



The Consortium

Alberta Professional Learning Consortium

Introduction to EAL Learning August 20, 2026

Session Description

This introductory workshop is designed for participants interested in exploring language acquisition and supporting EAL learners. The session will cover essential theories on the stages of additional language acquisition and English language proficiency. Participants will also gain insights into the differences between social and academic language, as well as the importance of home languages and translanguaging in fostering additional language development.

Presenter

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- Education Consultant
- EAL, Literacy, and Leadership Specialist
- Retired School Principal
- Co-writer of Benchmarks 1.0 (2010) & 2.0 (2019)



**Calgary Board
of Education**



Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Recognize that EAL learners develop English **along varied pathways**
- Distinguish between **oral fluency** and **academic language proficiency**
- Plan **vocabulary supports** for social and academic language
- Use **translanguaging** as an asset-based classroom practice
- Match **teacher moves** to learner needs



Agenda

- 1 EAL Learners and Stages of Language Acquisition
- 2 Language Proficiency
- 3 Social and Academic Language
- 4 Translanguaging



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Terminology

Program

EAL: English as an Additional Language

ELL: English Language Learner

ESL: English as a Second Language

Student

ML: Multilingual



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1 EAL Learners and Stages of Language Acquisition

2 Language Proficiency

3 Social and Academic Language

4 Translanguaging

Who Are EAL Learners?

EAL learners are multilingual students who bring strengths, knowledge, and experiences as they develop English proficiency and academic language across subject areas.

What do EAL Learners bring with them to school?

Think of EAL learners that you have taught.

- What are the assets that they bring to school?
- What are the challenges that they may have?

Write your ideas in the chat box.

Alberta EAL Context

EAL learners may be:

- Newcomers
- Canadian-born multilingual learners
- Refugee-background learners
- International students
- Students with interrupted schooling
- Students with strong prior schooling
- Students who speak English socially but need academic English support

Strength – based

EAL learners bring:

- Languages
- Culture
- Family knowledge (language, customs, culture, norms)
- Prior schooling
- Content knowledge
- Literacy skills
- Problem-solving strategies
- Identity and resilience
- Hobbies and interests

EAL Learners are Diverse

EAL learners vary by:

- Age and grade level
- Prior schooling
- Literacy in home language
- Oral language development
- Content knowledge
- Migration and schooling experiences
- Opportunities to use English
- Confidence and identity as learners

Stages of Language Development

Broad Language Development Stage	What Students May Be Doing
Beginning	Using gestures, single words, memorized phrases, visuals, and familiar routines, and first language
Emerging	Using simple sentences, familiar vocabulary, and short explanations
Developing	Connecting ideas, explaining thinking, and participating with support
Expanding	Using more academic vocabulary, longer sentences, and subject-specific language
Bridging / Extending	Approaching grade-level academic language with increasing independence

In Alberta, we connect these broad stages to the **Alberta EAL Proficiency Benchmarks 2.0**

Meet the Learners for our workshop

Leila – Gr. 2

Active with social language in play and during hands on learning tasks, recognizes letters, copies print

Amir - Gr. 5

Leads discussions using familiar vocabulary and simple detailed sentences.
Reads and writes with supports

Sofia – Gr. 7

Shares ideas orally and in writing using specific words and complex sentences

Minh – Gr.10

-Uses gestures and phrases to communicate, makes connections to home language using translation tools

Identify Stage of Language Development

Stage	What Students May Be Doing
Beginning	Using gestures, single words, memorized phrases, visuals, and familiar routines, and first language
Emerging	Using simple sentences, familiar vocabulary, and short explanations
Developing	Connecting ideas, explaining thinking, and participating with support
Expanding	Using more academic vocabulary, longer sentences, and subject-specific language
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**What stage are
our learners?**

Identify Stage of Language Development

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Minh Gr. 10

Leila Gr. 2

Amir Gr. 5

Sofia Gr. 7

Beyond English Output

If we only look at English output, we may miss:

- Intelligence
- Content knowledge
- L1 literacy
- Prior schooling
- Family knowledge
- Confidence
- Academic potential
- Social-emotional context

Leila— Grade 2

Leila Grade 2

Languages: Tagalog and English

Strengths: Strong social skills, socially fluent, risk taker, observant

Notes: Limited literacy in L1, literacy gaps in English

Needs: Academic vocabulary, sentence frames, oral rehearsal, bilingual supports

Amir – Grade 5

Amir Grade 5

Languages: Arabic and English

Strengths: Math reasoning, visual problem-solving, Arabic background knowledge

Needs: Academic vocabulary, sentence frames, oral rehearsal, bilingual supports

Sofia – Grade 7

Sofia Grade 7

Languages: Spanish and English

Strengths: Oral communication, leadership, strong classroom participation

Needs: Academic precision, formal register, evidence language, inference skills and language

Minh – Grade 10

Minh Grade 10

Languages: Vietnamese and English

Strengths: Strong Vietnamese literacy, prior schooling, abstract thinking, subject knowledge

Notes: Intelligent and quick thinking, relationships are strong and take time, reading and writing skills stronger than oral skills in English

Needs: Language access, translanguaging, visuals, bilingual tools, multiple ways to show understanding



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2 Language Proficiency

3 Social and Academic Language

4 Translanguaging

Language Proficiency Domains

English develops across:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

A student may be stronger in one domain than another.

Proficiency is not one single level.

Alberta EAL Proficiency Benchmarks Levels

	A Emerging Literacy	B Emerging Literacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
Pre-K–K Listening and Speaking	A	B	1					
Grade 1	A	B	1	2				
Grades 2–3	A	B	1	2	3			
Grades 4–6	A	B	1	2	3	4		
Grades 7–9	A	B	1	2	3	4	5	
Grades 10–12	A	B	1	2	3	4	5	6
Beginner			Intermediate			Advanced		

What the Benchmarks Look At

The Alberta EAL Benchmarks 2.0 describe language development in:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

They also help teachers notice how students understand and express ideas across contexts using language features such as:

- Vocabulary
- Sentence structure
- Connections and transitions

Alberta EAL Proficiency Levels and Indicators

Benchmark Indicators

Key Competency	A Emerging Literacy	B Emerging Literacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
Vocabulary	Understands and uses words in isolation, including • survival words • basic utility words • words used in social greetings <i>May rely on home language(s).</i>	Understands and uses a few high-frequency words, including • utility words • familiar words • phrases used in social greetings <i>May rely on home language(s).</i>	Understands and uses some high-frequency words, including • basic descriptive words • instructional words • expressions used in social greetings	Understands and uses more high-frequency and a few low-frequency words, including • descriptive words • instructional words • synonyms/antonyms	Understands and uses some low-frequency words, including • subject-specific words • descriptive words • instructional words • words with multiple meanings	Understands and uses more low-frequency words, including • subject-specific words • descriptive words • academic words • words with multiple meanings • idioms • figurative language	Understands and uses a range of words, including • subject-specific words • academic words • technical words • words with multiple meanings • idioms • figurative language	Understands and uses a broad range of words in a variety of cross-curricular contexts, including • subject-specific words • academic words • technical words • figurative language
Sentence Structure	Understands and uses words in one- to three-word utterances that convey meaning.	Understands and uses words connected in fragmented phrases and memorized phrases.	Understands and uses familiar phrases and substitution of words in simple patterned sentences.	Understands and uses familiar simple sentences in statement, command, and question sentence structures.	Understands and uses a variety of simple and familiar compound sentence types in structured oral texts and/or written paragraphs.	Understands and uses a variety of compound sentence types in structured oral texts and/or sequenced written paragraphs.	Understands and uses a variety of compound and complex sentence types in detailed oral texts and/or cohesive written paragraphs.	Understands and uses a variety of sentence lengths and types, including compound-complex sentences, for varying audiences, purposes, and styles, in extended oral and written texts.
Connections and Transitions	Understands the word <i>and</i> to connect ideas. Connects two to three words.	Understands and uses a few high-frequency words to connect ideas.	Understands and uses some high-frequency connector words and markers (time, place) to • connect ideas • locate items/objects	Understands and uses more high-frequency connector words, markers (sequence), and phrases to • organize ideas • add detail	Understands and uses some low-frequency connector and transition words and phrases to • compare • contrast	Understands and uses more low-frequency connector and transition words and phrases to • express an opinion • emphasize • show cause and effect • express a condition	Understands and uses a range of connector and transition words and phrases to • summarize • introduce examples • conclude • clarify • qualify	Understands and uses a broad range of connector and transition words and phrases to • justify an opinion • rephrase • suggest a possibility • show – change of direction – exception

Note:

Alberta EAL Proficiency Benchmarks 2.0

The Alberta K–12 EAL Proficiency Benchmarks 2.0 are used to:

- Assess initial and ongoing English language proficiency
- Inform language instruction and programming
- Support explicit language instruction in any subject area
- Communicate language development with students and families

They are not just for “EAL/ESL class.” They can be used across subject areas.

Different Domains, Different Needs

A student's proficiency may not be the same across all domains.

Learner	Possible Pattern
Leila	High-beginner oral English, with literacy gaps in English and limited literacy in L1
Amir	Stronger oral social language than written academic explanation
Sofia	Strong conversational English, still developing academic precision
Minh	Beginning/emerging English output, with strong literacy and content knowledge in Vietnamese

What are the Learners Benchmark Levels ?

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Grades 2-3	A	B	1	2	3			
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Grades 7-9	A	B	1	2	3	4	5	
Grades 10-12	A	B	1	2	3	4	5	6
			Beginner		Intermediate		Advanced	

Leila Gr 2
L/S ?
R/W ?

Amir Gr 5
L/S ?
R/W ?

Sofia Gr 7
L/S ?
R/W ?

Minh Gr 10
L/S ?
R/W ?

Benchmark Levels

	A Emerging Literacy	B Emerging Literacy	1	2	3	4	5	6
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			Beginner		Intermediate		Advanced	

Leila Gr 2
L/S 2
R/W A/B

Amir Gr 5
L/S 3
R/W 2

Sofia Gr 7
L/S 5
R/W 4

Minh Gr 10
L/S B
R/W 1

Stages Connected to Alberta EAL Benchmarks 2.0

Broad Stage	Benchmark Level	Alberta Benchmark Connection	Teacher Planning Question
Beginning	A, B, 1	Students are beginning to understand and use English in familiar, supported contexts. They may rely on visuals, gestures, routines, single words, phrases, copied language, and modeled language.	What visuals, routines, gestures, first-language support, and modeled language are needed?
Emerging	2	Students can use simple English to communicate familiar ideas. They may begin using simple sentences, familiar vocabulary, and short responses with support.	What sentence frames, oral rehearsal, word banks, and partner talk will help the student participate?

Stages Connected to Alberta EAL Benchmarks 2.0

Broad Stage	Benchmark Level	Alberta Benchmark Connection	Teacher Planning Question
Developing	3	Students can connect ideas and explain thinking with increasing control. They may still need support with academic vocabulary, sentence expansion, and organization.	What academic functions will students need: explain, compare, justify, describe, sequence, or summarize?
Expanding	4	Students are using more precise and varied language across subjects. They may need support refining academic vocabulary, sentence complexity, transitions, and register.	How can students refine vocabulary, sentence complexity, text organization, and subject-specific language?

Stages Connected to Alberta EAL Benchmarks 2.0

Broad Stage	Benchmark Level	Alberta Benchmark Connection	Teacher Planning Question
Bridging / Extending	5 / 6	Students are approaching or working with greater independence in grade-level academic language. They may still benefit from feedback on precision, nuance, style, and disciplinary expectations.	What feedback will help students use language flexibly, accurately, and appropriately for different academic purposes?

Proficiency Benchmarks

Student	Grade	Level	Main Risk	Main Support
Leila	2	Beginner	Social English masking literacy gaps	Reading and writing development
Amir	5	Intermediate	Social English masking academic gaps	Academic vocabulary and explanation
Sofia	7	Advanced	Support removed too early	Precision and academic register
Minh	10	Beginner	Ability underestimated	Access and translanguageing

Language Practices as Resources

Do Not Confuse...	With...
English proficiency	Aptitude or academic potential
Quiet observation	Lack of understanding
Social fluency	Academic proficiency
Emerging English writing	Limited thinking
Translation use	Dependence on home language
Home language use	Lack of English development
Grade level	English proficiency

Students' language practices are resources for learning, not barriers to achievement.



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Building on Social Fluency

Students' social fluency is a strength we can build on as they continue developing academic language across subject areas.

If a student can...	It does not always mean they can...
Chat with peers easily	Explain academic concepts independently
Answer simple oral questions	Write an extended academic response
Use everyday English confidently	Use discipline-specific vocabulary accurately
Retell what happened	Analyze, infer, evaluate, or justify
Understand classroom routines	Understand complex texts or assessments

Social vs. Academic Language

Social language helps students participate in everyday interactions.

Academic language helps students explain, analyze, justify, compare, argue, and demonstrate learning across subjects.

A student may sound fluent in conversation and still need support with academic language.

Cummins, 1979, 1981; WIDA, 2020

When Social Fluency Is Misread

When educators confuse social fluency with academic proficiency, they may assume students no longer need language support.

This can lead to:

- Fewer scaffolds
- Reduced academic language instruction
- Misinterpretation of writing or speaking as “low ability”
- Underestimation of what students understand
- Overreliance on independent reading and writing tasks

Asset-based reminder:

Social fluency is a strength. It is also not the same as full access to academic language across subjects.

Conversational and Academic English: Research

- Research distinguishes between **conversational language** and **academic language**. Cummins described this distinction as **Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills**, or **BICS**, and **Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency**, or **CALP**. BICS refers to conversational fluency, while CALP refers to the language needed for academic learning and school-based literacy tasks.
- Conversational language often develops more quickly than academic language. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt found that oral proficiency may take approximately **3–5 years**, while academic English proficiency may take approximately **4–7 years** to develop.

Conversational and Academic English: Research

- WIDA's English Language Development Standards also reflect this distinction. WIDA identifies **Language for Social and Instructional Purposes** as one standard and separately identifies the language needed for **Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies**. (wida.wisc.edu)

WIDA, 2020

Academic Language

Academic language is not just “hard words.”
It includes the language students need to do complex thinking in school.

Academic Task	Language Students Need
Explain a process	Sequence words, cause/effect language, precise verbs
Compare ideas	Comparative language, transition words, categories
Support a claim	Evidence stems, reasoning language, citations
Analyze a text	Interpretation verbs, academic vocabulary, formal register
Solve a math problem	Conditional language, justification, mathematical terms
Write in science	Observations, hypotheses, technical vocabulary

We are not simplifying the thinking; we are making the language of the thinking visible.
WIDA, 2020; Zwiers, 2008

From Social to Academic Language

A student might say socially:

"It went up because it got hotter."

With academic language support, the student might develop this into:

"As the temperature increased, the rate of evaporation also increased. This suggests a relationship between heat energy and the movement of water particles."

What changed?

More precise vocabulary
Cause-and-effect language

Formal register

Scientific explanation

Clearer relationship between evidence
and reasoning

The student's thinking was already there. The support helped make it visible.

Supporting Academic Language Development

To support academic language development, teachers can:

- Teach vocabulary in context
- Model academic sentences aloud
- Use sentence frames and evidence stems
- Provide mentor texts
- Highlight language patterns in each subject
- Allow home-language brainstorming and previewing
- Give students structured talk before writing

Teach how everyday language shifts into academic language

What Students May Say

Everyday Language	Academic Language
“The character is mad.”	“The character feels frustrated because...”
“It got bigger.”	“The amount increased over time.”
“They don’t agree.”	“The two sources present conflicting perspectives.”
“That proves it.”	“This evidence supports the claim that...”

Application Example: Science

Leila may say:

"I planted the seed and it grew really tall."

With support:

"I planted the seed in the dirt. It grew really tall because I watered it and put it in sunlight."

Leila's initial response shows scientific understanding. The support helps her express ideas with added detail. Having her write what she says helps her develop reading/writing skills. Teachers can scribe what she says, co-read together and then she can copy the text and draw a picture. She would also be receiving other supports with reading and writing development.

Supports:

Science word bank

Visuals

Partner rehearsal

Oral language first,

teacher scribing,

copying text

Application Example: Math

Amir may say:

"I used multiplication to get the answer."

With support:

"I multiplied because each group has the same number, so the problem represents equal groups."

Amir's initial response shows mathematical understanding. The support helps him express that thinking using more precise academic language.

Supports:

Math word bank

Sentence
frames

Partner

rehearsal

Diagram first,
writing second

Application Example: ELA

Sofia may say:

“The character is clearly frustrated because she feels trapped and unable to change the situation.”

With support:

“This detail reveals the character’s frustration and suggests that she feels powerless to influence the outcome.”

Sofia’s response already shows strong comprehension and vocabulary. The support helps her refine precision, complexity, and academic tone.

Supports:

Academic verbs

Evidence stems

Mentor texts

Formal register

practice

Classroom Example: Building from Social to Academic Language

Minh may say:

The heat makes them move more fast."

Minh may be thinking in L1

"A higher temperature gives particles more energy, so they move faster and collide more often. More collisions make the reaction happen faster."

With support:

"More heat gives the particles more energy. They move faster and hit more."

Minh's simple English sentence may not reflect the full depth of his scientific understanding. Scaffolds help him move from basic everyday language to more precise scientific explanation.

Supports:

L1 preview

Diagram of particle
movement

Bilingual glossary

Science word bank

Cause and effect

sentence frames

Key Takeaway

Multilingual learners are not lacking academic thinking. They are developing the English needed to express academic thinking in school-valued ways.

- Social language is a strength.
- Home language is a resource.
- Academic language can be taught explicitly.

Our role is to make the language of the discipline visible, usable, and connected to students' existing knowledge and linguistic resources.



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Translanguaging

Translanguaging means students use their full linguistic repertoire to make meaning, learn, and communicate. This may include:

- Thinking in one language and writing in another
- Discussing content in a home language
- Using bilingual notes or glossaries
- Comparing words across languages
- Reading or previewing content in the home language
- Using home language to plan, draft, or explain

Students' home languages are resources for learning, not obstacles to English development.

Translanguaging is not Avoiding English

Translanguaging supports English development because it helps students:

- Access background knowledge
- Understand complex concepts
- Build vocabulary connections
- Participate before they have full English control
- Develop stronger explanations
- Maintain identity and confidence

Teacher stance: Use all of the student's language resources to support content learning and English growth.

Translanguaging Teacher Moves

Move	Classroom Example
Preview content in the home language	Student watches/reads a short L1 explanation before English task
Discuss first in home language	Partners clarify ideas in shared language
Use bilingual glossaries	Students record word, translation, picture, and example
Compare cognates	<i>reaction / reacción, energy / energía</i>
Plan in any language	Students brainstorm in L1, then write in English
Invite multilingual products	Labels, diagrams, notes, or drafts may include both languages
Bridge to English	Teacher helps students move from L1 ideas to English output

Translanguaging with our learners

Learner	Translanguaging Support
Leila	Use home-language talk, picture labeling, oral storytelling, and shared writing or explain in English and ask her if she knows the word/sentence in Tagalog
Amir	Explain math strategy first in home language, then use English frame or say/write in English and then relate to home language.
Sofia	Compare literary vocabulary across languages; revise for English academic register
Minh	Preview science concept in Vietnamese; use bilingual glossary; explain diagram in English with scaffolds (sentence frames)



Imagine if you were learning a new language and were not allowed to access your other languages?

Translanguaging is using the home language(s) to make meaning and connect to the new language
– like Velcro!

The **Language Switch** has to be modeled

Students need modeling and guided practice to learn to flow between languages. Translanguaging progresses over time:

- Early: Understands some English; shares thinking in the home language.
- Emerging: Uses simple English; relies on the home language to process ideas.
- Developing: Moves between English and the home language to build meaning.
- Expanding: Uses English for academic tasks; uses the home language to refine ideas.
- Flexible use: Chooses English or the home language based on the task, audience, and purpose



Bridge Don't Ban – What would you do?

1. A student asks to write in their home language first, then in English.
 2. A student uses the home language as needed but does not connect back to English.
 3. A student does not know the word, sentence, or concept in their home language.
 4. A student does not read or write in their home language.
- A. Model the switch. Bridge back to English with sentence frames, word banks, partner rehearsal, or a short English summary.
 - B. If English has become the dominant language. Invite home language use alongside English. Encourage talking, reading, and writing in the home language at home.
 - C. Support planning or drafting in the home language first, if it supports thinking; then help the student move key ideas into English.
 - D. If English is the student's dominant language, teach the concept in English using visuals, examples, modeling, discussion, and repeated practice. Encourage continued oral language development at home.

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 - D. If English is the student's dominant language, teach the concept in English using visuals, examples, modeling, discussion, and repeated practice. Encourage continued oral language development at home.
 - B. English has become the dominant language. Invite home language use alongside English. Encourage talking, reading, and writing in the home language at home.

Bridge Don't Ban – What would you do?

1. A student asks to write in their home language first, then in English.

Response: Support planning or drafting in the home language first, if it supports thinking; then help the student move key ideas into English.

Explanation:

This allows the student to use their home language as a thinking tool. The teacher still provides a purposeful bridge to English so the student can transfer key ideas into the language of instruction.

Bridge Don't Ban – What would you do?

2. A student uses the home language as needed but does not connect back to English.

Response: Model the switch. Bridge back to English with sentence frames, word banks, partner rehearsal, or a short English summary.

Explanation:

The student is using home language to build meaning, but they may need explicit support to connect that thinking to English. Modeling the switch helps students see how to move from ideas developed in the home language into English expression.

Bridge Don't Ban – What would you do?

3. A student does not know the word, sentence, or concept in their home language.

Response: If English is the student's dominant language, teach the concept in English using visuals, examples, modeling, discussion, and repeated practice. Encourage continued oral language development at home.

Explanation:

The student may not have learned the concept in their home language, or English may now be their stronger academic language. In this case, the concept should be taught clearly in English while still valuing continued home language development.

Bridge Don't Ban – What would you do?

4. A student does not read or write in their home language.

Response: If English has become the dominant language. Invite oral home language use alongside English. Encourage talking, reading, and writing in the home language at home.

Explanation:

A student may not be literate in their home language, but they may still have oral strengths and family language connections. They can use as much home language as they are comfortable using alongside English, and home language development can continue through talk, reading, and writing at home.



3 Big Take-aways

- 1. English output is not the same as thinking.**
- 2. Social fluency does not always mean academic proficiency.**
- 3. Home languages support—not block—English development.**

Teacher Moves



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- **Notice** the language demand
- **Prioritize** the most important vocabulary
- **Anchor** meaning with visuals
- **Model** academic language
- **Rehearse** before writing
- **Connect** to home language
- **Bridge** students toward independent English use

Tomorrow, I can support EAL learners by _____.

Option to pick a prompt:

- One consideration about EAL learners I will make is _____.
- One thing I will remember about proficiency is _____.
- One academic language move I will try is _____.
- One translanguaging move I will try is _____.

Exit Slip



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APLC Post Session Survey

Thank you for attending this session. To help us enhance the delivery of future sessions, we ask that you complete this short survey. Your feedback is important and appreciated! Note: Your survey will be submitted anonymously.



<https://aplc.ca/survey/?id=15805>

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