CAMBRIDGE

Getting the most from every moment of learning

Guide to integrating learning and assessment in your teaching



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Introduction

How can you get the most from every moment of learning in your classes? The best way to help learners succeed is by providing evidence of progress and actionable feedback as part of an Integrated Learning and Assessment (ILA) approach. Cambridge's ILA approach seamlessly combines learning and assessment, and shows how they can be integrated to maximise student outcomes.

The good news is that you are probably already including some elements of ILA in your teaching. The task now is to refine these practices and make sure that they work together to get the best outcomes for your learners.

Who this guide is for

All learners, whatever their age or language level, can benefit from seeing evidence of their learning and receiving actionable feedback. So this guide is for all teachers, whether you are just starting your teaching journey or have years of experience in the classroom. You may be preparing your learners for Cambridge English Qualifications, or your learners may not undergo any external assessment – the ideas in this guide will benefit learners either way.

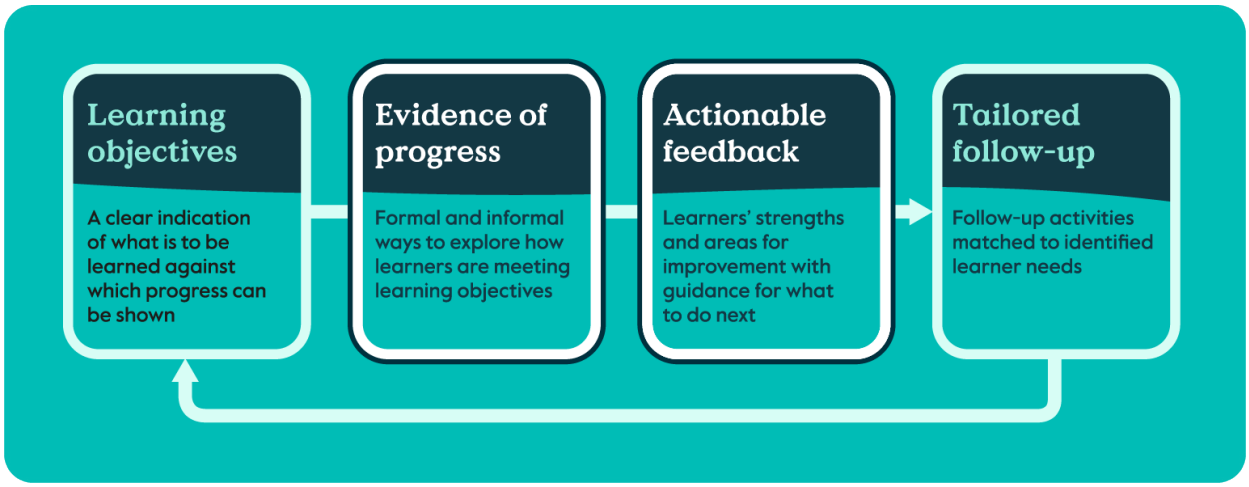


How to use this guide

This guide will take you through the process of integrating learning and assessment in your teaching. This process isn't just a question of adding some new techniques, it's also a change to the way that you think about teaching and learning. But that change doesn't need to happen overnight. You can make improvements to your teaching one at a time, step-by-step, and together they will make a significant difference to your learners.

In these pages we share over 20 ideas you can adopt to integrate learning and assessment to get the most from every moment of learning in your classroom. The more of these ideas you can embed into your teaching practice, the greater the impact on your students' learning outcomes. The ideas are grouped according to four pillars of ILA:

The four pillars of the ILA approach



The four pillars form the core of ILA in the classroom. They can be implemented by any teacher, in any context, to support improved learning outcomes. Of the four pillars, we believe that providing evidence of progress and actionable feedback are the best ways to help learners succeed. Learning objectives and tailored follow-up support you to do those things effectively.

To get started, begin with the first idea in the 'Learning objectives' section, and build it into your teaching. Once you feel comfortable with that idea, build in a new one. You can pick the ideas that appear most interesting to you, or follow the order in which the ideas are presented in each section.

If you find that some of the ideas in this guide need more time to become part of your teaching, that's fine – these are practices for a whole teaching career, not just one academic year. Over time, you can build up a toolkit of proven techniques that help you integrate learning and assessment to monitor student progress more accurately and provide the actionable feedback that truly drives improvement. By starting to embed the ideas in this guide into your teaching practice, you'll be better equipped to respond to the diverse needs of your students and help them achieve their language learning goals.

Outcomes will be greater for teachers who can work within an educational context that is entirely aligned towards the same goals, with learning materials, external assessment and teacher development all working towards the same end. For more information, see cambridge.org/ILA.

Short of time? Focus on these idea numbers first.		
Learning objectives	1	Derive learning objectives from your course materials
	3	Clarify success criteria
Collecting evidence of progress	7	Use classroom activities for collecting evidence
	8	Monitor with purpose
Actionable feedback	11	Apply the essentials of effective feedback
	12	Plan time for feedback
Tailored follow-up	17	Reflect on your impact after each lesson

Click the idea you would like to go to.



Learning objectives

What do you need to know?

Clear learning objectives and success criteria are fundamental for guiding students towards language proficiency. Learning objectives spell out what specific language skills or knowledge students should develop. They can refer to a period of study as short as one lesson, but they could also be used across several lessons, or a whole course. Success criteria provide concrete examples of what successful performance of the learning objectives looks like.

For instance, instead of "practising speaking" as an objective, you might clarify, "be able to introduce yourself and ask simple questions when you first meet someone." This helps students understand what they are working towards and makes it easier for you to judge whether each learner has successfully met the lesson objective.

What do you do already?

Reflection task

Do you have a clear idea of what the learners should be able to do by the end of each lesson?
How do you share that with the learners?

How can you do more?

Idea 1 | Derive learning objectives from your course materials

Your course materials may include learning objectives at the top of each unit or lesson, or in the Teacher's Book. These objectives are tailored to your learners' levels and can serve as a "main quest" for the lesson, much like in a video game. For example, in Evolve Level 3 (the example seen to the right), the objective is to write an email to get to know someone. Encourage your students to notice how all the smaller tasks (like focusing on paragraphs) contribute towards achieving this main goal. Keeping the objectives in mind helps maintain focus and direction throughout the lesson.

If your course materials don't include learning objectives, try to identify what learning outcomes the activities lead towards. Ask yourself, "what will this material require learners to understand and to do?"



Click to view larger version

Idea 2 | Write your own learning objectives

All your lessons should take learners one step closer to being able to communicate in English. Learning objectives must be achievable during the lesson, but they can combine to work towards larger curriculum goals, so start with your institution's curriculum or syllabus. Alternatively, use exams as a guide to identifying what your learners will need to be able to do.

- Begin your objectives with the words "By the end of the lesson learners will..."
- Make sure that the real-world context in which students will implement their learning is clear. You should also specify what they will do in that context. In the Evolve example it's "write an email to get to know someone."
- For grammar and vocabulary, specify the form(s) or lexical set that you want learners to use. It can be useful to add an example.

It can be useful to add an example of how you might expect learners to use the target language during the lesson.

Idea 3 | Clarify success criteria

Understanding what success looks like is crucial for achieving learning objectives. Success criteria spell out what success looks like, which adds useful detail and enables you and your learners to focus on achieving the objectives. As the teacher, you can use the success criteria to help guide your feedback to learners. For the Evolve example above, success criteria might look like this:

Remember to:

- *Use a different paragraph for each topic*
- *Use informal opening and closing sentences*
- *Say something about yourself and your family*
- *Ask questions*

Success criteria can be especially useful in helping learners preparing for Cambridge English Qualifications to understand what the examiner is looking for. You can see an example of exam-specific success criteria here.

Idea 4 | Plan lessons 'backwards'

Instead of starting your lesson plan with the opening stage, begin with the learning objective. Imagine the learners successfully achieving that objective at the end of the lesson. What are they doing that demonstrates achievement? From there, you can work backwards to create the success criteria and the steps needed to help learners be successful. What are the essential elements? What are the optional activities that can be skipped if time is short? Use the learning objectives to guide these decisions. Planning "backwards" in this way ensures you stay focused on the end goal.

Idea 5 | Share learning objectives and success criteria with learners

Make sharing objectives a regular part of your lesson. Share learning objectives with your students by writing them on the board and discussing them. It may be appropriate to introduce or recap a long-term learning objective first, to help learners understand how the learning objective for the lesson relates to previous learning and takes them towards broader goals.

In addition to sharing the learning objectives, make sure learners understand the success criteria as well. You could simply provide these, but it is likely to be more effective to show learners a model of what they are expected to achieve (the example from Evolve above contains two models). Learners can then be guided to construct the success criteria for themselves, which is much more likely to lead to high achievement.



Collecting evidence of progress

What do you need to know?

Collecting evidence of learning is especially important in the English language classroom, where students' language abilities can vary widely. Teachers need reliable ways to assess whether students are developing the necessary communicative skills. Evidence can be gathered from the communicative activities learners engage in, careful questioning, or even quick comprehension checks during a listening task. It can also be gathered from more formal assessment tools. Learner reflection is an important part of the evidence that we should collect.

What do you do already?

Reflection task

What do you do in your lessons to find out how much the students already know, and how much they are learning?

How do you capture that information (for example, in a notepad, or spreadsheet)?

How can you do more?

Idea 6 | Make the most of your whole-class questions

Some of the questions you ask in the classroom will be questions you don't know the answer to (e.g. what did you do at the weekend?). Other questions will be those you ask in order to check what the learners already know, or what they have understood. When you ask these:

- Pause after each question so that learners have time to think about their answers.
- Don't choose the first learners who raise their hands to answer. You want to know about the understanding of all learners, not just the fast ones.
- Nominate learners to answer instead, perhaps using a random method such as names from a hat, or by drawing lolly sticks with names on.
- When a learner answers, don't immediately indicate whether they were right or wrong, but invite others to comment, or to agree or disagree.

The goal is for you to understand learners' thinking, not to collect correct answers, so make the environment positive and open.

Idea 7 | Use classroom activities for collecting evidence

Any classroom activity can provide evidence of learning if it aligns with your objectives and you are clear about the evidence you want to collect. There are several steps to this:

- Select your activities when you plan your lessons backwards (see Idea 4).
- Understand the objective for each activity: how does it contribute towards your overall learning objective?
- Monitor learners as they complete the activity (idea #8), check their understanding with questions (Idea 6) and invite them to reflect on it (idea 10).

Idea 8 | Monitor with purpose

When learners are busy in class working on tasks that you have given them, you need to monitor them. This means actively observing the learners, with two goals in mind:

1. **To make sure that they understand what they need to do**
   If you see that learners are not completing the task as you intended, you may need to clarify instructions, or stop all learners and set up the task again. Learners who see that you are observing may call you over to request help or to ask questions.
2. **To evaluate how successfully they are performing**
   When you can see the learners working, look for evidence of achievement of the success criteria that you set for your task. Are all the criteria being met? If so, how? If not, are some criteria proving especially challenging for the learners?

Record your observations in some way – you may want to make notes on a notepad, or you could record notes digitally and add photos, audio or video. Your notes will be used to help you provide feedback.

Idea 9 | Use tests as a 'learning GPS'

You will probably have to test your learners as part of their course, and you may not have much control over the content or form of those tests. But there are still ways in which you can use tests and test results to improve teaching and learning:

- Encourage your learners to use **test preparation** as a chance to review their previous work and identify where they feel more confident about what they know and can do, or where they might need more study. For example, they can work in groups to look at past test papers and discuss questions together. The aim is not to answer the questions but to identify which parts of the curriculum they are comfortable with, and which parts they need support with.
- **After a test**, put learners in groups to peer-mark each other's answers. They could first work together to discuss and create a mark scheme, or you could provide the mark scheme to them. If you choose to do that, it can be useful to provide learners with a model answer to mark, so that they become accustomed to using the mark scheme.

If you can, collect marks for each section of the test paper, so that you can see which sections the class performed best in and which sections were most difficult. You can use this data to plan how you will follow up (see Tailored Follow-Up).



Idea 10 | Prompt learner reflection

One of the best ways to understand whether students are learning is to ask them! You can do this as part of a lesson, to gather evidence of learning in relation to your learning objective for that day. Or you can do it after a period of time, looking back over weeks or months and checking which parts of your curriculum have been learned and which might need more work.

Asking learners to reflect on what they feel they have learned can help them to recognise the progress they have made, and offer you some feedback on your lessons, as well as providing evidence of learning for you to work with. This can be done to different levels of depth:

- Anonymously via an online platform.
- By collecting handwritten answers to make students more at ease.
- Young learners could use 'traffic light' cards to indicate how comfortable they feel with the lesson content. Green means "I feel I can do this", orange means "I can do this but I need more practice", and red means "I need more help before I can do this".
- Teenage and adult learners might benefit from filling in a KWL chart (showing what they know, want to know, and have learned) in certain lessons, and keeping track of their learning objectives at different points of their learning journey.

This online kit has several ideas you can adapt to your context.



Actionable feedback

What do you need to know?

Feedback is a vital way of supporting learners to recognise how they have improved, and how they can continue to improve. Feedback should use evidence of learning to provide specific information to learners about how far they have progressed towards the learning objectives.

What do you do already?

Reflection task

How do you make it clear to learners that they have been successful?
How do you explain what they can do to perform better?

How can you do more?

Idea 11 | Apply the essentials of effective feedback

Whenever you give feedback to learners, either as a group or individually, aim to:

Focus your feedback only on elements relevant to the learning objective and success criteria. Although it can be tempting to give feedback on everything, focusing on the learning objective at hand will make life easier for your learners.

Include feedback on positive elements (evidence of progress) as well as ways to improve (actionable feedback). Learners need to know what they have done well, as well as what they could do better.

Check that learners have understood the feedback and know what to do next. You could do this by asking learners to summarise the feedback you have given, asking them to suggest what their next step should be, or providing them an opportunity to perform the task again and act on the feedback immediately.

Idea 12 | Plan time for feedback

When you plan your lessons, make sure that you include time in your lesson for feedback. There will probably be several opportunities for feedback in each lesson. You should allow time for:

- Feedback after discussions, to hear student ideas.
- Feedback after exercises, so that learners know what the correct answers are, but most importantly, why those are the correct answers.
- Feedback after your main task (the one in which learners should demonstrate success criteria).

Depending on the time available, you may also allocate time for learners to act on the feedback they receive, for example by repeating a task (or one very similar).

Idea 13 | Feedback on speaking

Aim to give some feedback on speaking immediately (for instance, on pronunciation), and some delayed feedback.

- Delayed feedback usually involves sharing specific examples of learner speech with the class. You will have collected these when monitoring and listening to learners talk.
- Learners can then discuss these examples and decide if they are correct or incorrect, or whether they can be improved.
- In this way, common errors or problems can be discussed, learned from and corrected in a way that is supportive and open.

For more detailed advice on how to give feedback on speaking, see Giving feedback to language learners in the Cambridge papers in English language learning series.

Idea 14 | Feedback on writing

Giving feedback on writing can take up a lot of a teacher's time, so it is important that it has an impact. Here's how you can make yours as effective as possible:

- Make your feedback specific to the success criteria for your lesson.
- Leave written comments that are specific and actionable (see Idea 11), rather than more ambiguous annotations such as ticks, underlining or question marks.
- Encourage learners to use digital tools for proofing and to ask you if they have questions about the corrections those tools make. They could use the proofing tools in word processing software such as Microsoft Word, or they could ask for feedback from an AI chatbot such as ChatGPT. Doing this for first drafts means that your comments can focus on achievement of the success criteria, rather than on correcting minor errors of spelling or grammar.
- Consider using a screen recording tool to give your feedback in spoken form; some learners may prefer this to written comments.
- Keep a record of your feedback so that you - and your learners - can refer back to it. A digital record of feedback, even if a simple spreadsheet, can easily be updated, shared and accessed.
- Encourage students to reflect on the feedback, to ask questions if necessary, and to set goals for their next writing task.



Idea 15 | Receptive skills feedback

When learners are listening or reading, it is very difficult to collect evidence of learning. As teachers, our main source of evidence is usually in the form of answers to comprehension questions. But these answers don't tell us how the learners can improve: if answers are wrong, there are many reasons why they could be wrong, and even if they are correct, they may be correct for the wrong reasons.

So, it is essential to get learners to reflect on how they are reading / listening, and for them to try to identify the areas which are holding them back. For example, learners may have difficulty completing a listening task for several reasons (Wilson, 2003*):

- They find it difficult to identify specific sounds.
- They find it difficult to separate sounds into words.
- They hear the words but find it difficult to remember meanings fast enough.
- They hear the words but some of those words are new to them.
- They hear and understand the words but not the meaning of that phrase.

If learners get a listening question wrong, the next step is to ask them to identify from this list what the problem was. (For reading, use the last three items on the list and substitute 'read' for 'hear'.) From there you can begin to provide actionable feedback.

For more advice on teaching and assessing receptive skills, see our guides for teachers at cambridgeenglish.org

* Wilson, M. (2003). Discovering listening–improving perceptual processing. ELT Journal, 57(4), 335–343.



Idea 16 | Self and peer assessment

Encouraging learners to assess their own performance, and their peers', is a crucial step towards helping them take charge of their own learning. It's also a natural progression from sharing learning objectives and success criteria with them (Idea 5).

Start with peer-assessment, as this can provide a useful foundation for self assessment later.

1. Ask learners to examine their partner's work alongside the success criteria and to decide which criteria they achieved.
2. Based on that peer-assessment, ask learners to write feedback for their partner. Let them know about the features of effective feedback from Idea 11.
3. Get learners to share their assessments and their feedback with their partners, and to discuss whether they agree with the ways they assessed each other.
4. Encourage students to be honest and specific in their feedback, using examples to support their points.
5. If there are questions or points of difference, discuss these as a class. The aim is for learners to be able to assess their progress more effectively and decide what their next steps should be.

Tailored follow-up

What do you need to know?

Feedback is a reaction to learning, but there are other ways we must react to the evidence of learning that we collect, during lessons, after lessons, and after longer periods of study. Our goals are to consolidate learning, deal with areas of difficulty, and better meet student needs – both as a whole class, and as individuals – in future lessons.

The ideas in this section help you to do this. We start with the actions that you can take to reflect on your own teaching and to organise some of the evidence of learning you will have collected. We then share ideas for following-up on learning with the whole class, before examining ways of tailoring follow-up to individuals or groups of learners.

What do you do already?

Reflection task

What do you do to extend learning for your stronger students?

What do you do to help students who have not yet achieved the learning objectives?

What do you do to reflect on your own teaching and improve it?



What do you need to know?

Idea 17 | Reflect on your impact after each lesson

Collecting evidence of learning provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the success of your teaching. You can evaluate your success more effectively after collecting evidence of learning from students.

Ask yourself these questions as you reflect after each lesson:

- What progress did learners make towards the learning objectives?
- What evidence do I have of that progress?
- What other successes or achievements do I have evidence of?
- What aspects of my teaching supported learners to make progress?
- What aspects of my teaching could be changed to enable further progress in future?

Although it can be tempting to focus on the most notable achievements or contributions from the lesson, ensure that you consider the progress that all students made, or didn't make. This will give you the most accurate picture of the impact that your teaching is having. It will also help you to pinpoint areas for improving your teaching more effectively.

Idea 18 | Collating evidence of learning

The ILA approach is based on understanding learners in order to better support their learning. To do that, we need to collect information about learners – their interests, needs, preferences and achievements.

Set up a system at the beginning of the year to collect evidence of learning for each student. This can include data from self and peer assessments, personal notes, digital learning content, tests, and exam preparation materials. This could be as simple as a folder on your computer or a page in your school's digital learning platform if you have access to one. It doesn't have to be digital, but you might find it easier to organise, especially if any of the work your students have done is on a digital platform.

Idea 19 | Return to challenging topics

If your class has struggled with a learning objective, they will need further support with it. It may be best to re-teach part of the lesson, or teach the same learning objective in a different way. To make the most of this, consider these questions when you plan how to re-teach:

- How do you know that the class found this area of the curriculum difficult?
- What evidence of learning can you build on?
- Does your evidence provide clues about what caused the difficulty? If not, can you gather evidence that will provide that information?
- How can you best support learners with the specific difficulties you've identified?
- What will success look like?

Colleagues can often be a valuable source of information and ideas when it comes to teaching difficult topics or skills. Ask other teachers what they would do and incorporate the best ideas.

Idea 20 | Re-run or repeat activities and tasks

Task repetition, particularly of speaking tasks, can be an effective way of consolidating learning and providing learners with further opportunities to demonstrate their use of new language. You might choose to repeat tasks within a lesson if there is time, or across two or more lessons. Consider making small changes each time you repeat a task to maintain engagement while still focusing on the same learning objectives:

- Regroup learners so that they interact with different peers.
- Change roles or the topic of the task.
- Change the mode of interaction, e.g. from face to face to online, or spoken to written.
- Change the level of support provided, to make the task more challenging.
- Change the time available.

Idea 21 | Review and recycle

Consolidating learning is a vital component of effective follow-up. Learners need to review and reuse the language they have learned for it to be remembered in the long term. For example, you can review learning by:

- Having learners complete unit progress tests, if these are part of your learning materials. See Idea 9 for ways to make these more conducive to learning.
- Return to reading or listening texts that you used in previous lessons. Get learners to reflect on whether they can understand these more easily than before.
- Have learners look back through the coursebook (if you use one) and pick out elements that they feel they need to review. Plan follow-up work accordingly.
- Collect examples of language – from learners and from your learning materials - through the week, and at the end of the week get learners to decide which are correct, and to correct any they think are incorrect.

Idea 22 | Respond to learner preferences, reflections, and engagement

Try to make a habit of finding out what your learners enjoy when learning and building those elements into your lessons. There are many ways of doing this:

- Create a dialogue with learners – have them write a weekly journal in lessons or at home for you to look at and respond to. This is a way of understanding your learners as people, as well as gathering evidence of their abilities, needs and preferences. Respond to the content rather than correcting mistakes.
- Ask learners to vote on topics / tasks to prioritise – what do they feel they need to work further on?
- Give learners a questionnaire to find out what interests them.
- KWL – Find out what learners know, what to know and need to learn more about before a new topic/task type/language or grammar point.

Idea 23 | Reduce the learning burden on some learners with scaffolded support

The evidence of learning that you collect will usually show that some learners need more support than others to achieve their learning objectives. There are different steps you can take to provide that support, for example:

- Vary the amount of language required from learners to achieve the communicative goal. You can do this by providing key vocabulary or useful phrases to weaker learners, so that they can focus on producing a more specific range of language.
- Group learners in different ways. Sometimes it will be preferable to group stronger learners with those who need more support, while at other times you might group learners of similar abilities together, so that you can provide support to the group who need it most.
- Have 'stretch' activities for fast finishers/stronger students, rather than more scaffolded activities for weaker learners who may recognise that they have been given more support than their peers. If you do this, ensure that the stretch activities relate to the same learning objectives as your core task.



Final considerations

In this guide we have explained how the four pillars of ILA support the successful integration of learning and assessment in the classroom, and we have shared teaching ideas for all four pillars. You're now ready to start your ILA journey by embedding these into your teaching practice. Proceed one idea at a time, and remember that making significant improvements to teaching and learning is usually the result of small changes applied consistently, rather than big changes every so often. For further support as you move forward, visit cambridge.org/ILA.

Frequently asked questions

Do I need a Cambridge book or Cambridge exams to do ILA?

No. The four pillars that underpin ILA in the classroom don't rely on particular books or examinations. But successful implementation of ILA does require alignment of curriculum, teaching and assessment, and using Cambridge learning and assessment materials can ensure that alignment. For more information see our research paper at cambridge.org/ILA.

Can I integrate learning and assessment without digital tools?

Yes. Digital tools are not a necessity for ILA. But some digital tools can make it easier for the teacher to collect evidence of progress, to deliver actionable feedback, and to create tailored follow-up for learners. For examples see here.

How long will it take to integrate learning and assessment in my classroom?

Implementing ILA is not a process with a clearly defined endpoint. Instead, you are likely to see benefits to student learning with every improvement that you make to your teaching practice. Making lasting changes to your teaching takes time, and it is probably a good idea to focus on introducing just one new idea from this guide each week. In many cases you will see some benefit straight away, but you will probably be refining most of these techniques for years to come.

Where can I learn more?

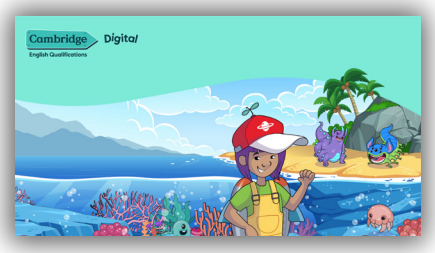
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