

# Class Standing & Success:

## Do Freshmen Have Lower Self-Efficacy & Goal Achievement for “Difficult” Goals?

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Who has more belief?  
Who achieves more?



**INTRODUCTION**  
*Do freshmen achieve less of their personal and academic short-term goals in comparison to upperclassmen?*

Some may intuitively assume that due to age, or lack of experience, college freshmen would have lower perceived task-specific ability (**self-efficacy**) and actually achieve less (goal-completion ranging from 0% to 100%). Differences between various class-standing levels are compared in many contexts such as vocational competency & vocational purpose (e.g. Flowers, 2002). This study attempts to compare freshmen and upperclassmen on self-efficacy & goal achievement.

Koestner, Lekes, Powers, and Chicoine (2002) found that self-efficacy negatively correlates with difficulty of self-set, short-term goals. More broadly, Schunk (1990) found that goal difficulty correlates negatively with initial doubts about goal attainment. Additionally, Mento, Locke, and Klein (1992) found that setting difficult performance goals is negatively correlated with attainment-expectations. Difficulty seems to be a crucial player in achievement of goals, and it sparked our interest in examining self-identified difficult goals.

*The purpose of the study* was to investigate if there is a difference between freshmen and upperclassmen in:

- 1) Self-efficacy when pursuing difficult goals
- 2) Goal achievement when pursuing difficult goals

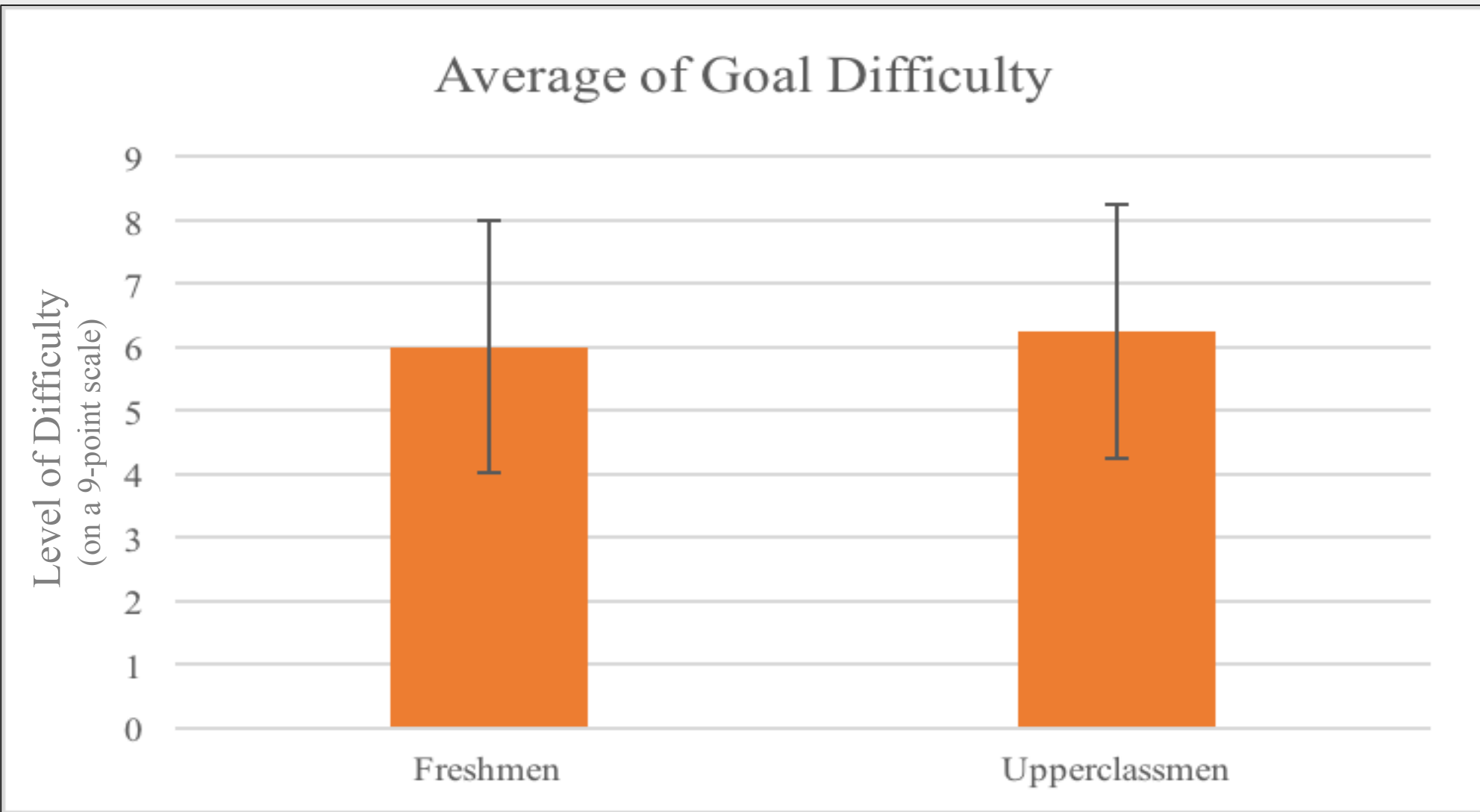
**METHODS**  
The study had 117 participants (79% female, 21% male); generally college-age ( $M = 19.57$ ,  $SD = 2.36$ ) from a public university.

Participants listed personal goals for the upcoming weekend, rated difficulty for each goal on a 9-point scale, & rated self-efficacy for each on a 9-point scale. On Sunday night, each participant was asked to report their goal achievement in percentage. This study examined the most difficult goals reported by freshmen and upperclassmen (those who reported junior standing or higher).

Personal Difficult Goal Example	Academic Difficult Goal Example
“Block 2 hours on Saturday to journal focus on my mental health”	“Decide if I should join ROTC”
[Difficulty rating: 8 out of 9]	[Difficulty rating: 9 out of 9]

### HYPOTHESES

Goal self-efficacy and goal achievement of difficult goals would be the same for freshmen and upperclassmen.



Graph 1: Difficulty Rating mean by Class Standing

### RESULTS

Table 1: Self- Efficacy and Achievement by Class Standing

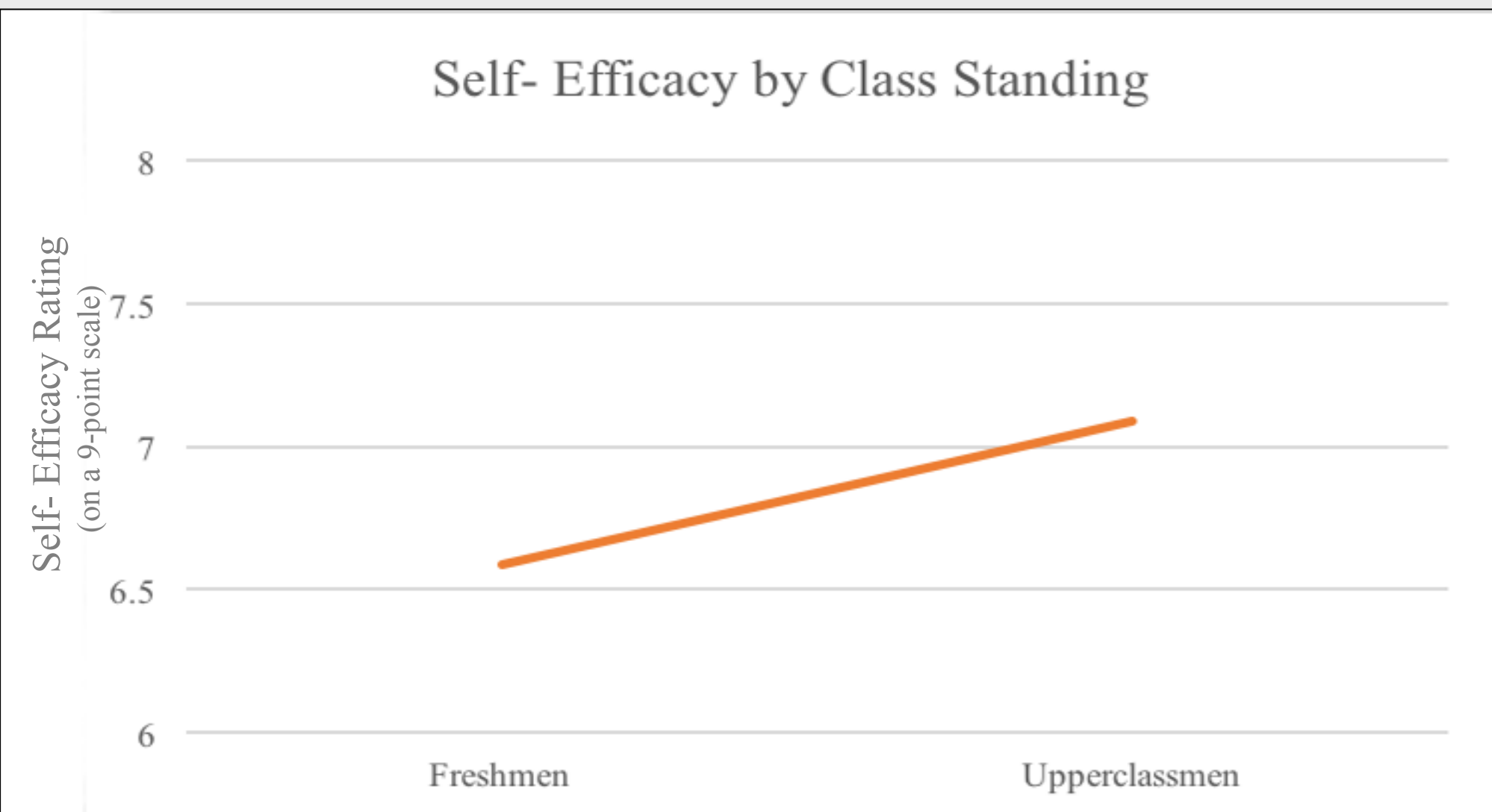
	Class Standing	M	SD	N
Self-Efficacy	Freshmen	6.59	1.87	83
	Upperclassmen	7.09	1.89	34
	Total	6.74	1.88	117
Achievement	Freshmen	75.99	27.26	83
	Upperclassmen	72.15	32.34	34
	Total	74.87	28.74	117

### HYPOTHESIS TESTING

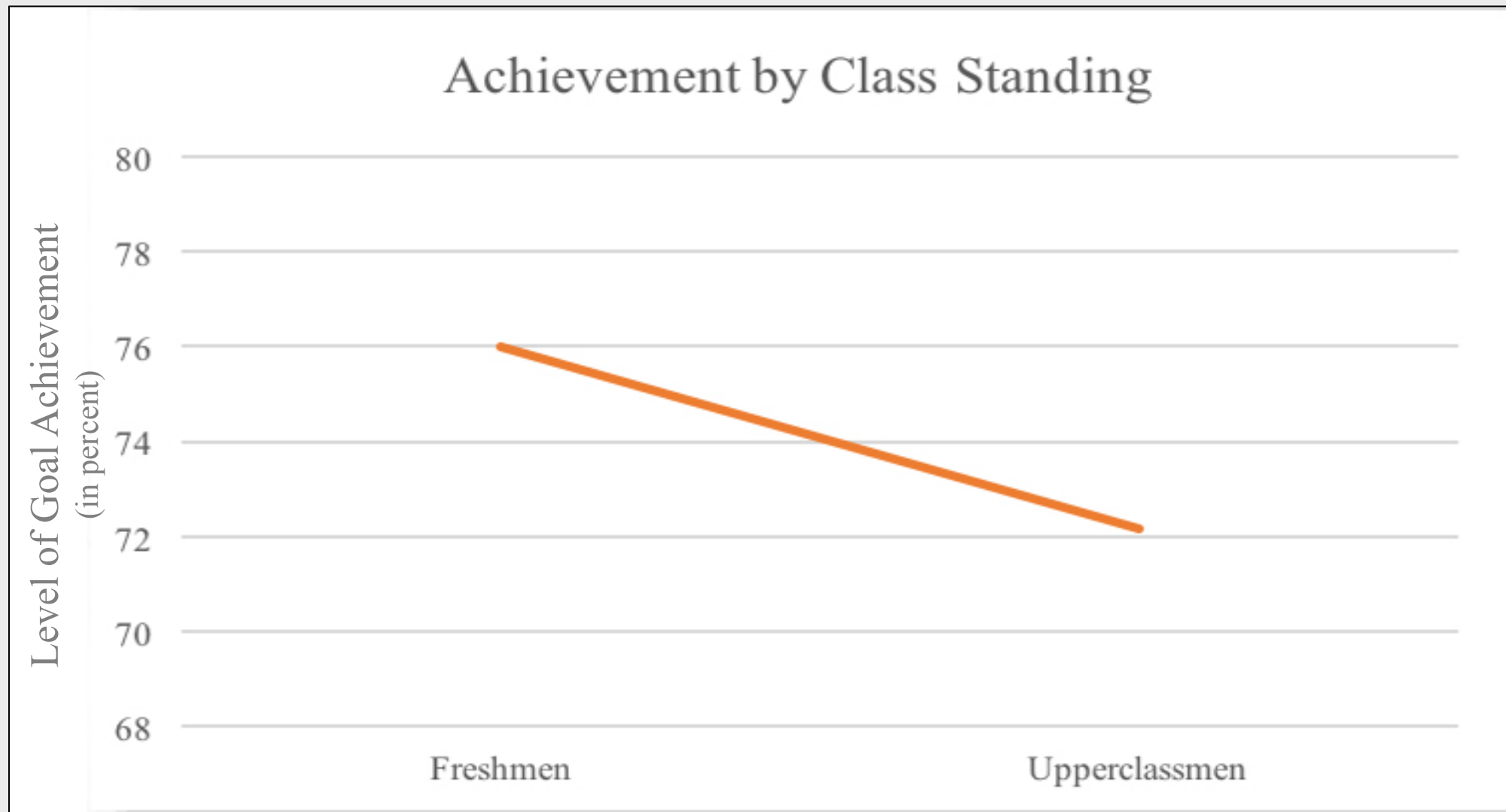
An independent-sample t-test was run to test if means of self-efficacy differed between freshmen & upperclassman. The same was done on means of achievement.

There was **no** significant difference between freshmen and upperclassmen in self-efficacy;  $t(115) = -1.31$ ,  $p = 0.19$ . There was also **no** significant difference between freshmen and upperclassmen in goal-achievement;  $t(115) = 0.66$ ,  $p = .51$ .

**These results supported our hypotheses.**



Graph 2: Self- Efficacy Means by Class Standing



Graph 3: Achievement Means by Class Standing

### DISCUSSION

#### Interpretation of Results:

Freshmen do not seem to have lower belief in their ability to tackle a specific, challenging task– their self-efficacy. Their achievement is also not lower than upperclassmen.

In fact, although not statistically significant, freshmen were slightly lower on self-efficacy yet slightly higher on achievement than upperclassmen.

#### Theoretical & Empirical Considerations:

If this limited study is any indication, it appears that goal-setting theory (Locke, 1968; and others), specifically for self-identified difficult short-term goals, works the same way for freshmen as upperclassmen. It appears that experience during college years is not a factor in contexts for goal achievement that may be similar to this study.

### TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

This study could suggest the following about *short-term* goals:

- 1) **Freshmen are NOT inferior to upperclassmen in their perceived task-specific ability in difficult academic & personal goals AFTER setting them**
- 2) **Freshmen are NOT inferior to upperclassmen in their achievement level in difficult academic & personal goals AFTER setting them**

### LIMITATIONS

- Limited number of seniors; upperclassmen was mostly juniors.
- Possible insufficient diversity considering the sample came from Psychology classes (mostly General Psychology)
- Examining only short-term goal-setting but not long-term

### REFERENCES

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