

Writing Tool Use and Writing Self-Efficacy among EFL Undergraduate Students: A Preliminary Correlational Study

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received 03/06/26 Revised 17/07/26 Accepted 27/07/26	Writing is among the most cognitively demanding skills in English language learning, and self-efficacy has consistently been identified as one of its principal affective determinants. The rapid proliferation of digital writing tools raises the question of how their use relates to learners' confidence in composing academic texts. This study examined the relationship between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy among undergraduate students of an English Language Education study programme, and additionally described the participants' descriptive writing performance. A correlational design was employed. Nine students who had completed an advanced writing course and reported prior experience with writing tools participated voluntarily through self-selection sampling. Data were collected through a ten-item questionnaire adapted from Khosravi et al. (2017), which demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .712$), and a descriptive writing test scored with an analytic rubric covering identification, description, language features, vocabulary, and mechanics. Pearson product-moment correlation revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy ($r = .778$, $p = .013$, $n = 9$). Writing performance was uneven: 55.56% of the participants were categorised as good to average and 44.44% as fair to poor, with mechanics emerging as the weakest indicator (88.89% fair to poor) despite the fact that two-thirds of the participants reported using an automated grammar checker. The findings suggest that writing tools may support learners' confidence without automatically translating into textual accuracy. Given the small, self-selected sample, the results are exploratory and warrant replication.
Keywords: descriptive writing; EFL learners; self-efficacy; writing ability; writing tools	
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I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a multifaceted skill that demands systematic strategy and sustained confidence on the part of the learner. Rao (2017) argues that writing enables students to explore innovative techniques for articulating their thoughts and ideas in a foreign language.

Proficiency in writing is difficult to attain without a comprehensive command of its constituent elements—vocabulary, grammar, organisation, and mechanics—which are intricately interconnected. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), these demands are compounded by affective barriers that are frequently reported in the literature but less frequently examined in relation to the digital resources learners now routinely employ.

Empirical evidence consistently identifies affective factors as a significant obstacle in EFL writing. Fareed et al. (2016) investigated the writing problems of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners and reported that a lack of self-confidence, together with writing anxiety, constituted one of the principal factors hindering the development of writing ability. Similarly, Sasmita and Setyowati (2021) identified four primary difficulties experienced by EFL students at the Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang: writer's block, lack of self-confidence, difficulty in conveying ideas effectively, and fear of making errors. Both studies converge on the observation that cognitive and affective difficulties in writing are mutually reinforcing: learners who struggle to generate or organise ideas lose confidence, and diminished confidence in turn constrains their willingness to engage with writing tasks.

Concurrently, a wide range of digital writing tools has become available to student writers, permitting them to select the resources they judge most appropriate for a given task. Because these tools differ in function—translation, grammatical feedback, and automated paraphrasing—their use may influence writing development and learners' confidence in divergent, and not necessarily positive, ways. Marzuki et al. (2023) reported that the integration of artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted writing resources enhanced the learning experience and was associated with improved academic performance, and that teachers perceived such tools as facilitating clearer, better organised, and more logically connected written compositions. Conversely, Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) and Prentice and Kinden (2018) have documented the risk that uncritical reliance on automated paraphrasing produces incoherent output and raises questions of academic integrity.

Despite the growing body of research on writing tools and on writing self-efficacy considered separately, comparatively few studies have examined the two constructs jointly within a single Indonesian EFL undergraduate setting, and fewer still have combined a self-report measure of confidence with an independent assessment of actual writing performance. Studies that rely exclusively on self-report cannot establish whether reported confidence corresponds to demonstrated competence, yet it is precisely this correspondence—or its absence—that carries the clearest implications for classroom practice. The present study addresses that gap by relating students' reported use of writing tools to their writing self-efficacy, while simultaneously documenting their performance on a descriptive writing task. The study is guided by the following research questions:

What is the relationship between the use of writing tools and the writing self-efficacy of students in the English Language Education study programme at Lambung Mangkurat University?

How is the descriptive writing performance of these students distributed across the indicators of identification, description, language features, vocabulary, and mechanics?

Two hypotheses were formulated in relation to the first research question. The null hypothesis (H_0) states that there is no significant relationship between the use of writing tools and students' writing self-efficacy. The alternative hypothesis (H_a)

states that there is a significant relationship between the use of writing tools and students' writing self-efficacy.

Writing Tools

Writing tools vary according to learners' needs. Grammar checkers and paraphrasing applications are the resources most frequently employed by student writers. Rogerson and McCarthy (2017) describe automated paraphrasing tools as web-based applications that use machine translation to rewrite a text while ostensibly preserving its original meaning, including across languages. Grammar checkers, often referred to as automated grammatical feedback systems, are useful for detecting linguistic errors and for supplying immediate, automated feedback (Yang, 2018).

Following Roe et al. (2023), writing support tools may be classified into three principal categories. Machine translators, such as Google Translate and DeepL, convert content between languages and are essential for the global circulation of knowledge. Digital writing assistants, such as Grammarly and ChatGPT, comprise software applications operating within browsers or on various devices that employ artificial intelligence to support the composing process. Automated paraphrasing tools, such as QuillBot and WordTune, function by replacing words and phrases with lexical items of similar meaning (Prentice & Kinden, 2018).

The pedagogical value of these tools is not uncontested. Machine translation may increase the risk of misunderstanding and compromise originality if applied uncritically. Nevertheless, Mundt and Groves (2016) argue that technological assistance in academic tasks is now widely accepted and advance two recommendations: that universities formulate clearly defined policies regulating the appropriate use of automated language-conversion applications, and that a structured research programme be established to examine how learners actually interact with these resources.

With respect to digital writing assistants, O'Neill and Russell (2019) found that Grammarly may serve as a source of guidance for learners in refining linguistic accuracy, strengthening their belief in their own capabilities, and promoting self-directed revision throughout the composing process. Beyond linguistic accuracy, Grammarly has been reported to assist users in developing more effective written communication by identifying word-level errors and proposing alternative sentence constructions (Barro, 2020).

Automated paraphrasing tools are typically operated by entering an existing text into an online application, which generates a modified version through lexical substitution. Excessive or inappropriate substitution, however, can produce incoherent output lacking clarity and readability (Rogerson & McCarthy, 2017). Learners who employ such tools therefore cannot accept the resulting text uncritically, since the output may convey a meaning substantially divergent from the writer's intention.

Writing Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy, grounded in Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, refers to an individual's judgement of their own capability to organise and execute the courses of action required to attain designated levels of performance. Waddington (2023) similarly characterises self-efficacy as an individual's assessment of their capability to carry out a given activity within a specified setting. Crutzen and Peters (2022) emphasise that the

construct concerns individuals' confidence in their capability to accomplish designated activities under specific situational demands rather than the skills they objectively possess. Self-efficacy is therefore defined not by the resources a person holds but by their belief in what can be achieved with those resources.

Leeming (2017) observes that self-efficacy develops when learners perceive themselves as succeeding in performing a skill or task, and that such beliefs are domain- and context-specific rather than universally applicable. Consistent with Bandura's framework, these beliefs may be strengthened through mastery experiences, vicarious learning from the successes of others, verbal persuasion, and the interpretation of physiological and affective states. Khosravi et al. (2017) reported a positive and significant relationship between Iranian EFL learners' self-efficacy and their use of writing strategies, finding that learners with stronger self-efficacy beliefs deployed a wider repertoire of strategies. Their study further identified a mutually reinforcing relationship between self-efficacy and writing performance, whereby increased confidence contributed to improved performance, which in turn strengthened self-efficacy beliefs.

Within social cognitive theory, self-efficacy reflects the interaction of personal, behavioural, and environmental determinants of learning. As a personal factor it requires continuous development by learners themselves, although teachers contribute substantially to strengthening it through instructional support. Its importance lies in its effect on skill development: individuals with low confidence in their capabilities are more vulnerable to negative self-expectations that may adversely affect achievement (Zivlak & Stojanac, 2019). Within higher education specifically, Mitchell et al. (2023) conclude that writing self-efficacy functions as a motivational construct amenable to improvement through deliberate instructional scaffolding.

Writing Ability and Descriptive Text

Cheung (2016) identifies writing as one of the four essential skills in English language learning, alongside speaking, reading, and listening. Aryanika (2016) explains that writing involves not only the recursive process of discovering meaning but also the mastery of component skills including vocabulary, grammar, syntax, mechanics, coherence, and cohesion. Kim and Schatschneider (2016) add that the production of a well-formed text requires planning, problem-solving, the deployment of working and long-term memory, and relevant domain knowledge.

In the case of descriptive text, Jayanti (2019) specifies five indicators of a well-constructed composition: the ability to state a clear identification; the ability to elaborate a detailed description; the appropriate use of language features, particularly the simple present tense, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs; the deployment of an adequate and precise vocabulary range; and control of mechanics, comprising punctuation, capitalisation, and spelling. Purnamasari et al. (2021) further note that the description component should convey information related to the topic in sufficient detail to enable readers to form a clear mental representation of the entity described. Afifuddin (2016) defines mechanics as the accurate use of punctuation, capitalisation, and spelling in a text. These five indicators constituted the analytic framework for scoring in the present study.

II. METHODS

Research Design

A quantitative correlational design was employed to examine the relationship between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy, complemented by descriptive analysis of participants' writing performance. The design permits the identification of association between variables but does not support causal inference.

Participants

The target population comprised students of the English Language Education study programme, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Lambung Mangkurat University. Participants were recruited through self-selection (volunteer) sampling: an invitation containing a link to a Google Form was distributed via the study programme's WhatsApp group. Two inclusion criteria were applied: (a) completion of the Advanced Writing course, and (b) prior experience of using at least one digital writing tool. Nine students met these criteria and consented to participate, comprising two male and seven female students. Participation was entirely voluntary and unremunerated.

Instruments

Two instruments were used. First, a ten-item questionnaire adapted from Khosravi et al. (2017) measured students' writing self-efficacy beliefs and their use of writing tools, with responses recorded on a four-point Likert scale (Bhandari & Nikolopoulou, 2020). Items were adapted to the Indonesian undergraduate context and reviewed by two lecturers in English language education prior to administration. Internal consistency was examined through Cronbach's alpha.

Second, a writing test required participants to compose a descriptive text on the topic of an animal, administered through Google Forms. Compositions were scored with the analytic rubric developed by Jayanti (2019), which comprises five indicators—identification, description, language features, vocabulary, and mechanics—each rated on a four-point scale. Scores were interpreted using the following intervals: 3.51–4.00 (excellent to very good), 2.51–3.50 (good to average), 1.51–2.50 (fair to poor), and 1.00–1.50 (very poor).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected during July–December 2025. Questionnaire responses and written texts were exported from Google Forms and analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23. Descriptive statistics were computed for both variables. Because the sample was small, the assumption of normality was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test prior to the correlational analysis. The relationship between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy was then examined using the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient, with the level of significance set at $\alpha = .05$. Writing test scores were analysed descriptively and reported as frequencies and percentages for each indicator.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and provided consent before completing the instruments. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout: personal identifiers were removed at the point of data entry, and extracts from participants'

writing are reported without attribution. Participants were free to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Reliability of the Instrument

Reliability analysis of the ten-item questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .712 (Table 1), which exceeds the conventional threshold of .70 and indicates acceptable internal consistency. The instrument was therefore deemed adequate for use in this study.

Table 1. Reliability of the questionnaire

Statistic	Value
Cronbach's alpha	.712
Number of items	10

Writing Tools Reported by Participants

All nine participants reported using at least one writing tool. Four participants (44.44%) reported using a single tool, three (33.33%) reported two, and two (22.22%) reported three. QuillBot was the most frequently reported tool, named by seven participants (77.78%), followed by Grammarly, named by six (66.67%). ChatGPT, Paraphraser.io, and DeepL were each reported by a single participant. The individual and aggregate patterns are presented in Tables 2 and 3 respectively.

Table 2. Writing tools reported by individual participants

Participant	Writing tools reported	Number of tools
P1	Grammarly, QuillBot	2
P2	Grammarly, ChatGPT	2
P3	QuillBot	1
P4	Grammarly, QuillBot, Paraphraser.io	3
P5	Grammarly, DeepL, QuillBot	3
P6	QuillBot	1
P7	Grammarly	1
P8	QuillBot	1
P9	Grammarly, QuillBot	2

Table 3. Frequency of writing tools by functional category (n = 9)

Writing tool	Functional category	f	%
QuillBot	Automated paraphrasing tool	7	77.78
Grammarly	Digital writing assistant	6	66.67
ChatGPT	Digital writing assistant	1	11.11
Paraphraser.io	Automated paraphrasing tool	1	11.11

Writing tool	Functional category	f	%
DeepL	Machine translator	1	11.11

Note. Percentages exceed 100 because participants could report more than one tool. Functional categories follow Roe et al. (2023).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for the two questionnaire variables are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for writing tool use and writing self-efficacy (n = 9)

Variable	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Writing tool use	3.10	0.61	3.06	3.10
Writing self-efficacy	3.06	0.54	3.06	3.10

Overall Writing Performance

Table 5 presents the distribution of participants' overall descriptive writing scores. Five of the nine participants (55.56%) were categorised as good to average, and four (44.44%) as fair to poor. No participant reached the excellent-to-very-good category, and none fell into the very poor category. Overall writing performance was therefore moderate, with the majority of participants demonstrating satisfactory but improvable performance and none demonstrating mastery.

Table 5. Distribution of overall writing ability scores

Score interval	Category	f	%
3.51–4.00	Excellent to very good	0	0.00
2.51–3.50	Good to average	5	55.56
1.51–2.50	Fair to poor	4	44.44
1.00–1.50	Very poor	0	0.00
Total		9	100.00

Performance by Indicator

Table 6 summarises performance across the five rubric indicators. Identification was the strongest indicator, with eight participants (88.89%) categorised as good to average. Vocabulary followed, with seven participants (77.78%) in the good-to-average category, then description (six participants, 66.67%) and language features (five participants, 55.56%). Mechanics was by a substantial margin the weakest indicator: only one participant (11.11%) achieved a good-to-average score, while eight (88.89%) were categorised as fair to poor.

Table 6. Distribution of scores across the five writing indicators (n = 9)

Indicator	Good to average f (%)	Fair to poor f (%)
Identification	8 (88.89)	1 (11.11)
Description	6 (66.67)	3 (33.33)
Language features	5 (55.56)	4 (44.44)
Vocabulary	7 (77.78)	2 (22.22)
Mechanics	1 (11.11)	8 (88.89)

Note. No participant was categorised as excellent to very good or as very poor on any indicator.

Correlation between Writing Tool Use and Writing Self-Efficacy

Pearson product-moment correlation indicated a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy, $r = .778$, $p = .013$, $n = 9$ (Table 7). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Participants who reported more extensive or more confident use of writing tools also reported higher levels of writing self-efficacy. It should be noted that this coefficient describes the association between two self-reported variables; the relationship between either variable and measured writing performance was not tested statistically, owing to the size of the sample.

Table 7. Pearson correlation between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy

Statistic	Value
Pearson correlation (r)	.778*
Sig. (2-tailed)	.013
Sum of squares and cross-products	14.000
Covariance	1.750
n	9

Note. * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

Descriptive Writing Performance

The writing tools reported by participant's map onto the three functional categories identified in the literature. QuillBot, reported by seven of the nine participants, is an automated paraphrasing tool; Kurniati and Fithriani (2022) found that it contributed to the development of students' paraphrasing competence, a capacity central to academic writing. Grammarly, reported by six participants, functions primarily as a grammar checker and proofreading aid; Tambunan et al. (2022) found that it assisted students in improving grammatical accuracy and punctuation. DeepL and Paraphraser.io serve translation and paraphrasing functions respectively, while ChatGPT was used principally for idea generation and topic development. The predominance of paraphrasing and proofreading tools over machine translation suggests that these participants approached the tools primarily as instruments of textual refinement rather than of composition.

Despite this range of support, participants' writing performance was uneven. The finding that only five of nine participants achieved a good-to-average overall score, with none reaching the highest category, indicates that access to writing tools does not in itself

guarantee textual quality. Examination of the indicator-level results clarifies where the difficulties lay.

With respect to identification, Jayanti (2019) defines the component as the specification of the event, person, or object that constitutes the focus of the description. Eight participants stated their subject clearly. The single participant categorised as fair to poor opened with a generalised statement about animals as a class—“Just like human, animals are fascinating creature who are roaming the earth with each of their own purpose in life. From the deep bottom of the sea to the highest of mountain, they live and inhabit mostly every ecosystem on this planet”—without specifying which animal would be described. The absence of a defined referent leaves the reader without an interpretive anchor for the remainder of the text.

With respect to description, Purnamasari et al. (2021) note that this component should elaborate the qualities, properties, and distinguishing features of the chosen subject in sufficient detail. Three participants were categorised as fair to poor. The participant with the unclear identification also produced an underdeveloped description, illustrating the dependence of elaboration on a defined subject. Two further participants offered only one or two propositions about their subject: one wrote, “My cat is very cute. I often play with it after school”, supplying neither physical attributes nor behavioural detail, and leaving basic information such as the animal’s appearance unspecified.

With respect to language features, descriptive texts conventionally employ the simple present tense to convey stable, factual information, together with adjectives that specify the attributes of nouns and adverbs that supply circumstantial detail (Jayanti, 2019). Four participants were categorised as fair to poor. One participant wrote, “I have a cat in my home. It’s cute when we touch its fur. It has 3 colors on its body. It’s white, black, and orange. It is like eating whiskas.” The final clause conflates the copular construction with the lexical verb like, producing a structure that both violates the grammar of the simple present and obscures the intended meaning.

With respect to vocabulary, Jayanti (2019) argues that lexical knowledge constitutes a core element of language proficiency, and that a restricted repertoire impedes the accurate and effective expression of ideas. Two participants were categorised as fair to poor. One wrote, “I like cat. Cat always has been cute and beautifull. Many times that i have seen cat, i always say hi to them. But i’m afraid to hold cat in my arm”, in which lexical choice is repetitive and the absence of determiners and plural marking further restricts precision. The most striking finding concerns mechanics, where eight of the nine participants were categorised as fair to poor. Recurrent errors included the failure to capitalise the first-person pronoun (“i always say hi to them”), misspelling (“beautifull”), and the misuse of punctuation in linking or separating clauses. This result is noteworthy precisely because two-thirds of the participants reported using Grammarly, a tool designed to detect errors of exactly this type, and because mechanics is the indicator most amenable to automated correction. Two interpretations merit consideration. First, participants may have composed the test text directly in Google Forms without recourse to the tools they ordinarily use, in which case the result reveals their unassisted competence and, by extension, the degree to which their ordinary written output depends on external correction. Second, participants may possess only a superficial understanding of how to interpret and act upon automated feedback, accepting or ignoring suggestions without evaluating them. Either interpretation supports the position advanced by Mundt and Groves (2016) that instruction in the

appropriate use of writing technologies is a necessary complement to their availability, and neither is consistent with the assumption that tool access alone remediates mechanical error.

Writing Tool Use and Writing Self-Efficacy

The correlational analysis revealed a strong positive association between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy ($r = .778$, $p = .013$). This finding is consistent with Bouzar et al. (2024), who reported a strong correlation between students' use of ChatGPT and their level of academic writing self-efficacy, and with O'Neill and Russell (2019), who found that automated feedback strengthened learners' belief in their own capabilities. A plausible mechanism is that the immediate, non-evaluative feedback supplied by such tools functions as a source of mastery experience in Bandura's (1997) sense: learners observe their own texts being improved and attribute the improvement, at least in part, to their own agency. The absence of the interpersonal judgement that accompanies teacher feedback may further reduce the affective cost of error, allowing learners to revise without the anxiety documented by Fareed et al. (2016) and Sasmita and Setyowati (2021).

It must be emphasised, however, that the direction of this association cannot be determined from the present design. Learners with higher self-efficacy may be more disposed to experiment with digital tools, just as tool use may enhance confidence. The relationship is plausibly reciprocal, as Khosravi et al. (2017) suggested with respect to self-efficacy and writing strategy use.

The Relationship between Performance and Self-Efficacy

Juxtaposing the two sets of findings yields the study's most instructive observation. Participants reported comparatively high self-efficacy in association with writing tool use, yet 44.44% produced texts categorised as fair to poor, and 88.89% demonstrated weak control of mechanics. Confidence and competence, in this sample, were not aligned. This divergence warrants caution against the assumption that writing tools straightforwardly improve writing. What the evidence supports is a more limited claim: writing tools appear to be positively associated with learners' confidence, while the translation of that confidence into textual quality appears to depend on the learner's understanding of how the tools should be used. The pattern is pedagogically consequential, since self-efficacy that is not calibrated to actual competence may reduce learners' motivation to seek instruction, revise substantively, or attend to the aspects of writing—mechanics foremost among them—in which they are in fact weakest. Mitchell et al. (2023) accordingly position writing self-efficacy as a motivational resource that instruction can cultivate; the present findings suggest that such cultivation should be accompanied by explicit instruction in the critical evaluation of automated feedback, lest confidence outpace competence. Because writing performance was not entered into the correlational analysis, this interpretation remains provisional and requires testing on a larger sample.

IV. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study examined the relationship between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy among nine undergraduate students of English Language Education at Lambung Mangkurat University, and described their performance on a descriptive writing task. Two conclusions may be drawn. First, Pearson correlation revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant association between writing tool use and writing self-efficacy ($r = .778$, $p = .013$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. Second, descriptive writing performance was moderate and uneven: 55.56% of participants achieved good-to-average

scores, no participant reached the highest category, and mechanics constituted a pronounced weakness, with 88.89% categorised as fair to poor. Taken together, the findings indicate that the reported use of writing tools coincides with higher writing self-efficacy but not with uniformly strong writing performance—a divergence that constitutes the principal contribution of this study.

Several limitations constrain the generalisability of these findings. The sample comprised nine self-selected volunteers from a single study programme, which restricts statistical power and introduces the possibility of volunteer bias; correlation coefficients derived from such a sample are subject to wide confidence intervals and should be regarded as preliminary. The correlational design precludes causal inference. Writing tool use and self-efficacy were both measured by self-report, which may be affected by social desirability. Participants' access to writing tools during the writing test was not controlled or recorded, which limits the interpretation of the mechanics finding. Finally, the writing test consisted of a single descriptive text on one topic, and a single rater scored the compositions; no inter-rater reliability estimate is therefore available.

For future researchers, replication with a larger and probabilistically drawn sample is recommended, together with the use of a pre-test–post-test design permitting comparison of writing performance before and after tool use. Controlling or documenting tool access during the writing task would permit a direct test of the dependence hypothesis advanced above. Multiple raters and the reporting of inter-rater agreement would strengthen the assessment component, and qualitative data—interviews or think-aloud protocols—would illuminate how learners actually interact with automated feedback. For teachers, the results indicate that instruction should address not only writing strategies but also the critical and ethical use of writing technologies, with particular attention to mechanics, which automated tools appear not to have remediated in this sample. Sustaining learners' self-efficacy through mastery experiences and constructive feedback remains an important instructional objective, provided that confidence is calibrated against demonstrated performance. For students, the findings suggest that writing tools are most beneficial when used as instruments for learning rather than substitutes for it. Verifying and understanding the corrections proposed by such tools, rather than accepting them uncritically, is likely to yield more durable gains in writing competence.

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