

Technical Report # 37
Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning



English Writing Curriculum Framework and Map:

Levels 5 - 6

Submitted by the Assessment Tools for Teaching and Learning team,

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Written Language Curriculum Framework and Map:

Levels 5--6

This report explains the principles underlying the mapping of Levels 5 and 6 of the functions in the writing strand of English in the New Zealand Curriculum and includes recommendations for the asTTle Writing Framework, Curriculum Map and scoring for Levels 5 and 6. asTTle is funded by the Ministry of Education to Auckland Uniservices Ltd. at the University of Auckland to research and develop an assessment application for Reading, Writing, Mathematics, Pānui, Pāngarau, and Tuhituhi for Years 5-7 (Levels 2-4) for New Zealand schools. We acknowledge this funding, and thank the Ministry of Education for their continued assistance in the development of this project.

Mr Phil Coogan, Unitec, Ms. Ngaire Hoben, University of Auckland, and Dr. Judy Parr, University of Auckland, are thanked for their work on this report. Phil and Ngaire developed initial drafts concerning the purposes of writing and progression in writing. Judy provided continuity with the initial asTTle work on assessing writing described in asTTle Technical Report 6. Dr Gavin Brown, asTTle Senior Project Manager, analysed the report and highlighted the critical issues for asTTle development, as well as redrafting and editing the report. He was assisted by Ms. Raewyn Higginson, asTTle Coordinator, who pulled the material together in its present structure and proof read the draft. The respondents to the draft version of this report are thanked for their insight and critical responses.



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Assessment of curriculum content requires a clear understanding of the structure and nature of the content to be assessed. Two powerful tools in guiding the development of assessment items are a content framework and a curriculum map. A content framework classifies the content of a subject into major categories or big ideas and sub-divides the big ideas into major or key themes. What is being taught in classrooms ought to relate to children learning these major ideas and related themes. Furthermore, a curriculum will specify a multiplicity of achievement objectives across a range of difficulty levels that need to be taught and mastered as the substance of the major curricular themes and ideas. A curriculum map relates the detailed achievement objectives to the major categories and key themes identified in the content Framework. The whole process of identifying the structures and relationships of curriculum content is called curriculum mapping.

This report was commissioned to analyse the asTTle English writing framework and curriculum map in light of extension of Project asTTle into curriculum Levels 5 and 6. The majority of the students will be in Years 9 through 12. The Levels 5-6 curriculum map for writing takes into consideration the range of writing purposes exercised and developed within the context of secondary schooling. The discussion is confined to the purposes and demands of Poetic and Transactional writing. The report also raises some issues relating to interpreting the scope of the achievement objectives for the writing functions for English in the New Zealand Curriculum (ENZC) and thence of the nature of the development of higher level writing skills and strategies and assessment tasks.

Curriculum Map and Framework

The present asTTle Written Language Framework and Curriculum Map is the result of a number of repeated analyses and reviews, including Limbrick, Keenan, & Girven, 2000 (Technical Report 4) discussion of ‘unpacking’ the English curriculum map and Glasswell, Parr, & Aikman, 2001 (Technical Report 6) development of theoretical construct for analysing writing and progress indicators to score student writing at curriculum levels 2-4. The aim of this report is to extend the writing

assessment framework and curriculum map to include levels 5 and 6 of the New Zealand English Curriculum (Ministry of Education 1994).

Assessment of writing has been an on-going debate. Two main theories of assessing writing have been apparent in this debate. The first theory, known as functional genre theory (e.g., Martin, Christie et al. 1987) argues that writing is context specific, where the acquisition of a generic set of processes can be applied across all writing. Genre is seen as fixed and immutable and able to be classified into mutually exclusive categories. The emphasis here appears to be on form rather than purpose. The second theory of writing is known as social process theory. Theorists such as Gerot and Wignall, (1994) suggest genres are highly context specific and writers access them for particular social purposes. Here writers make explicit linguistic choices. There are no hard and fast rules, but change according to differing contexts and the division between genre is often discretionary.

Project asTTle (Glasswell, et al., 2001) used the second theoretical stance to inform the development of the Level 2 to 4 writing rubrics for asTTle. The asTTle curriculum map follows the conceptualisation of genre as driven by functional purpose (i.e., each genre has specific characteristics that make the assessment unique). Six functions or purposes of writing have been adopted in asTTle V2: persuasion, instruction, narration, description, explanation, and recount. Note that some writing processes are not unique to subject 'English'; for example description, explanation, and instruction may well be used in Science.

The asTTle writing framework scores student performance in each purpose by two major score categories. The Deep scores relate to (a) audience awareness and purpose, (b) content, (c) structure or organisation, and (d) language resources. The Surface scores relate to (e) grammar, (f) punctuation, and (g) spelling. Note that the surface scores have identical progress indicators across all writing purposes, while the deep scores are contingent on the linguistic, structural, and schematic characteristics of fulfilling each purpose.

This report has examined the existing asTTle writing curriculum map and framework in light of a requested extension of the asTTle tool into Levels 5 and 6. It has consulted the international literature, and current New Zealand assessment writing projects (such as National Exemplar Project, Assessment Resource Bank, and the National Certificate of Educational Assessment).

Writing Achievement Objectives in the English Curriculum

The current curriculum progress indicators progression from Level 3 to 4, categorised by score variables adopted in asTTle, are outlined below in order to assist in identifying progression expectations of the writer moving into Levels 5 and 6.

Table 1.
asTTle Key Factors in Writing Progressions from Level 3-4: Poetic and Transactional

Progress Indicators	Poetic Key factors	Transactional Key Factors
Audience Awareness and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater reader engagement/response. • Development of voice (in narrative writing). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of and appropriateness for audience. • Appropriateness of style to function. • Wholeness i.e. less reader inference needed.
Content/Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensiveness in the inclusion of the elements of narrative/recount. • The inclusion of more illustrations, detail, observations, interpretive comments, etc. • A conclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprehensiveness detail/elaboration. • Relevance.
Structure/Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More seamless management of linking/sequencing of events/effective plotting. • Effective paragraphing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grouping/paragraphing of ideas. • Effective use of other ordering devices.
Language Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of language devices to engage/add detail. • Use of dialogue. • Correct and more varied use of sentences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistency of language appropriate to task/topic. • Clear references (eg pronouns). • Correct and more varied use of sentences.
Surface Features (level 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correct sentences. • Control of complex sentences. • Correct syntax (complete sentences, subject-verb agreement, appropriate word order, consistent tense). • Few spelling errors –evidence of ability to spell multi-syllabic, irregular or technical words (references to NZCER Essential Word Lists 1-7). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per poetic writing.

Table 2 identifies the key curriculum achievement objective differentiations for both poetic and transactional writing between levels 4 to 5 and levels 5 to 6.

Table 2.

Key Level Transitions: Poetic and Transactional Writing (NZEC)

Level Transition	Key Factors	
	Poetic	Transactional
4—5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The addition of “extended” to “range of genre”. • “<i>Selecting</i> appropriate language features “ instead of “<i>using</i> appropriate vocabulary”. • The implication of “accuracy and confidence” in the use of writing conventions as opposed to just using them at level 4. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The addition of “to express experiences and ideas imaginatively” (which is reprised from level 4 after a mysterious exclusion from level 5). • The substitution at level 6 of “choosing” for “selecting”. • The substitution of “with discrimination” for “and confidently” in the use of writing conventions.
5—6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The addition of “coherent” to “write instructions explanations and factual accounts”. • The substitution of “argue” for “explain” in “express and argue a point of view”. • The substitution of “linking main and supporting ideas and structuring material in appropriate styles” for “organising and linking ideas logically”. • The deletion of “making language choices appropriate to the audience”. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The substitution of “clear” for “coherent” in “write clear, logical instructions, explanations etc”. • The substitution of “justify” for “argue” in “express and justify a point of view”. • The substitution of “structuring material confidently in appropriate styles” for “linking main and supporting ideas and structuring material in appropriate styles”. • The addition of the concept of “audience”.

It should be noted that in terms of poetic writing progression from Level 4 to 5 is marked by greater breadth of genre, more conscious selection of language features and greater technical accuracy. In contrast, progression from Level 5 to 6 is marked by virtually no indication of progression. In transactional writing, progression from Level 4 to 5 is differentiated in terms of greater structural sophistication. Progression

from Level 5 to 6 is again marked through the addition of the concept of audience (which may be far too late in the developmental progression).

The curriculum processes for Levels 5-6 offer the following areas of differentiation over levels 4-5 which could be applied to writing. In Exploring Language there is a reference to “*a range of texts*” as opposed to “*different texts*” and “*applying*” rather than “*using*” the “*distinctive conventions, structures and language features of a range of texts*”. In Thinking Critically level 5/6 substitutes “*explore and identify attitudes and beliefs in terms of personal experience and knowledge of others*” for “*exploring relevant experiences and other points of view*”. Once again, there is little here to help if one is seeking indicators of progression.

Thus, the achievement objectives mapped out in the English Curriculum for functions and processes give relatively little assistance in developing a curriculum map to guide the development of asTTle assessment at Levels 5 and 6. Further insight is available in the previously published assessment resources (i.e., Exemplars, ARBs, and NCEA Achievement Standards).

Progression in Writing in other published Assessment Resources

English Exemplar Project (EEP)

The EEP are a set of on-line examples of writing ascribed to the different levels of the ECNZ in poetic and transactional writing covering Levels 1 to 5. The indicators for poetic writing from the English Exemplar Project are generic (i.e., they apply to across all purposes) and only two purposes are exemplified (i.e., *Personal Experience* and *Character*). Where necessary, an indicator related to one of the particular forms is inserted as a sub-heading. The writers of these indicators paid heed to the asTTle indicators and hence there is considerable consistency between the two sets (including an almost identical set of sub-headings). The indicators for transactional writing from the English Exemplar Project are also generic, applying to the two purposes of argument and explanation. Where it is necessary, an indicator related to one of the particular forms is inserted as a sub-heading. The key factors for Level 5 poetic and transactional writing achievement are shown in Table 3.

As has been noted above, there is considerable and conscious synergy between asTTle and the Exemplar Project and it may be that, given the latter has already developed progress indicators for level 5 which have been influenced by both asTTle and the NCEA, these may provide some pointers as to how progression into levels 5-6 may be shown in the asTTle progress indicators. However, the essential difference between these projects is that the Exemplar Project has focused on forms of writing (e.g., argument) rather than purposes of writing (e.g., to persuade). Note the progress indicators for the Exemplar Project were written with reference to the relevant NCEA achievement standards and hence will have some familiarity for English teachers.

Assessment Resource Banks (ARB)

The Assessment Resource Banks, developed by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research have developed generic sets of indicators for poetic and transactional writing for Levels 2 to 5. There has been some attempt to ensure consistency with both the Exemplar Project and asTTle project progress indicators,

although congruence is limited partly because the ARBs published their progress indicators in advance of both the asTTle and Exemplar projects. The key Level 4 to 5 transition indicators are outlined in Table 4.

Table3.

EEP Writing Key Factors Level 5: Poetic and Transactional

Progress Indicators	Poetic Key factors	Transactional Key Factors
Audience Awareness and Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of <i>a range</i> of means of engaging the audience. • The personal voice of the writer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of targeting the audience. • Logic.
Content/Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sustaining</i> a strong central idea. • The use of <i>substantial</i> illustrations, interpretive comments etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of ideas. • Convincing the audience (for argument).
Structure /Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence/wholeness. • Experimentation with structure. • The use of a variety of sentence structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very similar to the NCEA (i.e., “appropriateness of structure for form and purpose). • The use of a variety of sentence structures.
Language Resources (called “vocabulary/ language”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater range of vocabulary. • Providing information (eg about a character) by implication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A greater range of language features, including vocabulary. • Control and intent in the employment of language features.
Surface Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the writing conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation with <i>few intrusive errors</i> (as per NCEA). NB at earlier levels spelling of high frequency words is referenced to the Spellwrite lists. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As per poetic writing.

Table 4.

ARB Level 4 to 5 Writing Progression Key Indicators: Poetic and Transactional

Poetic Key Indicators	Transactional Key Indicators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More <i>conscious</i> selection of language features including greater use of figurative language. • More detailed structural features at level 4 (“appropriate sentence structure”, “varied sentence beginnings”, “more complex sentences”) becomes more generalised at level 5 (“strong sequential structure”). • Accurate punctuation at level 4 becomes “using conventions of writing accurately and <i>confidently</i>” at level 5; a norm of 3%-5% spelling error rate at level 4 becomes “conventional spelling predominates” at level 5. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The privileging of structural features (paragraphing, organising and linking ideas logically). • The importance of supporting details at level 4 disappears at level 5. • Use of “appropriate vocabulary” at level 4 becomes “carefully chosen” vocabulary at level 5. • Accurate punctuation at level 4 becomes “using conventions of writing accurately and <i>confidently</i> at level 5; a norm of 3%-5% spelling error rate at level 4 becomes “conventional spelling predominates” at level 5.

Given that lack of structural synergy between these and asTTle, these may offer less in terms of clear sign-posting to asTTle as it develops progress indicators for levels 5-6. However, developers of such indicators should refer to them as they have been developed in conjunction with New Zealand teachers and have empirical confirmation.

National Qualifications Framework: National Certificate in Educational Achievement

University Bursary, School Certificate, and National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) have all influenced the forms of writing taught at years 9 and 10. Four forms of writing dominated School Certificate examinations 1998- 2001 and recur in the NCEA Achievement Standard 1.2 as examined for the first time in 2002. These are (a) personal experience /memory writing [poetic: recount], (b) “original” stories of a creative nature [poetic: narrative or description], (c) development of an argument [transactional], and (d) expository essay as a response to text [transactional]. The four NCEA grades range from ‘not achieved’, ‘achieved’, ‘achieved with merit’ to ‘achieved with excellence’. The criteria for ‘achieved’ are used to highlight how NCEA has implemented the curriculum progress indicators in the Poetic or Creative and Transactional or Formal writing areas (Table 5).

Note that progression to “Achievement with Merit” in Creative Writing is marked by more developed ideas, use of a controlled writing style, greater clarity of structure, and the elimination of errors. Progression to “Achievement with Merit” in Formal

Writing requires ideas with “supporting detail and explanation”, a “controlled writing style”, “clarity and appropriateness of structure” and “technical accuracy”.

An overriding impression for the report authors is that (a) the NCEA achievement standards cover the important aspects of writing more faithfully than the curriculum (e.g., the inclusion of quality of ideas); (b) provide more discernible progression; (c) are more logically written; and (d) given their familiarity to teachers and structural consistency with asTTle, may well provide a logical basis for the development of asTTle progress indicators at levels 5-6.

In comparing the asTTle progress indicators in Version 2 for writing with the criteria for “achievement” in the NCEA writing achievement standards, there is an impression that the asTTle indicators (and to a degree, also those of the Exemplar Project) are pitched at a higher level (i.e., a piece of work which is Level 4 Advanced against the asTTle indicators seems to be operating at a higher level than NCEA ‘achieved’ grade). This impression is based upon two differences in the progress indicators. First, there is a general lack of qualifiers or qualitative language in the relatively bland NCEA criteria for achievement. Both NCEA Level 1 writing standards require students to “use a writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type” whereas level 4 Recount requires that “language use and writing style help to engage the reader and sustain interest”. Second, words like “comprehensive”, “clear”, “enriched”, “managed well”, “amplify”, “varied”, “variety”, and “enhances” in the Level 4 Recount progress indicators are not paralleled by similarly qualitative language in the NCEA criteria for achievement in the poetic writing achievement standards. This appears to be a real issue for the project and one which may possibly have been due to (a) the relative isolation in the development process of the two projects and (b) the initial development of asTTle was to Level 4 for use in primary schools and so analysis of higher levels was not undertaken as it was outside of brief.

Another key issue, which needs to be explored in this regard, is the hitherto unofficial direction from the Ministry of Education to NCEA writers that the level for NCEA “achievement” was lower level 5 of the curriculum.

Although NCEA achievement criteria are not categorised under sub-headings as occurs with both asTTle and the Exemplar Project, there is considerable congruence between each criterion for writing and the sub-headings used by asTTle. For both poetic and transactional writing, the focus of these achievement criteria can be summarised as (a) Ideas and Content, (b) Style and Audience and Purpose, (c) Structure and Organisation, and (d) Surface Features. The one apparent anomaly is “Language Resources” which is subsumed in the NCEA under style and audience and purpose. Apart from any structural issue which may need to be addressed here, the term “Language Resources” may be confusing for secondary teachers who would normally associate it with resources used to support the teaching and learning of writing, such as a photograph as a starter, or a dictionary. We believe the term “language features” would be much more familiar to them, though this term itself is prone to confusion with the surface features of grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Table 5.

NCEA Writing ‘Achieved’ Grade Criteria: Creative and Formal

English 1.1 <i>Produce Creative Writing</i>	English 1.2 <i>Produce Formal Writing</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to express ideas with detail is included in the achievement standard but not the curriculum (the quality of ideas tends to be eschewed by the curriculum which focuses much more on the quality of expression of those ideas). • The achievement standard asks for a “writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type” whereas the curriculum asks writers to select “appropriate language features”. • The achievement standard requires writers to “structure material in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type” whereas the only mention of structure in the curriculum achievement objective is in the word “shaping” (of texts). • Both insist on accuracy in the use of conventions (although the achievement standard is qualified by “without intrusive errors”). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to express ideas with supporting detail is included in the achievement standard and implied in the curriculum. • The achievement standard asks for a “writing style appropriate to audience, purpose and text type” whereas the curriculum only mentions style in relation to the structuring of material. • The achievement standard requires writers to “structure material in a way that is appropriate to audience, purpose and text type” whereas the curriculum asks that writers “link main and supporting ideas ...structuring material in appropriate styles”. • Only the achievement standard insists on accuracy in the use of conventions (“without intrusive errors”).

Issues

As can be seen from the multiple implementations of the curriculum achievement objectives concerning writing there is a lack of clarity in what the curriculum truly intends. The classification of writing into three functions (i.e., poetic, transactional, and expressive) has left open the relative importance of form and purpose. The lack of specification in discriminating between levels has led to disparities in how the various projects understand progression. Criteria without exemplification as offered by all the projects are inadequate, and yet there is no national agreement on what progress is, just as there is little agreement on what writing is.

The asTTle technology of a 40-minute test makes difficult the legitimate assessment of key dimensions of writing. Specifically, “shaping, editing and re-working texts” is difficult to assess in a one-off, on-demand event. Further, the curriculum states that writing should be “in authentic contexts”, which again poses difficulties for such brief assessments.

Three of the asTTle writing purposes may cause some confusion for English teachers (i.e., recount, narrate, and describe). In asTTle, narrate seems to be either personal experience writing or “made up” stories often referred, by secondary English teachers as “creative writing”, while in asTTle recount requires students to retell a personal event. For many secondary English teachers, the characteristics of these purposes of writing may be so similar that they could be treated interchangeably. Describe may be similarly confused asTTle uses describe to refer to a more transactional classification of some event, character, or object, while describe, for secondary English teachers, tends to be tied to creative or poetic writing as exemplified in School Certificate every year until its demise.

The inclusion in asTTle of purposes such as explain and describe, which are more commonly used in secondary schools in subject areas other than English, presupposes a level of cross disciplinary integration which rarely, if ever, occurs in New Zealand schools. It may well be that teachers of writing outside the English department may find the across-curriculum approach of asTTle useful. It is not intended by this to preclude the possibility that some English teachers will want to teach and assess the variety of purposes provided by asTTle.

A new writing purpose, not accommodated by asTTle presently, appears in secondary school English. The expository essay, which in literary form dominates one third of NCEA level 3 [currently Bursary level] response requirements, involves a structured type of analysis and persuasion with a purpose different to that of argue or describe as presently explained in asTTle. Secondary English teachers may argue that the dominance of the literary essay at NCEA level 3 requires a consistent focus from years 9 or 10 if students are to have full access to “life chances” via a tertiary education. Note that asTTle has the capability of handling up to eight purposes, and the adoption of the literary essay is quite feasible provided a suitable purpose label can be found. Possibilities include: critique, analyse, and literary, though further discussion and debate is required to set a suitable title.

Recently many English departments have embraced an NCEA backwash effect into their junior classes so that assessment against criteria is on the basis of “not achieved” “achievement” “achievement with merit” “achievement with excellence”. It may be that teachers will be reluctant to add a new set of terms as used by asTTle (i.e., “basic”, “proficient”, and “advanced”) to describe progression within a curriculum level. In contrast, more cautious English departments have not moved towards such criterion-referenced models and, where they do have coherent, cross department assessment models, these tend to be based on grades, marks or percentages which may or may not be related to established criteria. The most pragmatic way through this confusion may well be to adopt the terms used by the NCEA. These appear to be readily adaptable to the asTTle model, recognisable to secondary teachers, and loosely standards based. However, we acknowledge there may be negative and unintended consequences because asTTle is used in both primary and secondary schools.

It needs to be noted that asTTle’s commitment to curriculum fidelity may cause some problems with adoption of the tool in the secondary sector. The somewhat traditional terms “creative” and “formal” writing have been adopted as the terms to describe writing in the NCEA. The rejection of the terminology of the curriculum was a deliberate attempt to make the language of the NCEA comprehensible to wider community end-users of information about student achievement. Despite some initial opposition, these terms appear to have been widely (re) accepted by secondary English teachers and asTTle developments should perhaps reflect this by using these

as umbrella headings under which the six purposes of writing might be placed. This would need to be done in such a way as to acknowledge the considerable degree of overlap between the different purposes and forms of writing.

It should also be noted that very little professional development of teachers in the teaching of writing has taken place since the recommendations of the National Writing Project (Brown, Phillips et al. 1993). The predominant type of writing seen in secondary schools is the five paragraph expository or literary essay. NCEA has probably had a positive effect in enhancing the teaching of writing and even if it is formulaic or uniform, it has alerted English teachers to the importance of scaffolding. However, there is little to suggest that secondary teachers are equipped to work with the purpose-driven approach to the teaching of writing that asTTle promotes.

Recommendations

This attempt at mapping the development and progression of writing into curriculum levels 5 and 6 has focused on the key issues of the structure and content of the curriculum achievement objectives and on the various attempts to implement and exemplify assessment of writing in secondary schools. From this overview a number of recommendations are possible, which the asTTle team and Ministry of Education will need to agree on.

- There should be a new writing purpose, name to be determined, to capture the literary or critique essay.
- Serious consideration should be given to collapsing the recount and narrate purposes into one poetic, story-telling purpose.
- The socio-communicative purposes structure for selecting and testing purposes of writing should be kept.
- The deep (audience, content, organisation, language) and surface (grammar, punctuation, spelling) scoring structure should be kept.
- Further consultation and coordination with other projects to develop consistent scoring progress indicators should be undertaken.
- The equivalence of the asTTle curriculum levels and the NCEA grades should be investigated and consideration should be given to a NCEA-equivalent reporting mechanism.

Considerable work remains to be undertaken by the asTTle team to work out detailed progress indicators for each purpose for each score point, to develop age-appropriate writing tasks, to validate the scoring criteria, and to establish benchmark annotated exemplars of writing progress.

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