

# From Reflection to Revision: Exploring Self-Regulated Learning in EFL Writing Portfolios

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\*Ana Zulianingrum<sup>a</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Indonesia, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [anazulianingrum@unusia.ac.id](mailto:anazulianingrum@unusia.ac.id)

## A B S T R A C T

This study addresses the limited attention given to learners' internal self-regulatory processes in portfolio-based EFL writing instruction, particularly in non-Western tertiary contexts such as Indonesia. While previous research on self-regulated learning (SRL) in EFL writing has often emphasized measurable writing outcomes, including grammatical accuracy, coherence, and text organization, less is known about how portfolios support learners' goal setting, self-monitoring, and reflection during the writing process. Employing a qualitative case study approach supported by descriptive writing-performance data, this study investigated 30 Indonesian undergraduate EFL learners enrolled in a writing course. Data were collected through writing portfolios, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and reflective journals over a four-week instructional period. Thematic analysis revealed that portfolio-based writing tasks fostered SRL behaviors by encouraging iterative drafting, strategic revision, and critical self-assessment. However, students also encountered challenges related to time management, limited reflective depth, and difficulty self-assessing higher-order writing skills. These findings highlight the need for explicit instructional scaffolding, structured reflection prompts, and sustained teacher and peer feedback. Overall, the study suggests that portfolio-based writing instruction can enhance learner autonomy and writing proficiency by creating a structured, reflective, and process-oriented learning environment.

**Keywords:** *Self-Regulated Learning, Portfolios, EFL Writing, Reflection, Learner Autonomy*

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## INTRODUCTION

Self-regulated learning (SRL) has become an increasingly important concept in EFL writing instruction due to its strong relationship with learner autonomy, motivation, and academic achievement (Cliffs & Hall, 1991; Flavell, 1979; Puustinen & Pulkkinen, 2001). SRL refers to learners' ability to actively plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning processes in order to achieve specific goals (Zimmerman, 2002). Within writing instruction, self-regulation enables learners to manage complex cognitive and metacognitive processes such as planning ideas, organizing arguments, monitoring progress, revising drafts, and reflecting on feedback. Previous studies have shown that learners who effectively regulate their learning tend to demonstrate greater persistence, strategic awareness, and writing proficiency (Boekaerts, 1999; Schunk, 2011; Teng, 2024).

Zimmerman's (2002) cyclical model of SRL conceptualizes learning as a continuous process consisting of three interconnected phases: forethought, performance control, and self-reflection. In the forethought phase, learners establish goals and select strategies for completing tasks. During the performance phase, learners monitor their progress and regulate their behaviors while completing the task. Finally, in the self-reflection phase, learners evaluate their performance and adjust their strategies for future learning. These dimensions are particularly relevant to writing instruction because writing is inherently recursive and

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requires continuous drafting, monitoring, revision, and evaluation (Herbay et al., 2018; Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Russell, 2023).

In response to the growing emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy, portfolio-based instruction has gained attention as a potentially effective approach for fostering SRL in EFL classrooms (Lykova & Savelyeva, 2025). Writing portfolios allow learners to collect multiple drafts, reflect on their development, incorporate feedback, and evaluate their progress over time (Dilovar, 2024; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Romero et al., 2019). Through iterative drafting and reflection, portfolios may support learners' metacognitive awareness and encourage greater responsibility for their own learning processes. Previous research has demonstrated that portfolios can improve writing performance, increase motivation, and promote reflective learning practices (Ghouzani et al., 2014; Guay et al., 2020).

Despite these contributions, much of the existing literature on SRL in EFL writing has primarily focused on product-oriented outcomes such as grammatical accuracy, coherence, vocabulary use, and text organization (Benson, n.d.; Boyd & Szplit, n.d.). Comparatively limited attention has been given to learners' internal cognitive and metacognitive processes during portfolio-based writing activities, particularly in relation to goal setting, self-monitoring, reflection, and strategy use. Furthermore, studies examining how portfolios cultivate SRL among EFL learners in non-Western tertiary educational contexts remain relatively scarce. This limitation is significant because cultural and institutional learning environments may influence how learners engage in reflective practices and autonomous learning behaviors.

Within the Indonesian EFL context, writing instruction has often emphasized linguistic accuracy and examination-oriented performance rather than reflective and process-oriented learning. Consequently, students may have limited experience engaging in self-assessment, reflective journaling, and independent revision practices. Investigating how portfolios support SRL development in Indonesian tertiary EFL classrooms may therefore provide valuable pedagogical insights into fostering learner autonomy and improving writing instruction in similar educational settings.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how portfolio-based writing instruction supports the development of self-regulated learning among Indonesian undergraduate EFL learners. Specifically, the study explores how portfolios facilitate goal setting, reflection, self-monitoring, and revision throughout the writing process, as well as the challenges learners encounter during portfolio implementation. By adopting a qualitative case study approach supported by descriptive writing-performance data, this research contributes to a more process-oriented understanding of EFL writing instruction and expands current discussions on SRL development in non-Western educational contexts.

To guide this study, the following research questions were formulated: How do portfolio-based writing tasks influence the development of self-regulated learning behaviors among Indonesian EFL learners? In addressing this overarching question, the study also explores several sub-questions. First, in what ways do portfolios support learners in setting and achieving their writing goals? Second, how does the portfolio process facilitate reflection and self-monitoring throughout the writing development? Third, what challenges do students encounter during portfolio implementation, particularly in relation to time management, self-assessment, and reflective practice? Lastly, how effective are portfolios in improving writing proficiency and fostering learner autonomy in the EFL classroom? These questions are investigated through a thematic analysis of qualitative data supported by basic descriptive statistics from learners' writing performance.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design supported by descriptive quantitative data to investigate how portfolio-based writing instruction facilitates self-regulated learning (SRL) among Indonesian EFL learners. A qualitative approach was

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considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore learners' experiences, reflections, behaviors, and metacognitive processes during portfolio-based writing activities. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to obtain rich and contextualized insights into participants' learning experiences, particularly in relation to goal setting, self-monitoring, reflection, and revision practices.

In addition, a case study approach was adopted to provide an in-depth understanding of how self-regulated learning developed within a specific instructional setting. Case studies are particularly valuable in educational research because they allow researchers to examine complex learning phenomena within authentic classroom contexts (Dignath & Sprenger, 2020). Although the study primarily relied on qualitative data, basic descriptive statistics from students' portfolio scores were also included to support the interpretation of writing development and overall performance trends.

### Participants

The study was conducted at Nahdlatul Ulama University of Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language within the undergraduate English language education program. The participants consisted of 30 undergraduate students enrolled in an academic writing course during the 2024–2025 academic year. All participants were native speakers of Indonesian and ranged in age from 18 to 22 years old.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. The selection criteria included: (1) active enrollment in the academic writing course, (2) participation in portfolio-based writing activities throughout the instructional period, and (3) lower-intermediate English proficiency based on classroom placement and CEFR-aligned course standards.

The participants were selected because they represented learners who were still developing writing proficiency and metacognitive awareness in EFL writing contexts. This made them suitable for investigating how portfolios support the development of self-regulated learning behaviors.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and ethical considerations of the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without academic consequences.

### Instruments

To obtain comprehensive insights into learners' self-regulated learning behaviors, the study employed four data collection instruments: writing portfolios, reflective journals, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews.

#### *Writing Portfolios*

The primary instrument was the student writing portfolio, which contained multiple drafts, revisions, teacher and peer feedback, and reflective entries. Students were required to compose descriptive texts of approximately 500 words and revise their work throughout the instructional process. The portfolios served as longitudinal records of learners' writing development and were analyzed to identify evidence of goal setting, self-monitoring, revision strategies, and reflective thinking.

#### *Reflective Journals*

Participants were also asked to maintain reflective journals throughout the instructional period. In these journals, students documented their learning experiences, challenges, emotional responses, revision strategies, and perceptions of their writing progress. The journals provided valuable insights into learners' metacognitive awareness and self-regulatory processes.

#### *Classroom Observations*

Classroom observations were conducted during writing sessions to examine learners' engagement with drafting, revising, peer feedback, and reflective activities. Observation notes

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focused on students' participation, interaction patterns, revision behaviors, and responses to instructional guidance related to self-regulation.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected participants at the end of the portfolio implementation process. The interviews explored students' perceptions of portfolio-based writing, challenges encountered during revision and reflection, experiences with feedback, and the perceived impact of portfolios on their writing development and learner autonomy. The semi-structured format allowed participants to provide detailed explanations while enabling the researcher to explore emerging themes in depth. The use of multiple instruments enabled methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings.

**Procedures**

The study was conducted over a four-week instructional period consisting of four classroom meetings integrated into the participants' regular academic writing course. During the implementation process, students engaged in drafting, revising, reflecting, and responding to feedback as part of the portfolio-based writing framework. At the beginning of the study, participants received an introduction to descriptive writing, self-regulated learning concepts, portfolio-based instruction, and reflective writing practices. The researcher also provided guidance on goal setting, revision strategies, and self-assessment techniques. The instructional process was organized as follows:

Table 1. Writing Process

Meetings	Agenda
Meeting1	Introduction to descriptive writing, Drafting 1
Meeting2	Self-reflection, Peer feedback
Meeting3	Drafting 2, Self-reflection
Meeting4	Teacher feedback, Final drafting

Throughout the instructional process, students revised their writing based on teacher comments, peer feedback, and personal reflections. Reflective journals and classroom observations were collected continuously during the four-week period, while interviews were conducted after the final portfolio submission.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes related to self-regulated learning behaviors in portfolio-based writing instruction. The analysis followed several stages. First, all qualitative data from portfolios, reflective journals, interviews, and classroom observations were organized and reviewed repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Second, meaningful segments of data were coded according to emerging themes related to goal setting, self-monitoring, reflection, revision strategies, learner autonomy, and challenges encountered during the writing process.

Third, similar codes were grouped into broader thematic categories to identify relationships among learners' self-regulatory behaviors. Finally, the themes were interpreted in relation to the research questions and existing theories of self-regulated learning. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by comparing data obtained from multiple instruments, including portfolios, interviews, journals, and observations. In addition, descriptive statistics such as mean, median, mode, highest score, and lowest score were used to summarize students' portfolio performance and support the qualitative interpretation of writing development.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of this study were derived from the analysis of students' writing portfolios, reflective journals, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. The analysis revealed four major themes related to the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) through portfolio-based writing instruction: (1) goal setting and learning ownership, (2) reflection and self-monitoring, (3) challenges in

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reflective practice and self-assessment, and (4) improvements in writing proficiency and learner autonomy.

### **Goal Setting and Learning Ownership**

One of the most significant findings of this study was the role of portfolios in supporting learners' goal-setting behaviors and increasing their sense of ownership over the writing process. Through reflective activities and iterative drafting, students became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and developed clearer learning targets for subsequent revisions.

Analysis of portfolio reflections showed that learners frequently established both short-term and long-term writing goals. These goals commonly focused on improving organization, reducing grammatical errors, strengthening thesis statements, and enhancing coherence between paragraphs. Several students revised their goals throughout the writing process after receiving teacher and peer feedback.

For example, Participant 7 wrote in a reflective journal:

*"In my first draft, my ideas were not connected clearly. After reading my teacher's comments, I tried to improve the topic sentences and make each paragraph more organized."*

Similarly, Participant 12 stated during the interview:

*"Before using portfolios, I only focused on finishing the assignment quickly. Now I try to set small goals every time I revise my writing."*

These findings suggest that the portfolio process encouraged learners to approach writing more strategically rather than simply completing assignments for evaluation purposes. Interview data also revealed that goal setting contributed positively to learners' confidence and motivation. One participant explained:

*"Writing used to feel overwhelming for me, but after dividing the task into smaller goals, I could focus better and see my improvement step by step."*

This finding aligns with Zimmerman's (2002) view that goal setting functions as an essential component of self-regulated learning because it helps learners monitor progress and maintain motivation throughout complex learning tasks.

To support these qualitative findings, descriptive statistics from students' final portfolio scores indicated generally consistent writing performance across participants. The mean portfolio score was 78.2, with a median of 78.6 and a mode of 78. The highest score was 83.4, while the lowest score was 69. These results suggest that most participants demonstrated moderate to strong writing development during the instructional period.

### **Reflection and Self-Monitoring During the Writing Process**

The findings also demonstrated that portfolios facilitated reflection and self-monitoring throughout the writing process. Reflective journals and interviews indicated that students became increasingly aware of their writing habits, revision strategies, and areas requiring improvement. Many participants described how reviewing earlier drafts enabled them to evaluate their own progress more critically. By comparing initial drafts with revised versions, students were able to identify recurring weaknesses and monitor improvements over time.

*Participant 3 reflected:*

*"When I looked back at my first draft, I realized that many sentences were repetitive. After revising several times, my writing became clearer and easier to understand."*

Similarly, Participant 15 explained:

*"I learned that revising is not only about grammar. I also need to think about how my ideas connect with each other."*

Classroom observations further revealed that students became more actively engaged in revision activities as the portfolio process progressed. During early drafting sessions, many learners focused primarily on vocabulary and grammar correction. However, in later revisions, students paid greater attention to organization, coherence, and clarity of ideas. Peer and teacher feedback also played an important role in supporting reflective practices. Several participants reported that external feedback helped them recognize problems that they had previously overlooked.

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One participant noted:

*"My friend told me that my paragraph order was confusing. After discussing it together, I reorganized my ideas and the writing became better."*

These findings indicate that portfolio-based instruction promoted sustained self-monitoring and encouraged learners to take a more active role in evaluating and revising their own writing.

### **Challenges in Reflective Practice and Self-Assessment**

Despite the benefits of portfolio-based writing instruction, the findings also revealed several challenges related to time management, reflection, and self-assessment. Time management emerged as one of the most common difficulties experienced by participants. Many students reported struggling to balance drafting, revision, reflective journaling, and other academic responsibilities within the limited instructional period.

Participant 9 stated:

*"Sometimes I wanted to revise more carefully, but I also had assignments from other classes, so I finished the reflection quickly."*

Similarly, classroom observations showed that some learners completed reflective entries superficially due to limited time and unfamiliarity with reflective writing practices. Another major challenge involved learners' difficulty engaging in deeper reflective thinking. Although students were generally able to identify surface-level problems such as grammar mistakes or vocabulary errors, many struggled to critically evaluate higher-order writing aspects such as coherence, argument development, and logical organization.

For example, Participant 18 explained:

*"I know when my grammar is wrong, but it is difficult to judge whether my ideas are strong enough or not."*

Reflective journals also demonstrated that several students initially produced descriptive rather than analytical reflections. Many entries focused only on general statements such as "I need to improve my writing" without explaining specific revision strategies or learning processes.

These findings suggest that students require more explicit instructional support in reflective practice and self-assessment. Teacher guidance, reflection prompts, and peer collaboration appeared to function as important forms of scaffolding that helped learners gradually develop more sophisticated metacognitive awareness.

### **Improvements in Writing Proficiency and Learner Autonomy**

Overall, the findings strongly suggest that portfolio-based instruction contributed positively to learners' writing proficiency and autonomy. Through repeated drafting, reflection, and revision, students demonstrated improvements in clarity, organization, coherence, and idea development.

Participants consistently reported becoming more independent and responsible for their learning progress. Many students described feeling more confident when revising their work because they had become more familiar with evaluating their own writing.

Participant 5 explained:

*"Before this class, I usually waited for the teacher to correct everything. Now I try to check my own writing first before asking for feedback."*

Similarly, Participant 21 stated:

*"The portfolio helped me understand my weaknesses because I could see my progress from one draft to another."*

Classroom observations further confirmed that students gradually relied less on teacher correction and became more willing to revise independently or discuss revisions collaboratively with peers. The iterative nature of the portfolio process appeared to encourage learners to view writing as a continuous developmental process rather than a single final product. As a result, students became more engaged in revising their ideas, incorporating feedback, and monitoring their progress over time.

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Taken together, these findings indicate that portfolio-based writing instruction can effectively foster self-regulated learning behaviors, enhance writing development, and promote greater learner autonomy within tertiary EFL contexts.

## Discussions

This study investigated how portfolio-based writing instruction supports the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) among Indonesian EFL learners. The findings indicate that portfolios functioned not only as assessment tools but also as pedagogical mechanisms that encouraged learners to engage in goal setting, self-monitoring, reflection, and revision throughout the writing process. The discussion below interprets these findings in relation to existing SRL theories and previous studies on portfolio-based writing instruction.

### Portfolios as a Tool for Developing Self-Regulated Learning

One of the central findings of this study is that portfolio-based writing instruction facilitated the development of key self-regulated learning behaviors, particularly goal setting and self-monitoring. Through iterative drafting and reflection, learners became more aware of their writing weaknesses and developed strategies for improving subsequent drafts. This finding supports Zimmerman's (2002) cyclical model of SRL, which emphasizes that learners actively regulate their learning through the interconnected phases of forethought, performance control, and self-reflection.

Within the portfolio process, learners demonstrated the forethought phase by establishing specific writing goals before revision activities. During drafting and revision, they engaged in performance control by monitoring their progress, incorporating feedback, and adjusting their writing strategies. Finally, reflective journals and self-assessment activities reflected the self-reflection phase, in which learners evaluated their progress and identified areas requiring improvement. The findings therefore suggest that portfolios can operationalize SRL processes in practical classroom contexts by making students' learning development more visible and structured.

These results are also consistent with previous studies indicating that portfolio-based instruction enhances learner autonomy and metacognitive awareness (Ghouzani et al., 2014; Romero et al., 2019). Rather than viewing writing as a one-time product, students gradually approached writing as a recursive process involving continuous evaluation and revision. This shift in perspective appears particularly important in EFL contexts where writing instruction has traditionally emphasized grammatical accuracy and examination performance over reflective learning practices.

### Reflection and Metacognitive Development in EFL Writing

Another important finding concerns the role of reflection in supporting learners' metacognitive development. The portfolio process encouraged students to critically examine their writing progress, identify recurring problems, and evaluate the effectiveness of their revision strategies. Through reflective journaling and portfolio review, learners became more conscious of how they organized ideas, responded to feedback, and revised their drafts.

This finding aligns with Schunk's (2011) argument that reflection plays a critical role in self-regulated learning because it enables learners to evaluate performance and regulate future learning behaviors. Reflection also appears to support learners' ability to internalize feedback rather than merely correcting isolated language errors. Several participants reported that they gradually shifted attention from surface-level grammatical concerns to broader rhetorical issues such as coherence, organization, and clarity of ideas.

Furthermore, the findings support sociocultural perspectives on learning, particularly Vygotsky's notion that higher-order cognitive skills develop through social interaction and guided support. In this study, peer discussions and teacher feedback functioned as scaffolding mechanisms that helped learners refine their reflective practices and revision strategies. This suggests that reflective learning in EFL writing may be most effective when supported by collaborative interaction and explicit instructional guidance.

At the same time, the findings indicate that reflective practice was not immediately familiar to many learners. Several students initially produced descriptive rather than

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analytical reflections, suggesting that reflective thinking is itself a learned academic skill that requires modeling and practice. This reinforces previous research emphasizing the importance of structured reflection prompts and teacher guidance in portfolio-based instruction (Guay et al., 2020).

**Challenges in Self-Assessment and Reflective Practice**

Although portfolios promoted self-regulated learning behaviors, the study also revealed several challenges that limited learners' engagement with reflective and self-assessment practices. Many participants struggled to evaluate higher-order writing features such as coherence, argumentation, and organizational effectiveness. Students were generally more confident identifying grammatical errors than critically assessing rhetorical quality.

This difficulty may be explained by learners' limited prior experience with self-assessment practices in traditionally teacher-centered educational environments. In many EFL classrooms, students are accustomed to relying heavily on teacher correction rather than independently evaluating their own learning progress. Consequently, learners may require substantial scaffolding before they can effectively engage in deeper metacognitive evaluation.

The findings also highlight the role of time management as an important factor influencing the effectiveness of portfolio implementation. Students frequently reported difficulty balancing reflective activities, revisions, and other academic responsibilities. This suggests that portfolio-based instruction may place considerable cognitive and emotional demands on learners, particularly when reflective writing practices are newly introduced.

These findings imply that successful portfolio implementation requires sustained instructional support rather than simply assigning reflective tasks. Explicit guidance in self-assessment strategies, structured revision activities, and regular feedback opportunities appear essential for helping learners gradually develop independent self-regulatory skills.

**Implications for EFL Writing Instruction**

The findings of this study offer several important implications for EFL writing pedagogy. First, portfolios appear to provide a productive framework for integrating self-regulated learning practices into writing instruction. By encouraging learners to plan, monitor, revise, and reflect on their work, portfolios promote a more process-oriented approach to writing development.

Second, the findings emphasize the importance of teacher and peer feedback in supporting learners' reflective practices. Feedback should not function solely as corrective evaluation but also as scaffolding that guides learners toward greater metacognitive awareness and independent revision strategies. Teachers may therefore need to model reflective thinking explicitly and provide structured prompts that encourage deeper analysis of writing processes.

Third, the study suggests that reflective practice should be gradually integrated into EFL classrooms rather than assumed to develop automatically. Since many learners were unfamiliar with analytical reflection, instructional support remains necessary to help students develop the cognitive skills required for effective self-assessment and autonomous learning.

Finally, the Indonesian EFL context examined in this study highlights the importance of culturally responsive approaches to learner autonomy. In educational environments where teacher-centered instruction remains dominant, portfolios may serve as an important bridge toward more student-centered and reflective learning practices.

Overall, this study demonstrates that portfolio-based writing instruction can support the development of self-regulated learning by encouraging goal setting, reflection, self-monitoring, and revision. However, the effectiveness of portfolio implementation depends heavily on sustained instructional guidance, collaborative feedback, and opportunities for structured reflective practice. These findings contribute to a more process-oriented understanding of EFL writing instruction and reinforce the value of portfolios as tools for fostering learner autonomy and metacognitive development.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of portfolio-based writing instruction in supporting the development of self-regulated learning (SRL) among Indonesian EFL learners in higher education. The findings indicate that portfolios provide a structured learning environment that encourages goal setting, self-monitoring, reflection, and revision, enabling students to take greater responsibility for their writing development. Beyond their assessment function, portfolios foster metacognitive awareness, learner autonomy, and reflective learning through iterative drafting, feedback integration, and self-evaluation activities. However, the study also reveals that the development of SRL does not occur automatically, as students require explicit guidance, structured reflection, and continuous teacher and peer feedback to engage effectively in self-regulated practices. The findings highlight the value of portfolio-based instruction in promoting learner-centered approaches within EFL contexts traditionally characterized by teacher-centered practices. Despite limitations related to sample size and context, the study underscores the pedagogical potential of portfolios in fostering reflective, autonomous, and self-regulated learning. Future research should explore their long-term impact and application across different language skills and learning environments.

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