Abstract

This thesis critically evaluates the essence of First Year Composition (FYC) and establishes the benefits a composition course would offer high school students. The intended purpose is to assess the feasibility of teaching FYC in the high school classroom and to consider views from the perspectives of students, teachers, and scholars in order to formulate a comprehensive conclusion. One key dispute in composition studies is whether students who write compositions as critical thinking assignments actually become better critical writers and thinkers. Proponents argue that this method establishes better writing and thinking skills among college and university students, while critics argue that since these skills do not necessarily transfer to other courses and/or disciplines, FYC should either be abolished or largely revised. This thesis suggests that the benefits of FYC clearly outweigh the problems many have cited and that key mitigation measures can be used to improve FYC courses.
Introduction

First-year composition (FYC) is a mandatory introductory reading and writing course in many colleges and universities. The duration of FYC often ranges from one to three terms, and is often based on how the course is structured. FYC courses are organized in several ways and with pedagogies that generate a multitude of curricula, but they all focus on enhancing students' abilities to write in a university setting and introducing them to various writing practices in today's professions. Some of the common pedagogies include expressivity, current-traditional, Writing about Writing (WAW), process and post-process, and social-epistemic. FYC has been in existence since the late 19th century and has remained a longstanding course in American higher education.

Despite the century long existence of FYC, there have recently been questions posed concerning its importance and viability. These concerns include whether it has a long-term impact on students' writing or whether the same purpose of enhancing writing skills can be achieved through other means such as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID). For example, there are increasing numbers of students electing to enroll in concurrent classes, meaning that in addition to their high school courses, high school seniors also take first-year composition classes at post-secondary institutions. Rafaella Negretti, a senior lecturer at Chalmers Technical University, mentions that supporters of the first-year composition course argue that it enables college and university students to read and think critically and to write expressively in reaction to the content they have read (144). Yet, there is a need to make FYC courses in postsecondary education more effective, as well as a need for reform in both pre- and postsecondary education FYC courses. According to Jennifer C. Miller, a professor at Rowan University, one of the key changes suggested by most critics is to give up the idea of
teaching "general academic discourse" and replace it with teaching writing within a context or writing for specific purposes (5). Writing placed within a discipline will introduce students to the conventions of their intended discourse communities and teach them to distinguish among the various discourses of different disciplines (Miller 12).

Many proponents of FYC, including Negretti, argue that composition courses are beneficial to the careers of all students despite their area of specialization (144). FYC seeks to improve the communication skills of students in social, critical thinking, and writing skills. At the same time, the course structure aims at stimulating metacognition among students while enhancing the development of their critical thinking skills (Negretti 144). With all these proposed benefits, it is important to evaluate how effective the course has been in achieving its objectives of enhancing students' thinking, reading, and writing skills. Such evaluation is carried out in a college where students have had the opportunity to complete the FYC course.

Another aspect of FYC that should be examined is the effect of the required length of the course. In this regard, it ought to be determined whether students who take more FYC classes may end up having an advantage over students who only took one. Furthermore, there needs to be a continuity of skill development between FYC classes, and even between different schools and course lengths. The theme-based courses are essential because they facilitate the categorization of content and learned skills according to the knowledge acquired. One way to do that is to design every individual FYC course to follow three essential goals, as suggested by Jamie White-Farnham, an associate professor of writing at the University of Wisconsin. The first goal is to teach students to write proficiently in all areas of their academic studies. Such proficient writing can be measured based on the students’ capacity to express their analytical and creative skills. Additionally, the FYC serves a major goal in teaching the basic standards and expectations
regarding composition to improve their overall writing skills. The next is to acquaint students with concepts like plagiarism and proper citation, the use of appropriate word choices and idioms given the genre of writing, and other essential compositional concepts (96). The themes would feature written proficiency, writing standards, and writing conventions among others. Finally, White-Farnham states that programs should aim to assist students in attaining university-level skills in writing and reading. If the structure of FYC encompasses all of these topics, the students who take FYC for a shorter amount of time will conceivably not have any disadvantage or conceivable difference with those who take a considerably longer time to complete FYC course. Nonetheless, a longer exposure of students to the FYC is critical toward learning and expressing the composition aspects geared toward enhancing critical and creative thinking.

Creating the syllabus and class content for high school FYC lays the groundwork for its success in preparing high school students for college-level composition. To strike the most efficient balance of areas of focus in the curriculum, the perspectives of the students as well as those of writing theorists, and even college and high school teachers require consideration. The cooperation of college writing instructors and high school teachers will allow them to determine the most viable models for the course, and ensure continuity between high school and college levels. Rather than simply moving FYC from college to high school, retention at both levels ought to be a consideration. FYC in high school should equip students with basic compositional skills, allowing FYC at the college level to focus on professional and industry writing skills. Considering the variety of discourses and majors offered at most universities, it makes little sense to teach universal freshman discourse as it fails to transfer knowledge and skills between different disciplines like engineering and literature (White-Farnham 17).
The critiques of FYC in schools, especially high school, present numerous arguments against the use of FYC in learning institutions. Scholars in the educational field also offer their insights concerning the adoption of FYC. Some of the arguments put forth include the perceived lack of relevant content in the FYC courses and the lack of a connection between the composition course, student’s interests, and their study majors. Therefore, FYC is a form of writing with no particular content, unlike other subjects or disciplines. Other scholars note that the result of FYC, which is the development of general writing skills, does not focus on intricate writing genres nor does it emphasize on rhetorical practices. Nonetheless, the arguments presented by FYC critics are challenges that can be mitigated using various mechanisms that would modify some contents and instructional methods in the FYC course. Appropriate alternatives include adjusting writing links and auxiliary clauses in sentences, specifying FYC content, and using limited writing genres and appropriate assessment measures.

Based on the different objectives of FYC and the arguments advocating for the revision and/or abolition of FYC courses, the Literature Review that follows covers a brief history of FYC, an overview of writing practices in high school and college, and an evaluation the need for critical and creative writing. Additionally, various modifications, including specifying FYC content, using limited writing genres, and using appropriate assessment measures can be employed to improve FYC courses offered in high schools and colleges.

Therefore, to provide students with adequate opportunities for developing creative and critical thinking skills, which are essential for college and university education, the FYC course should be implemented in high school. Implementing such course in high school should be based on the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Writing in the Disciplines (WID) approaches. Such implementation is critical toward preparing high school students on what the general areas
of knowledge they should expect to experience in college and university. For instance, FYC courses should prepare students in the general areas covering communication and interpersonal skills, critical and analytic thinking skills, and problem solving. The implementation of FYC should be based on Linda McHenry’s model, which indicates the need to equip students with essential skills for rhetorical writing and inquiry into new knowledge.

**Literature Review**

A major concern regarding the efficacy of first-year composition courses is the lack of unified curriculum. This often leads to a situation where a student may experience a completely different FYC class from one school to the next. For instance, while one school may emphasize the importance of diversified sources and building substantive arguments, another may focus more on the scholarly rules of rhetoric, leading to inconsistencies in writing education (Young 21). While the focus may vary from one institution to the next, most FYC courses require students to read instructions and various texts, learn how to write various styles of essays for their courses and be able to transfer that knowledge across their studies in their majors or professionally-oriented courses. FYC ought to be a step that aids students to improve their writing skills and consequently apply these skills to the other subjects embodied in the curriculum.

While the concept of introducing FYC to high school curriculums seems like it would simply give students more opportunities to hone their writing skills, Sharon Crowley, a professor of English at Arizona State University, believes that this movement will diminish the importance of such courses, and lead people to view FYC as a basic introductory course (113). According to Crowley, the mandatory nature of FYC may cause students to lose interest in it as a subject, and
that it would be a far more effective course overall if it were not mandatory (242). Other scholars agree with professor Crowley. For instance, Doug Downs, the Chair of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, and Elizabeth Wardle, both of the University of Central Florida, argue that there is no need for FYC to remain a requirement owing to its incredible generalization of information that is deliverable through other writing experiences in other classes (553). These scholars and others essentially argue that mandatory FYC makes composition less appealing to students, and is an unnecessary addition to an English departments' curriculum.

Of course, there are those who vehemently disagree with this perspective. For instance, Linda McHenry, a specialist in the Teaching of Writing, argues that the FYC class empowers students with vital skills that will enable them to:

- Evaluate and recognize rhetorical situations in writing;
- Effectively utilize primary and secondary research to create, articulate, develop, and support a purpose or a topic;
- Understand the meaning of writing in different contexts and for different audiences, and know why it matters;
- Make use of writing as an integral part of inquiry about the social, material, and cultural context;
- Develop efficient and effective processes for writing through practice, planning, editing, drafting, and revising in various genres using a wide variety of media;
- Evaluate, construct, and organize ideas;
- Edit, make a vital correction, and proofread writing to maximize credibility and authority (McHenry 11).
This illustrates that there is some consensus regarding the necessity of teaching basic composition skills, but there is still considerable disagreement regarding the method of delivery of mandatory FYC classes in either high school or college. A robust writing education and practice is integral to the success of academic ventures for a multitude of reasons (White-Farnham 92). According to Jeffery Zorn, a Professor in the English department at Santa Clara university, scholars who believe in the effectiveness of first-year composition courses argue that students who engage in writing composition as a critical practice have the opportunity of becoming persuasive and critical writers, thinkers, and readers (273). These skills will help an individual achieve success regardless of the focus or field pursued. The writing practice facilitates critical thinking in that it fosters students' abilities to discern the value or truth of various claims and theories across the curriculum (White-Farnham 95). On the other side, contemporary pragmatic theorists of composition argue that this statement is not equally true for all majors and fields as shown by the argument that students of such specific disciplines as medicine or biology ought to take an optional composition course, rather than as a course that is mandatory for graduation (Crowley 9). Alternatively, development and introduction of courses specific for the writing requirements of medicine or biology majors alongside existing FYC classes can aid in enhancing the relevance of the course.

The argument for teaching composition earlier (that is, introducing first-year composition courses to high school students) is based on the understanding that literacy is very similar to a ladder that one climbs in that a student needs fundamental writing and reading skills to progress (McHenry 11). To that end, composition writing plays a major role in the creation of a good writing culture among students (White-Farnham 102). The course offers the students an opportunity to express their thoughts in a systematic structure through writing, thereby
improving their critical thinking skills (Desmet 23). Downs and Wardle argue that teaching students about writing and asking them to research their own and other's writing encourages self-reflection and mindfulness; they also suggest that it enhances student capability for inquiry through writing, as they write in other disciplinary systems (Downs et al. 577). By incorporating the various writings of others, students learn how to integrate secondary material. In a post-secondary context, there are some notable pedagogies associated with first-year composition, including social-epistemic, writing about writing, expressivity, current-traditional, process, and post-process (Desmet et al. 21). Teachers often focus more heavily on rhetorical approaches to help students understand how to apply the context of audience, invention, style, and purpose in their writing models (Desmet 23). Though there are no unified standards for teaching FYC courses across the U.S., there have been some attempts to articulate the fundamental objectives of the first-year composition curriculum. The basics require each program to lay out the "objectives" and "outcomes" of the course. In 1996, a disciplinary group of FYC teachers devised the universal curriculum summarized in *The Outcomes Book: Debate and Consensus after the WPA Outcomes Statement*, the purpose of which was meant to help post-secondary students meet the list of universal requirements expected from them by the end of the FYC course (Harrington et al. 321). *The Outcomes Book* is divided into several sections with requirements for FYC students: rhetorical knowledge, critical thinking, reading, writing, writing processes (drafting and revising), and knowledge of conventions (format, styles, means of documenting, syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling) (Harrington et al. 325).

The history of FYC goes back to 1885, the year of its commencement at Harvard (Miller 1). James Berlin's work, *Nineteenth-Century American Colleges and Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges* provides a comprehensive survey of the history of
freshman composition. Nonetheless, his use of the epistemological taxonomy, which operates as a terministic lens, makes Berlin's work flawed. Terministic lens involves the idea that terminology and symbols are pivotal toward directing individuals’ attention to specific fields. As a result, the FYC courses serve as terministic lenses through which first years are introduced directly to various ideologies that require an in-depth exploration to understand their deeper meaning. Despite its flaws, Berlin was perhaps the first scholar to classify various pedagogies and rhetorical theories incorporating the contexts of the writer, reader, reality, and language. Currently, most students consider freshman composition as the lowest status course within an institution. Historically, learning institutions have often given it the least priority. Before the emergence of the debate concerning its efficacy, faculty members tasked with teaching freshman composition were the least paid. The current state of respect and funding for FYC is still far less than adequate. According to David Smit, a professor of English and the director of the Expository Writing Program at Kansas State University, there is a lack of enthusiasm among students regarding first-year composition, and this is in many ways associated with the fact that FYC is currently mandatory (186). Additionally, the perception that FYC has a potentially limited application in specialized fields such as mathematics and sciences is a major concern for many students. As a result, providing specialized genre writing courses for the type of writing used in such fields may make composition courses more appealing to students, thereby leading to improved learning outcomes. This goes on to emphasize the need for the disintegration of FYC into several writing courses that directly link to, and are well aligned to various specialty courses.

Challenges to first-year composition emanate partly from theoretical issues with the context of writing. Some scholars, such as Justin Young, an assistant professor of English and the
director of the Composition Program and Writers’ Center at Eastern Washington University, characterize first-year composition as "writing with no particular content," and contrast these courses with other subjects where content serves more than instrumental function (White-Farnham 93). In essence, they imply that first-year composition focuses on personal expression in the interpersonal rhetorical transaction with the assumption that more of the same writing skills will develop no matter the type of the content chosen (White-Farnham 110). However, this process is useful in the development of academic skills insofar that FYC encourages one to engage in self-reflection, which is important in the learning process as it enhances discipline and understanding. Additionally, by reading the provided literature and developing critical viewpoints, FYC students are in turn able to engage in personal expression as well as in the expression of the ideas presented in the literature, as White-Farnham suggests (93). Downs and Wardle argue that the concept of generally universal academic writing, or writing as an essential skill independent of context, and its automatic transfer from FYC to other courses and contexts are common misconceptions about writing that permeate expectations for the course (Downs et al. 554). The modification of FYC courses to ensure they align to the student’s career choice or major will help ensure that individuals are able to transfer writing skills learnt in the FYC course to their specific areas of expertise.

Other critics object to the aim of first-year composition, which they tag as "general skills writing instruction" (Zorn 274). It presupposes the existence of universal academic discourse where writing instruction is transferable between various writing situations. Downs and Wardle, together with many other critics of FYC, object to the existence of unified academic discourse as an assumption with little empirical verification, and seriously question students' ability to transfer their writing skills from one context to another (Downs et al. 552). They propose the
integration of a writing studies curriculum. This is in fact a feasible proposition, as it will ensure that students learn writing skills that align perfectly to their specific majors. Research on learning general cognitive skills also portrays limited transferability from one learning task to another (Zorn 274). While generalization, as posited by Gerald Nelms, an assistant professor and Academic Director of Developmental Writing at Wright State University, aids in the development of basic skills, it also distances students from the eventual transferability necessary to ensure that writing skills learned in FYC are in some way made relevant to the courses they eventually take up in college. Nelms calls generalization an integral condition for transfer of composition knowledge to occur. He believes that interdisciplinary writing exchanges should be concentrated on communicating a deep understanding of writing concepts, skills, strategies, genres, course objectives, and student attitudes toward writing (Nelms and Lively 229). It is unclear whether Nelms and Lively would outright abolish generalized FYC courses, but one could certainly interpret his argument that interdisciplinary writing courses should focus on basic skills within and across disciplines.

Establishing FYC in high school would require transferable skills since they will influence the students' writing experiences. In this case, the better model would be writing with a purpose across all disciplines since it would ease the assessment of student work and enhance peer review. Nelms proposition is plausible mainly because of its focus on the gains that students will make in relation to the various specialty courses they will opt for in college. This puts the aspect of writing in a better context based on transferability of skills and relevance of the writing course. Writing with a purpose is achievable through altering FYC to accommodate changes that will improve the students' writing in different genres.
David Russell, a critic of the idea of "developing writing skills" and professor of English at Iowa State University, claims that the aims of FYC courses are over-ambitious. He also believes that it is impossible to eradicate habits of thought and expression in three-hour weekly sessions over the course of 35 weeks, despite estimates that at least fifteen years are needed to form this set of different writing habits (Russell 52). Consequently, Russell implies that it is not possible to implement FYC in high school because of the length of time required to achieve its objectives. He makes use of activity theory to argue that "no generalizable skill or "writing skill" that can be learned and applied to all activities or genre (52). Activity theory is a conceptual framework whereby the comprehension of an activity is that of a purposeful and transformative event that can create interaction between the actors (subjects) and the world (objects). David Russell sarcastically compares the use of "general writing skill courses," such as the FYC, to improve student writing in different genres as trying to improve playing skills through teaching general ball handling techniques to football and basketball players (57). For Russell, courses with general writing objectives face a problem of content and transferability. In this regard, the argument by Russell points towards the development of several writing courses offered to students based on their major or specialty course to ensure transferability and applicability of the appropriate disciplinary skills. Bringing a version of FYC to high school will require the implementation of a strategy that will ensure that teachers have the capacity to eradicate their students’ thought processes and expression habits. However, Russell’s argument does not hold since it is impossible for teachers to eradicate student’s thought processes, as teachers can only modify the way students express their thoughts and behaviors. Russell’s opinions indicate that introducing FYC in high schools would trigger significant drawbacks associated with transferability and content. This means that FYC course may hinder students from transferring
the skills acquired into addressing emerging situations, such as challenging college tasks. Nonetheless, teachers can use numerous modification methods to mitigate the challenges highlighted by critics with the aim of fostering improved student learning for skill transferability.

Critics of post-secondary FYC point out that “general writing skills,” which are the expected end-result of FYC, do not concentrate on the complex genre and subtle rhetorical practices that writers should learn in order to compose papers for their major fields because learning with such depth is possible only within the context of a particular discipline (Zorn 273). Nelms and Dively conducted a study on transferring knowledge from FYC to writing-intensive major courses and they argue, “Composition program administrators should create a curriculum that applies knowledge of how to compose in writing beyond the context of the composition course” (229). They believe that composition courses should develop more discipline or workplace specific assignments to enable students to shorten the distance between learned skills and future writing contexts (Nelms and Dively 229). Moreover, Nelms and Dively emphasize the importance of finding ways of raising student motivation and including more metacognitive reflection on writing processes, rhetoric, and applications of writing strategies, such as brainstorming and free writing. These recommendations might also be helpful to facilitate the transfer of composition knowledge to other writing activities and contexts in various courses and disciplines. If the main aim of understanding learning processes entails motivating students to reflect on various areas of study, clarifying the different aspects of various disciplines in the curriculum would lead to the eventual transfer of thought processes into written work that aligns to students’ majors (Nelms and Dively 229, 231).

Russell calls writing contexts "activity systems" and explains why writing can be seen only when applied to one activity system at a time. He argues that if it were possible to generalize
writing as an autonomous skill to all activity systems that use writing, improving writing could be a clear objective of general writing skills instruction, but writing does not exist apart from its uses (Russell 57). One more point of criticism of "writing with no context" is that any universal requirement for freshman writing courses will not be connected to other features of students' course curricula because it causes a lack of motivation among students. Crowley has long argued that students learn to speak and write most efficiently when they are motivated by some compelling cultural or professional urgency (Crowley 8). Therefore, learning "writing with no context" creates a highly artificial writing situation and turns a universally required writing class into an imitation or a simulacrum of motivated writing (Crowley 9). The FYC's traditional goal of teaching students the general knowledge concerning academic language accounts for the development of generalized writing skills curricula. If the criticisms of FYC's capability to achieve this traditional objective are strong and rooted in disciplinary theory, then there is no need for considering it as a general academic writing skills module (Wardle 766). These critics advocate getting rid of FYC entirely.

All the above-mentioned critiques of FYC courses in postsecondary education raise questions about possible ways to make these classes more effective. Though some critics call for its complete abolition from the college curricula, the majority argue for a sustainable alternative to teaching students to write should take its place (Miller 1). There is clearly a need for reform in postsecondary education FYC courses. One of the key changes required by all the critics is to give up the idea of teaching "general academic discourse" and replace it with teaching writing within a context or teaching writing for specific purposes (Miller 5). Writing placed within a discipline will introduce students to the conventions of their intended discourse communities and teach them to distinguish among the various discourses of different disciplines (Miller 12).
Considering the variety of discourses and majors offered at most universities, it makes little sense to teach universal freshman discourse as it fails to transfer knowledge and skills between different disciplines like engineering and literature (17). The need for reform in postsecondary education FYC is essential in enhancing the transfer of knowledge and skills from different disciplines. Such models would be essential in a high school setting to deal with the drawbacks associated with content and transferability. Applying a reformed FYC in high school will enhance writing for a specific purpose and make the course more enjoyable.

Another issue is the qualification of FYC instructors who have to receive appropriate training. It is important to limit the range of the topics for students' compositions to make them match teachers' specialization and ensure high-quality assistance (Downs et al. 577). Downs and Wardle argue that writing studies require a textbook summarizing writing studies research (575). Writing in the Disciplines (WID) courses have been established in many majors in many universities. At many institutions, FYC supplements WID courses by offering and promoting general writing skills. FYC also serves the needs of students in such universities as a primary course by teaching the students on how to write across the university in other academic courses, which, as mentioned earlier, introduce the problem of transferability of writing skills thereby further raising the question of the necessity and effectiveness of compulsory FYC courses. However, such courses are complicated by at least an inability to determine not only how to define “generalized writing skills” but to understand students’ difficulty in transferring writing knowledge from high school to college, from course to course, and from university to workplace settings. These general writing courses do exist, but they are problematic because of transferability.
Russell suggests teaching students the genres of writing instead of giving general writing skill instruction. He believes that learning more writing activities and writing in more genres makes it more likely that students will be able to master a new genre faster as it will have some features they already know from another genre or activity (Russell 59). Downs and Wardle see a potential for improvement of students' understanding of language, rhetoric, writing and literacy through more practical writing courses typically oriented to both writing and reading. Their main idea is to change the conception of first-year composition from teaching "how to write in college" to learning about writing (Downs et al. 553). They have developed a course called Introduction to Writing Studies and have received students' feedback regarding the benefits as well as competence of the course. The course comprises various activities that include reading, researching, and writing arguments that are similar to those in FYC. Nonetheless, the content of the course explores reading and writing. Where Russell’s approach suggests teaching students different writing genres one by one, Downs and Wardle focus on teaching the ways writing works in the world and how the "tool" of writing can be used as a mediator of different activities more effectively (558). Their course, Introduction to Writing Studies, gives students an understanding of the nature of writing and enables them to explore their writing practices (560). Introduction to Writing Studies is essential for the overall improvement of the deliverables of the traditional FYC course mainly because it presents a highly modified version of FYC in high school, which is better suited to teach writing, and further encourages application of writing skills to other courses. The reformed FYC course in the form of Writing Studies will enhance writing for a specific purpose, thereby making the course enjoyable and purposeful. In spite of the fact that the benefits of Introduction to Writing Studies are yet to be tested, it is a logical
approach of instilling writing skills for progressive application by students enrolling for various programs.

Despite the transferability arguments, it is essential to note that skills transfer is not an authentic reason for refuting the inclusion of FYC in high schools. Anne Beaufort, Professor Emeritus at the University of Washington-Tacoma, supports the idea that transferability can be mitigated by applying the concept of genre awareness as a way of facilitating transfer from one writing context to another, whether for different courses or different education levels (Beaufort 66). FYC provides students with the ability to enhance their metacognitive understanding of how the aspects of a familiar writing context can be transferred to less familiar context. Russell supports the genre perspective through suggesting that teaching students the genres of writing is better than giving general writing skill instruction. He believes that learning more writing activities and writing in more genres makes it more likely that students will be able to master a new genre faster as it will have some features they already know from another genre or activity (Russell 59). The concept of writing in more genres involves analyzing new writing tasks in new context and using corresponding writing styles to bridge rhetoric and social knowledge. Downs and Wardle see a potential for improvement of students' understanding of language, rhetoric, writing and literacy through more practical writing courses typically oriented to both writing and reading. Their main idea is to change the conception of first-year composition from teaching "how to write in college" to learning about writing (Downs et al. 553). The Russell approach would require students to sit for writing courses in each writing genre or each subject student takes in school. However, the Downs and Wardle approach saves time and allows transferring knowledge independently. Their course, Introduction to Writing Studies, gives students an understanding of the nature of writing and enables them to explore their writing practices (560).
Hence, the Downs and Wardle opinions should be incorporated in the FYC courses with the objective of promoting optimal learning transfer from high school FYC to college and university studies.

Downs and Wardle’s Introduction to Writing could be useful for modeling first-year composition courses in high schools. First and foremost, they incorporate the use of research writing, through WAC and WID, readings and theoretical ways of thinking about writing to raise questions and provide students with examples of related scholarly writing based on primary research to teach students how to write thoughtful responses to other writing (560). Downs and Wardle encourage students to think historically and to identify the sources of their present attitudes and approaches to literacy (561). The next step requires students to write about conducted primary research, which should help them to generate new knowledge from primary research while further compiling facts from secondary research to aid in the overall enrichment of any new knowledge developed through this process. Primary research helps students to observe carefully and learn empirical data-gathering techniques (562-563). Another vital characteristic of the course is acceptance of students’ levels of imperfect work, drafts that require extensive revision. Downs and Wardle argue that accepting imperfection is recognizing the truth about realistic research writing assignments (575). Nonetheless, Russell’s view that FYC courses are overly ambitious is not accurate; such courses can be used to foster positive habits of thought and expression among students.

**Discussion**

The argument for bringing first-year composition into high schools must take into consideration these various critiques of FYC in postsecondary institutions. Many of the points
mentioned by the critics of introductory writing courses in colleges relate to problems of transferability in the teaching of generalized writing skills. As a result, such points cannot be ignored while discussing possibilities for introducing first-year composition courses in high schools.

Developers of high school first-year composition courses should facilitate a more effective and viable model that is applicable for students at that level. The main aim of the course is to prepare students to improve their writing skills and introduce them to writing practices used in different professions and disciplines (McHenry 11). In other words, the goals of FYC in high schools are the same as those in postsecondary first-year composition courses: to make students better writers. While the best methods for doing this may still be questioned, teaching writing in high school classrooms will allow for the expansion of the duration of students' training, prepare them for college courses and careers, and give them a chance to concentrate on writing within contexts of selected disciplines offered in college. At present, the basis of reading and writing courses in high school are on textbook contexts that neither enhance students’ skills nor prepare them for college courses and careers. As a result, FYC courses in high school would be different by introducing a new name and revised course deliverables embodying different writing processes that will enhance the student's skills and prepare them for college and future careers without forgetting the various writing requirements for the numerous career paths the students are likely to embrace. For instance, whereas high school writing may encompass assignments aimed at allowing students to write coherent narratives, college writing may require students to develop argumentative and analytic essays on specific topics. A clear understanding of the high school and college writing scopes is central to developing measurable and attainable FYC course objectives for the respective student groups.
Elementary courses in writing skills do not belong in the college; on the contrary, the foundation should start in a high school as both the school and college bear a joint and continuing responsibility for training in the use of English language (Jones 4). When first-year composition was offered to Harvard freshmen for the first time in 1885, it was not meant to be a permanent English offering, but a temporary stopgap course until the students who were not strong writers in secondary education improved on their writing skills (Jones 3). The debates that followed the introduction of freshman composition courses in Harvard were partly an attempt to bring attention to the necessity of writing instruction improvement in secondary schools (Jones 3). Unfortunately, until now, few efforts have existed between high schools and colleges to coordinate writing program curricula at various levels. For students, one realization of entering college is that they typically discover that what was important in high school writing is no longer important in college-level writing (5). High school and college teachers should realize that they are working towards the same goal – to make their students better writers – and coordinate their work to ensure continuing and effective guidance in writing instruction. To achieve this objective, it is imperative to ensure that FYC content in high school focuses on three core goals: to teach students to write across the college and university academic courses; to teach students general concepts, such as plagiarism and proper communication, concerning academic language; and to assist students in attaining university-level skills in writing and reading.

**Concurrent Enrollment**

Justin Young, an associate professor and director of English composition program and Writers’ Center at Eastern Washington University, explains that common Core State Standards (CCSS) were introduced to public schools in the United States to align K-12 exit standards with
college level entrance requirements and make students "college and career ready" (Young 19). One way to enhance collaborative learning between high schools and colleges is concurrent (or dual) enrollment programs, which provide college-level learning and credit while students are still in high school. Currently, more than one million high school students in the US are enrolled in concurrent enrollment courses annually (Collier 11). These concurrent enrollment programs could become a platform for collaboration between high school and college teachers in teaching writing skills. For instance, through effective collaborations, high school and college teachers can develop comprehensive courses aimed preparing high school students for college level writing and reading skills.

This opportunity can be mutually beneficial, as high school teachers will learn about the expectations and practices that define college-level writing while college teachers can learn about the practices of teaching high school composition and learn more about the strengths, weakness, and challenges of incoming writers. Such collaboration may also help develop a common understanding of what college-ready writing looks like, and identify the areas of writing where students are least ready for college (Young 20, 23). When high school and college teachers find agreement about and understand students' weaknesses and strengths as writers, they will be able to work together on curriculum development and assessment, according to the CCSS and college-level learning outcomes (Young 23). Coordinated curriculum for high school and college writing courses can help to ensure a continuous learning process, avoiding duplications in course syllabi. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Bruner's scaffolding could be beneficial to this collaboration, as they will enhance interaction with the students, leading to the development of their skills. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development suggests that teachers should utilize cooperative learning exercises to ensure ease of progression and transition across
different levels of learning (Silver 21). The provision of assistance in FYC courses will ensure that the students have enough motivation and energy to achieve tasks. Bruner's scaffolding is also essential in the collaboration since it ensures that the students have active support from their teachers as they acquire new skills. Moreover, the implementation of FYC in high school has a potential of building students’ independence from their teachers, as they grow more confident and efficient at research and writing.

Finding an agreement between high school and college teachers might be challenging as those in high school might feel belittled or ignored by their collegiate colleagues who, on the other hand, feel underserved by high school teachers' efforts (Jones 1). There may also be significant differences between their approaches to writing instruction. High school teachers usually give priority to literary analyses at the expense of rhetoric while teaching writing and composition (Jones 6). Of great interest is the presumption by graduating seniors that literary analysis would be the form of writing mostly emphasized in the college English courses. Despite being true for those seeking to be English majors, there are not many first-year composition classes that focus solely on literary analysis. Differences in understanding of key concepts at high schools and colleges might also lead to disagreement. For example, "thesis" in high school means one's "main idea,” but in college, it may mean one's "central argument,” and the demands for defending a case differ qualitatively from an explanation of the main idea (Jones 6). The four genres of essay writing taught in high school include narrative, description, exposition, and persuasion. In the narrative style, the writer focuses the story on his or her real-life experience. Unlike narrative, descriptive writing involves focusing on the features of an event or object. Expository writing, which is more common in post-secondary education, involves presenting facts as a balanced topic. Regardless, the challenges that might occur in finding consensus
between high school and college teachers may be difficult, but their collaboration is hopefully influential in supporting students' efforts to become better writers.

Before discussing what might comprise the content of a high school first-year composition course, we must look at potential support for and opposition to its introduction and inclusion in high school classrooms. Though first-year composition has been one of the key foundational courses in colleges and institutions of higher learning, the need to enforce and develop it in the high school curriculum is a critical concern in the education sector. The idea of teaching first-year composition in high school has received mixed reactions from scholars and educators. Those opposed to the idea of establishing the requirement of first-year composition in high school feel that there will be no link and consequently little or no benefit from the duplication of courses and FYC (Zorn 283). They believe that for younger high school students, it might be cognitively hard to learn the higher-level material or make different kinds of analysis and judgments that 18- or 19-year-old students usually make at college (Collier 13). In that case, however, high school English classes should not substitute for FYC in college, but prepare high school students for studying at postsecondary education where they will deepen their writing skills. English classes such as Advanced Placement or college preparatory classes would be appropriate since they enhance student's grammar and use of English as a language, and are not entirely focused on enhancing writing skills. As a result, college teachers must remodel their courses to ensure that the required scores are aligned to high school students’ knowledge level to ensure optimal outcomes.

Though FYC has significantly influenced students' writing skills in postsecondary education, some scholars have criticized its essence not only in high school but also in colleges and universities. While FYC has been considered a mandatory introductory course that can help
first-year students in colleges and universities gain academic writing skills, the duration of the course is not the same across all colleges and universities. Introducing the course in high school raises questions about the required duration to ensure that students achieve the set objectives and are prepared adequately for college writing.

Supporters for the incorporation of FYC into the high school curriculum consider the benefits realizable by the high school students; critics consider its relevance, or the lack thereof, to the students' career and academic path. The main aim of introducing the course in high school is to equip young students with vital writing skills that would introduce them to various writing proficiencies required in different disciplines and professions. It is expected that in high school, students gain basic knowledge that significantly determines their future specialization and professionalism. Therefore, providing a firm writing foundation from the high school level could significantly boost students' understanding of their career subjects.

There is a growing need to incorporate FYC in high school, especially given the increased demand for professional writers in modern institutions and organizations. As some scholars have argued, enforcing writing skill early in students' academic journey is a vital approach that supports mastery of key writing basics. Additionally, students who engage in writing composition as a critical thinking practice have the opportunity of becoming persuasive and critical writers, thinkers, and readers. One of the strong arguments used to support the implementation of FYC in high schools is the fact that writing practice facilitates students' ability to work across various arguments and make proper discernment on the value of various ideas and theories across the curriculum. Being able to discern and understand theories is a fundamental requirement of creating strong and applicable theories.
Career advisors have noted a major concern in writing and expression skills among high school students (Young 19). Writing instruction can provide significant preparation for students entering a marketplace where employers continually voice the need for effective written and oral communicators. Currently, almost all professions require substantial knowledge and skill in writing. Whether one is an engineer, a nurse, a technologist, an architect, a doctor, a zoologist, or a businessperson, good writing skills are a necessity. Writing skill is the first general consideration regarded in all professions, yet the importance of FYC is catalyzed by students' perceptions about the mandatory course in colleges and universities. Consequently, it is important to teach students realistic narrative writing depending on the rhetorical situation (Downs 558).

In higher education, the majority of students, especially those in fields such as engineering, mathematics, architecture, medicine, and scientific courses, believe their writing skills are less important in the practical application of their studies. These students believe that writing is not a fundamental tool for expressing their professional skills. Partially, this can be explained by the current content of postsecondary FYC, where instructions on the course writing skill are too general and do not address any specific discipline. The features of good writing in one discipline will differ greatly from the requirements for another one; likewise, what is clear to one audience might be unclear to another (Downs 558). Therefore, FYC in postsecondary institutions should be reshaped to focus on teaching writing instruction related to the students' major.

Though it is important to establish first-year composition in high school, teachers should consider using different instructional approaches based on high school students’ learning requirements. Firstly, the course should be structured in a manner that addresses rhetorical situations in the students' career paths. That is, if FYC becomes a mandatory subject in high
school, students should write addressing specific audiences so that their work demonstrates rhetorical awareness. Similarly, teaching vital organizing principles, such as process analysis, comparison, contrast, and cause and effect, should be emphasized to equip students with the skills that will enable them to make appropriate choices on how to present their ideas. If FYC is incorporated in high school as a mandatory subject for all students, it must be scheduled in a manner that will aid systematic learning while working in sync with the other subjects in the high school curriculum. The duration of the course should be uniform in all high school institutions to ensure effective balance in administering the writing knowledge. In contrast to postsecondary institutions where writing instructions depend greatly on the specific requirements of particular disciplines, which may, and should cause differences in course duration and curriculum, in high school, the curriculum and duration of the writing instruction course can be standardized to ensure equal college and career readiness of high school students. Universalization is achievable by focusing the content of FYC in relation to the aforementioned goals. Nonetheless, high school emerges as the most suitable place for executing the FYC courses with the intention of preparing students for more challenging tasks in colleges and universities. For instance, with the narrative skills obtained in high school level, students can develop the capacity to perform analytic tasks intended to enhance open-mindedness in their approach to challenging situations in higher learning contexts.

To create a better FYC course that can accommodate high school students, it is important to include participation from teachers of different courses and students who will be the direct beneficiaries of the new course. Writing theorists, college and high school teachers, as well as students' opinions should be taken into account while selecting the content of high school FYC courses. The main argument in use by scholars opposed to the idea of introducing first-year
composition into high school is based on a critique of "general writing skills instructions" derived from the course, skills that do not sufficiently address the students' needs in tackling complex genre and subtle rhetorical practices. Therefore, it is important to design a curriculum that addresses specific requirements that students will need to master in their chosen subjects.

Even though most critics argue that writing without content is not possible, there are some general writing instructions that can be taught during a FYC course in high school. If we look back into the curricular document, “The Outcomes Statement,” developed by a disciplinary group of FYC teachers in 1996, we will see some universal requirements expected from FYC students by the end of the course (Harrington et al. 325). This suggests that there are in fact basic generalized skill-sets that can be taught. These include common formats for different kinds of texts; knowledge of genre conventions ranging from structure and paragraphing to mechanics and tone; and knowledge of different means of students' work in documenting, syntax, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and vocabulary (325). In this case, colleges can move on to work on writing in various disciplines.

Other ideas, such as the grounding principles for high school FYC course content, can be adapted from Downs and Wardle's "Introduction to Writing Studies." Although it was developed for college classrooms, some writing activities may be beneficial for high school students. Such activities include reading and reflective assignments that can aid develop students' written responses to others' writings, which could help students to improve their critical thinking and analytical skills (Downs et al. 561). However, despite allowing students to submit flawed work (part of the necessary scope of revision), it is important to ensure that the goals of FYC are achieved. Seeing writing as a process means reconsidering a linear set of writing stages offered
in many high school classrooms where meeting page numbers often overwhelm the concern for actual content (Jones 9).

Again, it is crucial that high school and college writing teachers work collaboratively in the development of an effective curriculum for high school FYC course. Using their experience of teaching FYC at postsecondary institutions, college composition instructors, and administrators can assist in preparing students for the transition into college requirements for writing instruction, while high school teachers help college level teachers to understand the challenges that students face while learning writing instructions in high school. These collective teachers' efforts should strengthen student literacy skills and significantly influence student writing ability (Young 24).

Choosing the content for high school FYC courses would take into consideration feedback from both high school and college students. College students may provide useful comments about their feelings about the teaching of writing at high school and college as well as discover discrepancies of high school curricula with college requirements. In 1951, the Ford Foundation’s Fund conducted a study to determine the relationship between the last two years in secondary school and the first two years of college. In such study, which focused on Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, the main complaints about writing instruction were summarized as poor teaching, especially during the first two years in college; impersonality of learning at large universities; and a lack of stimulus to independent thinking in both high school and college (Jones 4). Jones, currently an associate professor at the University of Memphis, conducted another study that examines discourse and writing in 54 ninth-grade English classes and 48 ninth-grade social studies classes. His study concluded that students who are required to write more frequently exhibit better writing in English class where more attention is paid to the writing process, but worse performance on writing in social studies focused on reading (Jones 5).
In this case, the study showed that students enhance their writing process but fail to work on their reading. Another finding showed by regression analyses of this study is the benefits from classroom talk as a prewriting activity, especially when teachers ask questions without looking for particular answers (Jones 5). This study provides significant data for curricular reforms in high school writing and reading courses. It also indicates the need for relevant connections between the two, which should be worked out through meaningful cooperation between high school and college teachers.

Introducing FYC in high school will also offer opportunities for reshaping FYC courses in postsecondary institutions to professionally oriented courses like Introduction to humanities, science, biology, etc., where college students will from the beginning learn how to write within the contexts of their various disciplines. This depicts the need for focus on both reading and writing skills in a bid at ensuring applicability to the various courses and career paths chosen by students. Having completed an FYC course in high school, freshmen will enter postsecondary educational institutions with basic knowledge on how to write in college and will deepen their knowledge and writing skills following specific requirements of their professional field. This change should ensure motivated writing and have a more practical use for students who will receive writing skills relevant to their future profession.

Though critics have offered substantial arguments against the incorporation of FYC at a high school level, they are not sufficient to ascertain course disapproval. The benefits expected from teaching FYC in high school outweigh the limitations and other deterrents, as it would provide a generalized skill set for college composition classes that would further enhance student writing in the individual student’s chosen field.
Modification Alternatives for FYC

Although FYC critics offer strong arguments against the incorporation of FYC at both high school and tertiary levels, the given counterarguments are not satisfactory to disapprove the course completely. Notably, the benefits that result from teaching FYC in schools outweigh the limitations set forth by the course’s opponents. Primarily, FYC has a potential to provide students with a comprehensive skill set for college composition classes, which enhances writing skills among learners in their respective study fields and in future career positions. Furthermore, the arguments presented by FYC critics can be mitigated by modifying FYC courses to align them to the students’ majors and career choices. The alignment ensures that learners can transfer acquired writing skills to their educational and career domains. Hence, the development and implementation of FYC courses with specific writing requirements for particular fields would be an essential mitigation measure. The crucial modification alternatives for FYC involve modifying writing links and adjuncts, as well as specifying FYC content.

Writing Links and Adjuncts

A significant challenge that first-year composition faces originates partly from theoretical issues that exist within the writing context. Critics such as Young and Kaufer exemplify FYC as a form of writing with no particular content and distinguish FYC courses with subjects where content function is more important than instrumental function (White-Farnham 93). However, Young notes that writing links and adjuncts offers a different approach, which learning institutions can use to link the existing courses with FYC (White-Farnham 21). Notably, the FYC course is linked to other large or medium-sized general education courses, and students are required to enroll concurrently in both the FYC and the general education course. Writing links
and adjuncts offer another approach to joining content and writing in the first-year composition; however, they have different lecture hours and credits. For instance, the writing link can have similar credit hours with the content course but fewer credits. This means that although students should be subjected to equal amounts of instructional time, the writing courses should allow them to attain essential, manageable objectives only. This is attributed to the understanding that lecturers are able to use already existing topics and subjects to develop key course objectives.

The link between existing topics and courses helps students by enhancing the development of knowledge in the content course as opposed to building new knowledge within a writing course. The creation of links is an effective method of dealing with the FYC challenge of having no particular content. The links allow instructors to use the learners’ emergent knowledge in the content course instead of developing the background information based on given assignments in the FYC writing course. Furthermore, the link creation has mutual benefits because composition writing helps students discover and understand concepts in the main lecture class or one’s major. Moreover, the knowledge and perspectives issued in each lecture allow learners to create compositions with critical insights and greater depth.

Various universities use the writing links strategy to maintain the relevance of FYC in their institutions and students' future careers. For instance, the University of Washington has an Interdisciplinary Writing Program that links about 20 writing courses to lecture courses in various disciplines on a quarterly basis. However, the course’s requirements and assignments vary to ensure lecturers maximize linkage with individual lecture courses. The use of writing links and adjuncts is essential in the modification of FYC since it joins content with writing and ensures an equal emphasis on content and writing instruction. The interdisciplinary model is
crucial in identifying the skills that should be covered in the FYC writing and reading course. Such model is preferable as it can address different students’ learning needs.

**Specifying the Content in FYC**

The use of the FYC reforming model functions by limiting content in first-year writing courses. The limitation eliminates random selection of writing topics based on the topics available in a syllabus or the instructors’ preferences. Instead, the model allows a teacher to assign a single but broad topic to an entire study term; however, the topic designation does not support David Russell’s suggestion to turn FYC into a liberal arts course (74). Instead, the topic allocation reinforces David Joliffe’s recommendation for using an “inquiry contract” where students write several papers on a single subject based on their topic of interest (Russell 74). The learners begin with what they know, and after going through the FYC, they incorporate the learned content to subsequent compositions each term. Moreover, the inquiry method is practical since it allows the students to learn about the subject matter and the required content in the first-year composition course. The inquiry model will allow students to approach issues open-mindedly, thereby gaining the important creative writing and reading skills while in high school.

**Strategies for Mitigating the FYC Challenges posed by Critics**

Zorn denotes that most FYC critics assert that the general writing skills, which are the expected end-result of FYC, do not focus on complex genres and do not understate rhetorical practices; notably, this is despite the genres and rhetorical practices being essential for high school writers to know the art of composing academic papers in their distinct fields (273). Consequently, the critics note that first-year composition students should be explicitly taught all
the various conventions of academic writing. However, proponents of FYC argue against the genre’s tactic and indicate that students tacitly recognize more than they can directly express about a given genre. Consequently, exposure to a more direct instructional method concerning writing styles may suppress the existing tacit knowledge and enhance reliance on more limited information that is taught in class. Irrespective of the opponents’ arguments, the genre issue can be solved through minimal exposure to genres in first-year composition courses. The reasons for advocating for limited genres, according to Young, is that most first-year students are often not ready to understand and have no interest in writing styles (22). Moreover, majorities of instructors that offer FYC courses to these learners are not adequately prepared to teach specific writing conventions and neither can they teach the compositions based on each student's major. Furthermore, Young argues that school administrators are often not ready for the financial burden associated with hiring teachers whose instruction abilities cut across the board (22).

A different and significant criticism concerning FYC is the authenticity and qualification of teachers that offer the course in high schools. As indicated earlier, FYC is a unit meant to meet specific academic and career related goals, which are achieved through learning critical thinking skills, the writing process, information literacy, and rhetorical conventions. However, the lack of a standard curriculum for the first-year composition in the American educational system leads to instructional challenges. Carolyn Wisniewski, a University of Tennessee-Knoxville, now-former doctoral candidate whose dissertation focused on the processes by which novice college composition teachers develop pedagogical thinking, posits that FYC students have different perceptions of the course and a majority note that they have negative experiences. For instance, a learner in the first-year composition class notes that the students are disoriented due to the teacher’s content delivery method, which diminishes their enthusiasm (Wisniewski 16).
Furthermore, other reports quoted in the study indicate that high school and college students cannot write or express themselves through the written word. However, it should be noted that the decline in writing and reading abilities is not caused by FYC content but the method of instructional delivery. Therefore, issues concerning the quality of student’s written word should not be based on availability of FYC but on the unqualified nature of the instructors.

Young notes that the overall decline in reading both at home and in school among teenagers has become a significant contributor of the difficulties that high school and college learners have when expressing their opinions through written words (22). Wisniewski posits that most of these students focus primarily on their grades and the attainment of credits for those in colleges insofar that students want to gain credits to allow them to compete in their desired professional, technical, and skilled labor jobs (17). Predictably, modern learners have a pragmatic perspective that influences them to perceive high school and college graduation as a way of achieving their financial goals. Accordingly, the students tend to question the authentic value of achieving competence in writing when they can accumulate grades and realize their economic objectives. The noted challenge has been a crucial critique factor for FYC opponents who cannot support their views. However, first-year-composition instructors in high schools and colleges should consider reflecting on the writing and content of FYC concerning assessments and inclusion reading instructions in the first-year-composition curriculum. Such assessments and inclusion are central to ensuring the relevance of the curriculum in equipping students with the required writing skills.
Conclusion

Writing skills play a significant role in the student's career and provide significant preparation as a means of acquiring influence in various areas of professionalism. The growing need to incorporate first-year composition in high school is evident from the increased demand for professional writers in modern institutions and organizations, especially given the understanding for the need of strong writing skills. The writing skills that can be acquired, or at least introduced, in FYC can place the individual in a professionally advantageous position. Therefore, there is great need to enforce first-year composition in high school. The arguments projected by many critics are not sufficient to kill the idea of introducing this potentially beneficial course at a high school level. The main aim of introducing the course in high school, as indicated in the introduction, is to equip students with vital writing skills that would usher them to various writing skills required in different disciplines and professions, a focus of WAC/WID pedagogy. Various mechanisms, such as the establishment of linked courses, the introduction of limited writing genres, and the use of appropriate assessment measures can render these FYC courses in high schools quite effective. Hence, learning institutions should adopt the recommended measures and incorporate them in their FYC content delivery to influence the continued use of first-year-compositions in both high schools and colleges.

Necessary resources must be deployed to realize the goals of FYC in high school. Opinions of students, writing theorists, as well as both college and high school teachers, should be considered while deciding on the content of the course. The framing of the course should not only focus on empowering students with writing skills, but it should also address rhetorical situations in the student's career path. Even though most of the postsecondary FYC courses argue that writing does not exist without context, a high school FYC curriculum may include the
requirement of knowledge of basic writing conventions, which are universal for all disciplines and professions. However, this does not mean that the structure of FYC seeks to return students back to the basics. In addition, the duration of the course should be uniform in all high school institutions to ensure sufficient balance in administering the both writing and reading knowledge. If high schools incorporated FYC, college level FYC classes could take on more specification and focus more on the student’s career choice or course.

To establish FYC appropriately in high school, there is a need to create and develop a high school curriculum that would address major concerns raised by key teachers, students, and educationists. This is achievable through incorporation of ideas from all stakeholders and creating a curriculum program based on these ideas. College writing instructors working together with high school teachers have the potential to develop the most viable models of course curricula, considering their different levels experience and the varied challenges of teaching writing and reading in both high schools and postsecondary educational institutions.
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