

# DISTANCE LEARNING

The Authoritative Guide  
for **School Leaders**

Includes our  
Learning Continuity  
checklist

see page 19

# Introduction

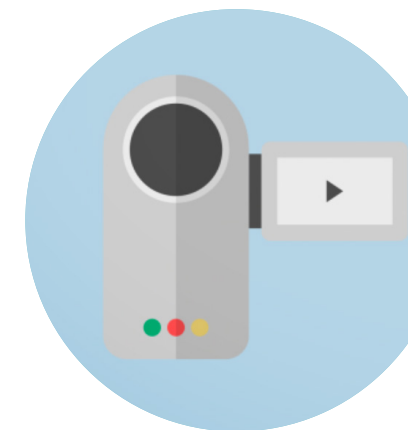
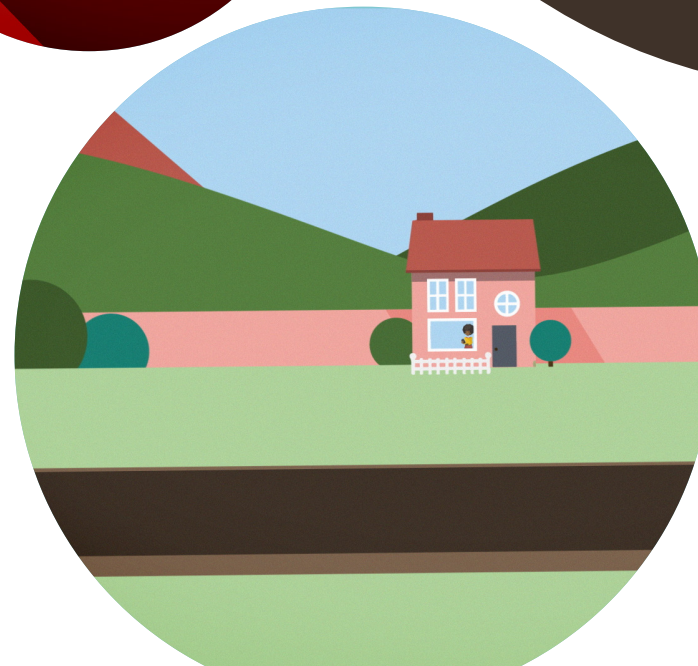
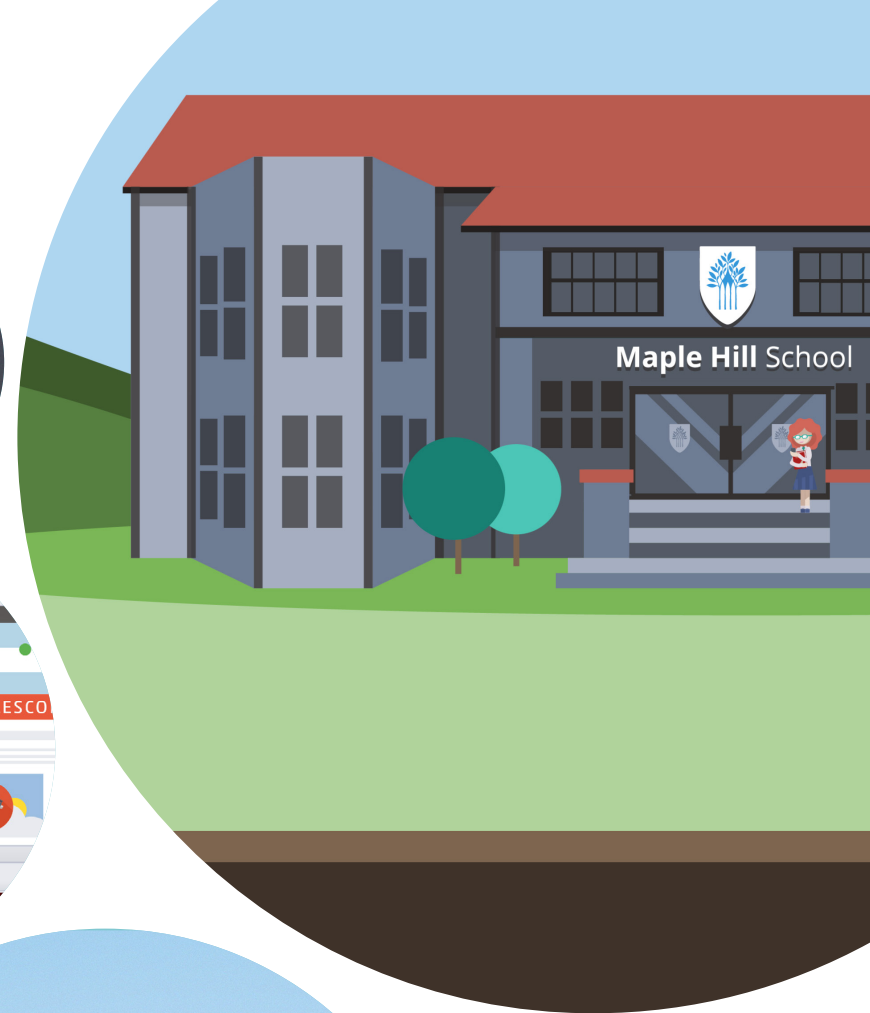
The impact of COVID-19 has driven schools all around the world to move to a new way of teaching. This has been no mean feat, with schools having to consider new tools, policies, and teaching practices as well as new ways of working collaboratively when they are so used to in-person interactions.

We've heard some fantastic stories, and it's been amazing to see the quick turnaround schools have made to make distance learning work. Not to mention how parents have risen to the challenge of homeschooling.

However based on our recent survey, this quick turnaround has come at a cost. Our recent survey showed that **67% of schools** did not feel confident to assess learning digitally. Quality feedback is one of the most important aspects of learning, but given the current workloads of teachers, it can be difficult to provide.

With this in mind, we wanted to share 4 key areas school leaders need to consider in order to provide a dynamic digital learning strategy. One which does not compromise the essentials of in-classroom learning. They are: **Preparing content**, **Sharing resources**, **Assessing progress** and **Engaging with parents**.

In addition, to help benchmark your school in terms of readiness for learning continuity, we also share some useful insights from our recent distance learning survey.

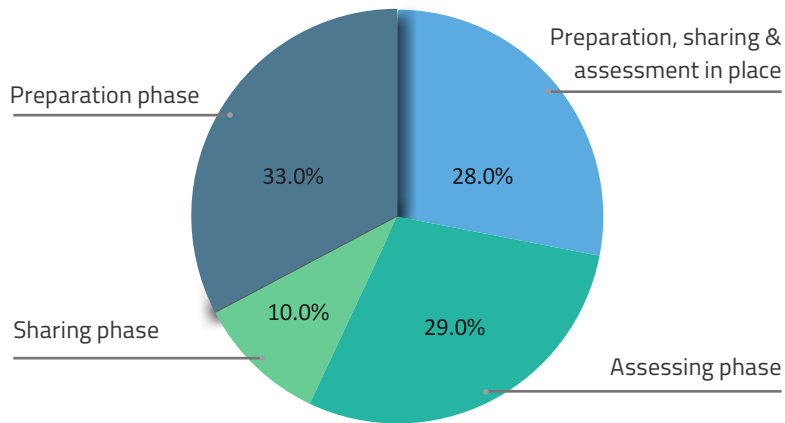


# 1. PREPARE

## How can you prepare for distance learning?

In our survey on distance learning readiness, results showed that **33% of schools** were still at the preparation phase (April 2020). This phase includes the review of a school's online learning tools as well as content for their digital learning program.

Learning is less about location and in recent years there has been a lot of talk of edtech driving this shift. Students are now able to access learning content from home as easily as in class.



How would you best describe your school's current ability to offer distance learning?

### Make all your resources easy to access

When providing digital learning, teachers and students can often face problems and frustration searching for multiple files. This includes too many open tabs, or remembering multiple different logins for a variety of platforms. Try to find a solution which can help your school bring all your resources together in one place.



#### Prepared content

Finding content to share is as easy as a Google search. BBC Bitesize, GCSEPod, Twinkl, GeoGebra, PHET, Youtube — you name it. Digital textbooks are on the rise as well. Whether your teachers have got time or need something at the last minute, there are a variety of options.

#### Content creation

Content creation is not just for professionals anymore either. Think of vast online libraries like Khan Academy. Tools like digital whiteboards and screen sharing technology have expanded the pool of content creators.



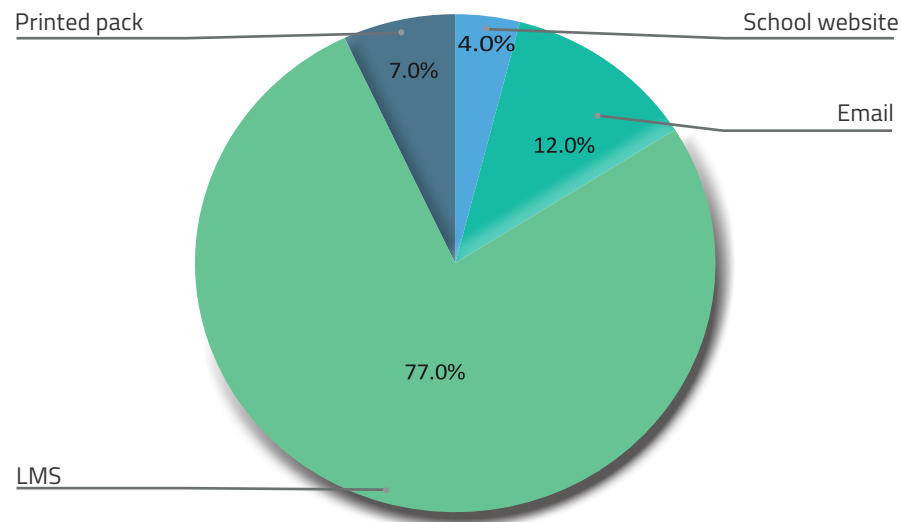
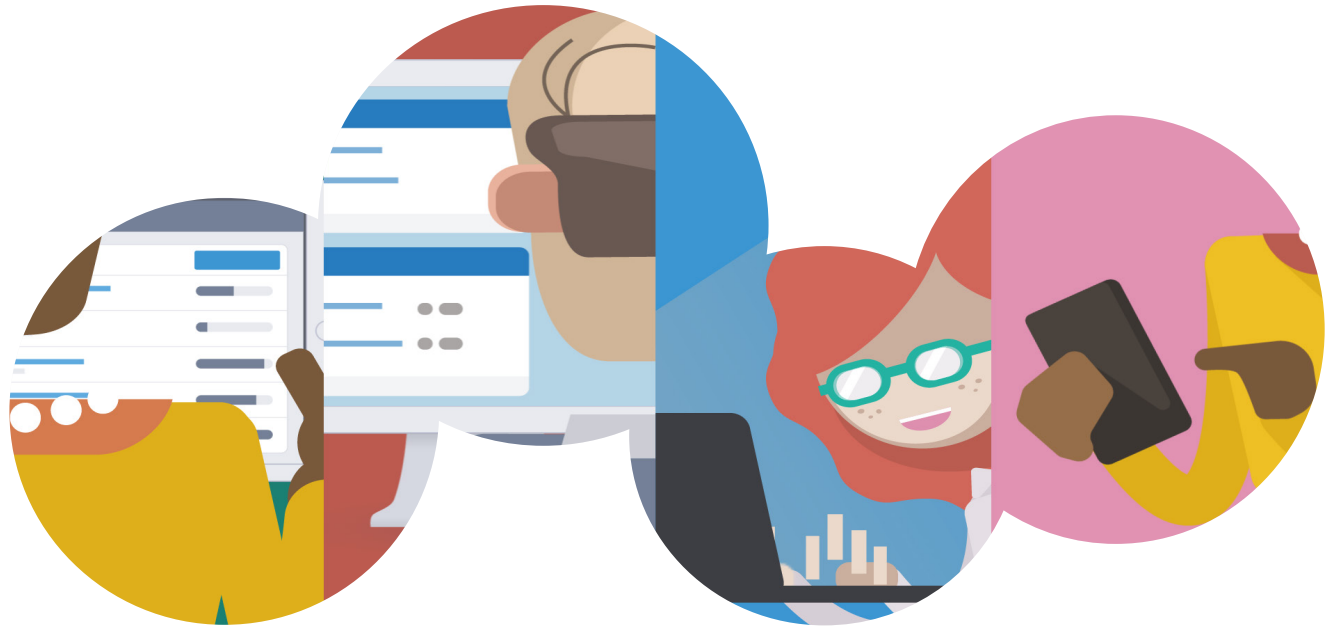
#### Activity creation

Quizlet, Kahoot! and Educandy have applied similar ideas to the activity side of learning. Companies like ClickView have also taken it a step further by creating worksheets for their content. Teachers can even create interactive videos with their own videos.

## 2. Share

How will you share the learning resources?

In the face of school closures, schools are making use of all kinds of content. Our recent survey showed that 43% of schools didn't feel prepared to share resources online. Of those who felt prepared, a **staggering 77%** were using a Learning Management System as their preferred method of sharing. These include Google Classroom, Microsoft Teams and Firefly.



How would you share learning resources with students?

These platforms allow schools to bring everything into one place, making it simple for both teachers and students to access resources and collaborate with each other. Benefits include messages not getting lost in an inbox along with increased security and data management.

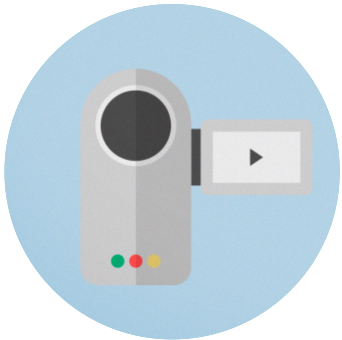
### Provide a blend of activities and reduce screentime

Students will be spending a lot of time at home and will get bored easily. Try to think about a range of digital assets to use such as videos, worksheets, and quizzes. You will also want to think about how to limit screentime, for example through the use of audiobooks or asking students to write pieces of work in an exercise book, which could be shared as a picture file.



### Getting support from Parents

The best solutions also make it easy for parents to be part of the learning conversation, strengthening the partnership between school and home. When considering different options, take a look at ones which share resources not only with students and teachers, but also with parents who will become your teaching assistants during school closures.



### Combining learning content with video-conferencing

Beyond using an LMS platform, the other tool which many schools have opted for is video conferencing. Learning is an inherently social process; it's all well and good to distribute perfectly pitched and curated content, but it soon hits a wall without some dialogue and interaction.

A little work with Google Calendar and Google Hangouts could allow a school to hold classes or run tutor sessions, whilst Zoom and Microsoft Team Meetings are also popular tools. In the edtech sphere, tools like Padlet or Firefly forums can facilitate online interaction. If you haven't already done so, check out Flipgrid for video.

With the right tools, you can manage the kind of interaction you want. Even better if you can centralise it, like many schools do through Firefly, you can provide a multi-dimensional video conference experience with notes, videos and worksheets grouped together in a single space.

## Develop clear policies and guidelines

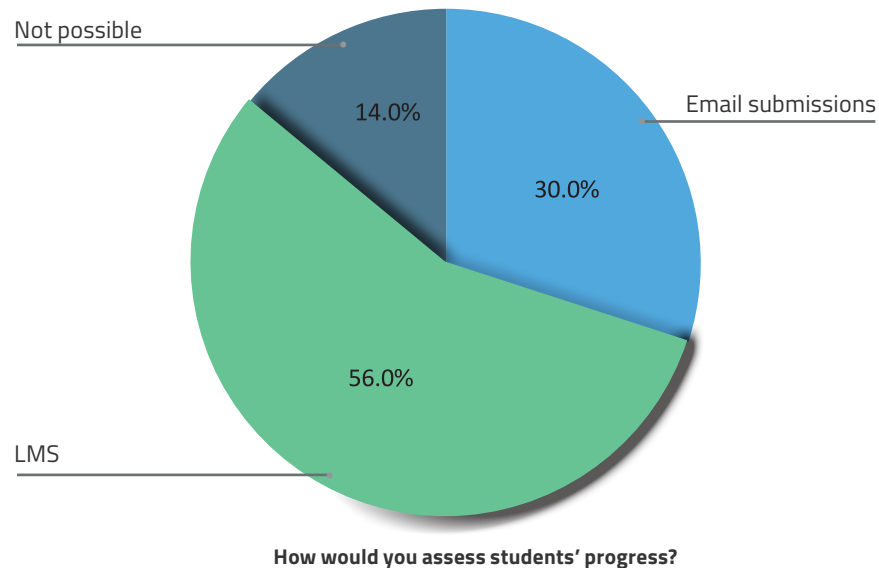
Make sure policies are clear for both students and teachers to help maintain safeguarding. Often schools have very clear policies within the school setting, but at this time, they will need to prepare policies which have been adapted for distance learning. Also don't forget to ensure these documents can be easily found.



## 3. Assess

### How can you assess students' progress?

Our recent survey on distance learning preparedness, indicated that **67% of schools** currently don't feel ready to assess work online. If given a choice, the preference for assessing work was by using an LMS for **56% of schools**.



#### Providing evidence-based activities

In the event of an extended school closure, assessment and feedback becomes an essential aspect of home learning. The Learning Scientists have an excellent blog and podcast full of evidence-based activities.

#### Giving quality feedback

Your students might also appreciate the added touch of audio or video feedback. For more formal assessments, some of the video tools mentioned earlier might open up the opportunity for oral or performance exams. Whatever your curriculum, there will be something that fits your needs.

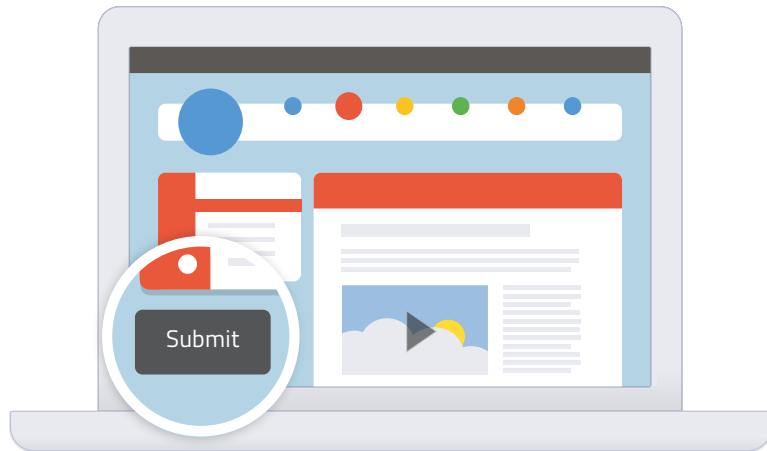


### Think about assessment authenticity

We don't want students to simply pull answers from google or textbooks. So think about the types of assessments your school will provide. For example, you could try to use a combination of quizzes, video or audio submissions, photos of handwritten work or even screen captures of online projects.

### Tracking progress

What is going to fit your school's needs? For many schools, it tends to come down to the flexibility of feedback and collection of data. For example in Firefly, teachers are able to provide grades and feedback on each piece of work which then gets collated automatically into a digital markbook for each student.



## You need simplicity for tracking purposes

Teachers can't be managing multiple assessments methods through a variety of platforms as it will quickly become difficult to track grades for multiple classes. Find ways of bringing all the results together in one place.

## Manage the workload

Teaching online is hard. There is a lot of work that goes into preparing it. Think about how your teachers can easily share it through an LMS platform, and find tools which speak to each other so that gathering assessment data is simple.

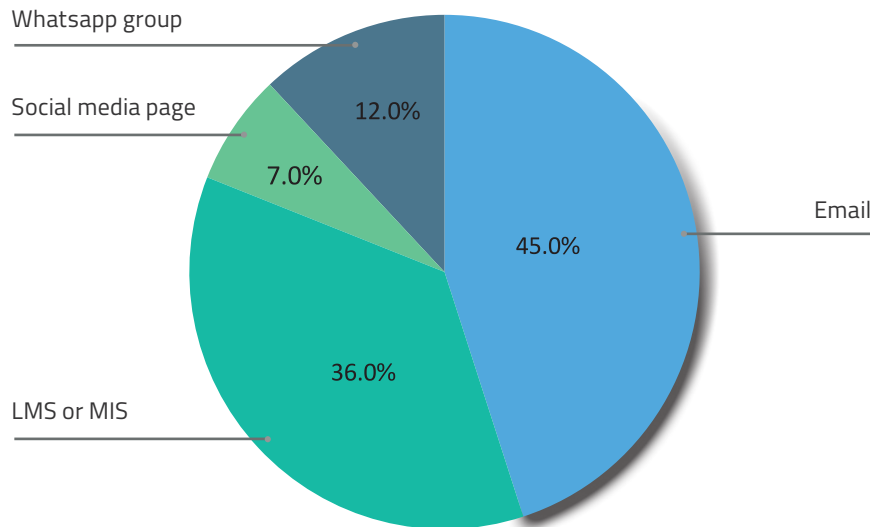
If you would like more guidance, why not [visit our Firefly resources page](#)? Here our learning experts share advice for digital learning strategies and learning continuity.

## 4. Engage

How will you be getting parents involved?

During a school closure, the needs of parents have evolved beyond simply wanting to know how their child is progressing. They are also fulfilling the role of teacher or teaching assistant, which is why it is even more important than ever for schools to be in close contact with parents and families.

When speaking to schools, our survey showed that **45% of schools** kept in contact with parents mainly over email, closely followed by an LMS or MIS for **36% of schools**.



How would you engage parents in their child's learning journey?

### Ensure regular comms don't become a burden

Schools need to ensure that regular communication doesn't become a burden for everyone involved. Teachers should not be spending inordinate amounts of time emailing updates to families and of course parents do not want to be 'spammed' with emails. So how do we improve Parental Engagement?

### Provide visibility of work to Parents

During school closures, in addition to generic school information, updates and policies, parents will also be particularly interested in the work students are doing and the resources they are using.



## Avoid flooding Parents with lots of emails

During this time most people are already being bombarded with all sorts of information and emails. Try to limit your emails to very important updates and be aware that the more emails your school sends, the more responses teachers are likely to receive, which could become difficult for them to manage.



### Improving Parental Engagement

Generally, parents want to know:

- What is my child doing?
- How is my child doing?
- What do I need to do?

If schools can ensure parents get this information regularly, then Parents will become more engaged and empowered to support their child's learning. To make a real difference, these communications need to be easy to access, relevant to each family and crucially timely - so that parents can act upon the information before it's too late.



### Helping Parents feel reassured

All of this information can be easily shared through an LMS platform and help parents feel reassured. For example, schools can send out updates and announcements in the form of newsletters and blogs, as well as provide access to student timetables and learning resources, making it easier for parents to manage their child's day.



## Share learning support materials

As well as providing access to the child's learning resources, it can also be helpful to share learning support materials. For many parents, this will be the first time they will be assisting with homeschooling and may require some advice as well as a refreshment of key topics. The Firefly Parent app is particularly well placed for this.

## Conclusion

A fully-formed learning strategy has to consider all of these questions. It's as much about providing opportunities to interact and to assess students' learning journeys while keeping parents engaged, as it is about simply providing learning resources.

All of the tools we've mentioned above embed directly into Firefly. Through its platform for supporting parent engagement and sustaining learning continuity, Firefly saves your teachers time, while creating a centralised space for students and parents to access content and keep them involved in the learning conversation.



## Your checklist for learning continuity

We know that this sudden transition to online learning is not easy. Based on our experience of working with hundreds of schools around the world, we have put together this handy checklist. It will help you consider how to get the most from your distance learning strategy and tools.

### Prepare

- Consider easy access to resources
- Plan for a blend of online and offline activities
- Reduce the workload by using prepared content
- Use edtech tools to create interactive activities

### Share

- Combine learning content with video conferencing
- Develop clear policies and guidelines
- Centralise all your tools and resources
- Ensure students and teachers can collaborate

### Assess

- Create evidence-based activities
- Find a simple way to collate all your assessment data
- Consider audio and feedback tools
- Think about assessment authenticity

### Engage

- Provide visibility of tasks to Parents
- Avoid flooding Parents with lots of emails
- Share learning support materials
- Give Parents access to student progress data



## Why are **schools** using Firefly for distance learning?

Firefly has been an absolutely godsend to us and in view the possibility of school closure, it is one of the remote systems we will use to update pupils and set work!

**Phil Nelkin**  
 Queen's College

Firefly has been a lifesaver with very positive feedback from Parents with regards to remote learning but we couldn't have achieved what we have in the short space of time without the backup from your team.

**David Smith**  
 Doha College

Teachers and students are able to create and share rich resources, creating the ideal conditions for the flipped classroom.

**Yvonne Mitchell**  
 Fettes College

I wanted to say that I am actually extremely impressed with how Firefly have been able to scale up their service so quickly for what is obviously unprecedented demand.

**James Hoyle**  
 Skipton Girls' High School



**The platform for parent engagement & learning continuity**

Find out more

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