dash is reserved for blank responses.

V. Scoring Notes
A. The following notations will not receive credit: enharmonic equivalents; octave transpositions; dots before the notehead; accidentals after the notehead.
B. If you use an alternate scoring guide, do not add the extra point to the total.
C. If you try both regular and alternate scoring guides, record the higher of the scores if there is a difference.
D. Scores from one guide may not be combined with those from another guide.
Strategies for Harmonic Dictation

1. Don’t listen to directions.

2. Set up the problem.
   1. Major/minor
   2. Chord List
   3. Predict cadences

Question 4. Before listening to the first playing, please look at the staff below. Notice that there are nine chords in the progression; the soprano and bass notes and the Roman numeral of the first chord are given.

Remember to notate only the soprano and bass voices and to write, in every blank, the numerals indicating the chords and their inversions.

Now listen to the progression for the first time and begin working.

The progression for Question 4 will now be played a second time.

The progression for Question 4 will now be played a third time.

The progression for Question 4 will now be played a final time.
Scoring Guidelines for FRQ

Harmonic Dictation

Question 4

0–24 points

I. Pitches (16 points)
   A. Award 1 point for each correctly notated pitch. Do not consider duration. (An accidental placed after the notehead is not considered correct notation.)
   B. Award full credit for octave transpositions of the correct bass pitch. (Octave transpositions of soprano pitches are not allowed.)
   C. No enharmonic equivalents are allowed.

II. Chord Symbols (8 points)
   A. Award 1 point for each chord symbol correct in both Roman and Arabic numerals.
   B. Award ½ point for each correct Roman numeral that has incorrect or missing Arabic numerals.
   C. Accept the correct Roman numeral regardless of its case.
   D. Award no credit if an accidental is placed before a Roman numeral.
   E. Accept any symbol that means “of” or “applied” at Chord Seven (e.g., vii°7/V, [vii°7], vii°7→V, vii°7 of V, etc.).

III. Rounding Fractional Scores
    Half-point totals round up with one exception: A total score of 23½ rounds down to 23.

IV. Scores with Additional Meaning
   0 This score is used for a response that represents an unsuccessful attempt to answer the question or a response that is off topic or irrelevant.
   — The dash is reserved for blank responses.
Strategies for Part Writing

1. Don’t listen to directions.
2. Set up the problem.
   1. Chord List
   2. Create bass line according to figured bass
   3. Create melody accordingly
   4. Add inner voices
   5. Check your work!

Write the following progression in four voices, following eighteenth-century voice-leading procedures. Continue logically from the spacing of the first chord. Do not add embellishments unless indicated by the Roman and Arabic numerals. Use only quarter and half notes.

\[ Ab: I \quad vii^{06} \quad I^6 \quad V_{\frac{6}{4}}/IV \quad IV \quad V^7 \quad I \]
Scoring Guidelines for FRQ

Voice leading

0–16 points

I. Chord Spelling (6 points, 1 point per chord)
   A. Award 1 point for each chord that correctly realizes the given chord symbols.
      1. The chord must be spelled correctly and in the proper inversion (i.e., the bass note must be correct). An incorrect accidental on the wrong side of the notehead will be considered a misspelling.
      2. The fifth (but not the third) may be omitted from any root-position triad.
      3. The fifth (but not the third or seventh) may be omitted from a root-position seventh chord.
      4. All inverted triads and inverted seventh chords must be complete.
      5. All triads must contain at least three voices.
      6. All seventh chords must contain at least four voices.
   B. Award 0 points for a chord that breaks one or more of the conditions of I.A.
      Note: Award 0 points for voice leading into and out of these chords.
   C. Award ½ point for a correctly realized chord that has exactly one of the following errors:
      1. A doubled leading tone, a doubled chordal seventh, or incorrect doubling of a 7 chord.
      2. More than one octave between adjacent upper parts.
   D. Award 0 points for a correctly realized chord that has:
      1. More than one error listed in I.C. (e.g., doubled leading tone and spacing error, or two spacing errors), or
      2. The correct accidental on the wrong side of a notehead. (For an incorrect accidental on the wrong side of a notehead, see I.A.1.)
      However, do check the voice leading into and out of these chords.

II. Voice Leading (12 points)
   A. In general, award 2 points for acceptable voice leading between two correctly realized chords.
      N.B.: This includes the voice leading from the given chord to the second chord.
   B. If all chords are correctly realized, and there are no voice-leading errors (as described in II.C. and II.D.), but the response seems to have excessive leaps within the three upper voices:
      1. Award 12 points for voice leading if there are five or fewer leaps in the three upper voices combined.
      2. Award 11 points for voice leading if there are more than five leaps in the three upper voices combined.
Strategies for Part Writing

1. Don’t listen to directions.
2. Set up the problem.
   1. Chord List
   2. Study the contour of the melody.
   3. Create cadences
   4. Complete the development of the bass line

Complete the bass line for the melody below, following eighteenth-century voice-leading procedures. Below the bass line, write the Roman and Arabic numerals that indicate the harmonies and inversions implied by the soprano and bass.

Observe the following:

A. Keep the portion you compose consistent with the first phrase.
   1. Write an appropriate cadence at each phrase ending.
   2. Give melodic interest to the bass line. (Nonharmonic tones, if included, should be limited to unaccented passing and neighbor tones.)
   3. Vary the motion of the bass line in relation to the soprano.
   4. Use mostly quarter notes. (Where appropriate, note values ranging from half notes to eighth notes may be used.)

B. Do not notate alto and tenor lines.
Strategies for Sight Singing

1. Don't listen to directions.
2. Set up the problem.
   1. Determine the key.
   2. Write in solfege.
   3. Check your counts.
   4. Sing through the melody.
   5. Sing through the melody again.

Questions 1 and 2

Assignment: For each of the two given melodies, sing the pitches in accurate rhythm and with a steady tempo.

Procedure: For each melody, you will have 75 seconds to practice and 30 seconds to perform the melody. You will hear the starting pitch for each melody at the beginning of the 75-second practice period. After the end of the practice period, you will have 30 seconds to perform the melody. A recorded announcement will alert you to the end of each practice and performance period. Directions on the recording will assist you in operating the recorder.

Your performance:

a) You may sing note names (C-D-E), syllable names (do-re-mi), scale-degree numbers (1-2-3), or a neutral syllable (for example, la-ta-ta).

b) Even though you will hear the starting pitch of the printed melody, you may transpose the melody to a key that is comfortable.

c) You should use some of the practice time to perform out loud. You may write on the music if you wish.

d) You may not use any device (for example, a metronome or a musical instrument) to assist you in your practice or performance.

e) You will be evaluated on rhythmic accuracy, pitch accuracy (relative to tonic), and continuity (maintaining a steady tempo). You may start over if you need to, but there will be a deduction from your score. You will not be evaluated on the quality of your singing voice.
Strategies for Sight Singing

Examples

**Question 1.** Look over the melody and begin practicing. You have 75 seconds to practice. This is the starting pitch of the printed melody.

Moderato

**Question 2.** Look over the melody and begin practicing. You have 75 seconds to practice. This is the starting pitch of the printed melody.

Moderato
Strategies for Sight Singing

Scoring

0–9 points

Use EITHER the regular scoring guide OR an alternate scoring guide, whichever gives the higher score.

I. Regular Scoring Guide

A. Score 1 point for each segment (i.e., each half-measure) correct in pitch, rhythm, and tempo (0–8).

B. If at least one segment is correct using LA, add 1 point for a complete response that has no hesitations or restarts (= overall flow; the “flow” point).

C. Record any score of 4 or higher and move to the next response.

D. If the score is less than 4, try an alternate scoring guide.

II. Alternate Scoring Guides (N.B.: Do NOT award the “flow” point in the alternate scoring guide.)

A. If a student sings many of the pitches correctly but is consistently inaccurate in rhythm, you may determine holistically to award up to 4 points for pitch.

OR

B. If a student is accurate or nearly accurate with respect to rhythm but is consistently inaccurate in pitches, you may determine holistically to award up to 2 points for rhythm.

III. Scores with Additional Meaning

1 This score may be given to a response that has two or more redeeming qualities (e.g., retention of the tonic pitch and singing the melody with a correct contour; persistence alone is not a redeeming quality).

0 This score is used for a response that has no redeeming qualities (or only one) or a response that is off-topic or irrelevant.

NR This score (no response) is used for blank responses (including spoken AP number but no response).

Scoring Notes:

A. If a student restarts, score the last complete response, but do not award the “flow” point.

B. Score from the tonic established by the student. However, credit any exactly transposed segment approached by the correct interval. In other words, any segment entered correctly (by the correct interval) is eligible for the point.
Benefits of AP Music Theory

HOW AP MUSIC THEORY CAN IMPACT YOUR MUSIC PROGRAM
Impact on Performance Ensembles

- Deeper understanding of musical concepts to create strong musical leaders in all ensembles
- Students become interested in continuing in their study of music theory and can potentially assist with tasks such as:
  - Accurately write out a part independently
  - Transpose a part from one instrument to another
  - Tackle small arranging or part writing projects independently
  - Create original compositions
Impact on Climate and Culture

- Organize a ‘composition club’ for students
  - Student compositions performed by one another and for one another
  - Develop ideas for arrangements or compositions
  - Create pieces to enter in student compositions competitions
- Development of Tri-M in our building
- Music is a real discipline
Impact on Students

- Ability to develop critical thinking skills
- Opportunity to practice perseverance
- Deeper interest and appreciation for music
Top Ten Tips

- Use the AP College Board website
- Find a group of AP teachers in your building to collaborate with
- Consider a rudiments portion of the course
- Sing and dictate as often as possible
- Analyze, harmonize and compose as much as possible
- Timing is everything
- Create assessments that imitate AP style questions
- Grade assessments according to AP scoring guidelines
- Divorce yourself from grades and student scores – progress, not perfection
- Know the test
Wrap Up

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