

# Improving the Students' Competence in Developing a Paragraph of Discussion Texts Using Theme-Rheme Negotiation with Cooperative Learning Method

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**Abstract:** *This research analyzes the effectiveness of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method in improving the students' competence in developing the paragraph of discussion texts and the effectiveness of teaching learning activities of paragraph writing class. This classroom action research was conducted in the English Department of Tidar University of Magelang in the academic year of 2011/2012. The subjects of this research were the fourth semester students who took writing III. To collect the research data, the writer used writing test, observation and interview while to analyze the data, she used descriptive statistics for quantitative data and constant comparative method which consisted of four stages for qualitative data. The first result shows that implementing theme rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can improve the students' competence in developing the paragraph of discussion texts. It can be seen from the results of writing tests. Based on Brown and Bailey's theory in Brown (2004), it can be seen that the mean score of organization element in pre-cycle is 10.85, first cycle is 15.62, second cycle is 17.31 and the third cycle is 17.53. The second result shows that there is improvement of the effectiveness of teaching-learning activity of writing class by implementing TP-CL. The improvement can be seen from the indicators of effective teaching based on Blum in Nunan and Lamb (1996) and Creemer's theory (1994). The results suggest that writing lecturers should introduce text-types to the students as well as how to develop the paragraph in order that they can write paragraphs coherently and various themes in order that they can write the paragraph artistically. In addition to that, the application of various cooperative learning methods can make the teaching-learning process effective.*

**Keywords:** *classroom action research, theme-rheme, cooperative learning, paragraph development*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is very important to be mastered by English Department Students of Tidar University of Magelang besides speaking, listening and reading. It plays a very important role. As a skill subject, writing provides the students with basic knowledge and skill of writing. Since the outputs of this department are English teachers who are expected to be ready to teach English especially at Junior High School (SMP) and Senior High School (SMA), this department uses text-based syllabus for writing subject. It is because SMP and SMA use text-based curriculum for English subject. In line with the above facts,

English department students of UTM are required to be able to write various texts either in the form of paragraph or essay.

Based on the facts, writing is a problem that hinders many students of English Department of UTM. Most students' writing is not in a good textual organization. The students still found difficulties in organizing the messages in their paragraphs. Besides that, some students still found difficulties in writing the logical development of idea (content), grammar, and style and quality of expression. In this case, some of the students could not develop the next clause from the preceding clause. They did not refer the subject of the next clause to the previous one. As a result, the students cannot write the paragraph coherently. Besides that, some students always wrote subject as the theme of the clause. It makes the text/paragraph look monotonous. In addition to that, some students still found difficulties in writing the logical development of idea (content), grammar, and style and quality of expression. The average score of each component of the students' writing test based on Brown and Bailey's theory (1984) can be seen in the following table.

**Table 1. The average score of pre-cycle test of writing**

No.	Component	Score	Category
1.	Organization: introduction, Body and conclusion	10.85	Unacceptable
2.	Logical development of idea: content	11.92	Unacceptable
3.	Grammar	10.85	Unacceptable
4.	Punctuation, spelling and mechanics.	14.19	Adequate to fair
5.	Style and quality of expression	13.65	Adequate to fair
	Total (mean)	61.46	

Based on the above pre-cycle of writing test, it could be seen that the ability of the students in organization in this case it was related to how the students develop the introduction, body and conclusion of the paragraph was still poor. It could be recognized from the average score. The average score was 10.85. It belonged to unacceptable category. It means the organization can be barely be seen; there were still several problems with ordering of ideas; lack of ideas; lack of supporting evidence; conclusion was weak or illogical; in adequate effort of organization. In addition to that, this problem is also caused by the teaching-learning activity which was not effective. It was based on the students' observation and the interview.

To solve the above problems, it was needed techniques that made the students easy to develop the paragraphs. One of the ways to make the students easy to develop the paragraph was by introducing theme-rheme negotiation. It is because in writing paragraph, the students are expected to be able to organize the paragraph coherently. One of the ways to treat the students to be able to write the paragraph coherently is by introducing them theme-rheme negotiation. It is because by theme-rheme negotiation, the students are helped to develop the paragraph by developing the theme elements or rheme elements. Developing the paragraph by picking out those elements will create coherent paragraphs. Besides that, it needs techniques that make the teaching-learning activities effective.

Based on the above consideration, the writer conducted a classroom action research by introducing theme rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method to improve the writing skill of the English Department students of UTM. The problems addressed in the research are the following.

- (1) to what extent theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts?
- (2) To what extent theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method is effective for teaching paragraph writing of discussion texts?

Discussing paragraph, there are some definitions about it. One of the definitions is taken from Bram (1995). He states that a paragraph is as a group of sentences which contain relevant information about one main or central idea that is expresses in the topic sentence. Further, he states that since a good paragraph normally focuses on only one central idea that is expressed in the topic sentence, we need to construct a good topic sentence as the starting point.

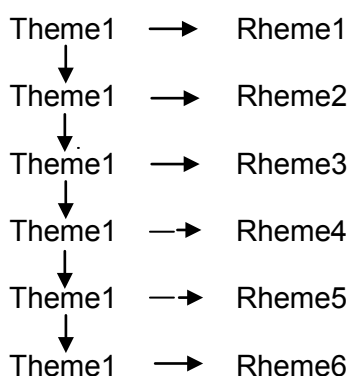
In addition to that, a good organization of Theme and Rheme in a paragraph will make the paragraph coherent. The definition of Theme and Rheme as stated by Halliday (1994: 37) is as follows: Theme is the element which serves as point of departure of the message; it is that with which the clause is concerned. The reminder of the message, the part in which Theme is developed is called Rheme. As a message structure, therefore, a clause consists of a Theme accompanied by a Rheme; and the structure is expressed by the order, whatever is chosen as a Theme is put first.

Organizing the first elements of clause, i.e. theme, plays an important role in writing; and the students must be aware of it. It will show the prominence of the message. In other words, the students' writing will be more cohesive and also the message being conveyed will be easier to be understood by the readers.

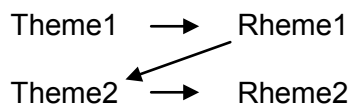
As said by Fries in his research (1997: 230-243), that both native English speaking and non-native English speaking students have difficulties ordering the words in their sentences. Further, he states that teachers often experience difficulties explaining the students how they should order the information in their sentences. Related to the fact, two concepts are helpful in the task. They are Theme and information focus while Thematic Progression or method of development of a text refers to the way in which the Theme of the clause may pick up, or repeat a meaning from a preceding Theme or Rheme (Paltridge, 2000: 140).

Talking about theme-rheme negotiation or thematic progression, Eggins (1994) says that method of development is very significant contribution that theme makes to the cohesion and coherence of a text has to do with how thematic element succeed each other. Related to thematic progression Danes in Gil (2001) states that 'Thematic Progression' refers to the choice and ordering of utterance Themes in a given passage. However, Gil (2001) explains that thematic progression only indicates the connections between the different textual segments without clarifying their nature. Further, he states that there are several ways in labeling this item. Halliday (1985) uses the term 'Thematic Structure', Danes and Paltridge use the term 'Thematic Progression', Fries and Martin use the term 'Method of Development'. Based on Martin and Rotherin Paltridge (2000), there are three main patterns of Thematic Progression. They are as follows.

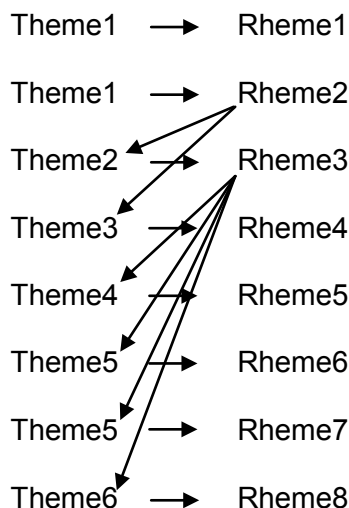
- (a) The Theme Reiteration/Constant Theme Pattern. In this pattern, the element of the preceding clause is the same as the subsequent clause. This pattern is as follows.



- (b) The Zig-Zag Pattern. In this pattern, the Rheme of the preceding clause contains an element which becomes the Theme of subsequent clause. The pattern is as follows.



- (c) The Multiple Theme Pattern. In this pattern, the Theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made in subsequent clause.



Discussing effective teacher for each individual is variable. Perceptions, opinions and/or experiences about an effective teacher are different. Blum in Nunan and Lamb (1996) states that the following classroom practices are typically of effective teachers. They are:

- (1) Instruction is guided by a preplanned curriculum.
- (2) There are high expectations for student learning.
- (3) Students are carefully oriented to lesson.
- (4) Instruction is clear and focused.
- (5) Learner progress is monitored closely.
- (6) When the students do not understand, they are taught.
- (7) Class time is used for learning.
- (8) There are smooth, efficient classroom routines.
- (9) Instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional needs.
- (10) Standards for classroom behavior are high.
- (11) Personal interactions between teachers and students are positive.
- (12) Incentives and rewards for students are used to promote excellent.

With similar point of view, Creemers (1994) states that aspects of effective teaching include:

- (1) having positive attitude
- (2) the development of pleasant social/ psychological climate in the classroom.
- (3) having high expectations of what pupil can achieve
- (4) lesson clarity
- (5) effective time management
- (6) strong lesson structuring
- (7) the use of a variety of teaching methods

- (8) using and incorporating pupil ideas
- (9) using appropriate and varied questioning.

Based on the above statements, it can be summarized that there are some different opinions about effective teacher who leads to effective teaching. Effective teachers teach to promote and enhance learning. Besides, they know how to manage their knowledge, classroom, and the students in terms of discipline, work, interaction between teacher-students-students, how to give instruction, and how to assess and evaluate students' activities and their own work. Therefore, to be effective teachers also imply to have a series of qualities, in terms of pedagogical, professional, social and personal skills.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **1. Research Design**

In this research, the writer applied Classroom Action Research approach. It is because action research is a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives. In this classroom action research, the writer conducted this in three cycles. It was to treat the students to improve the students' writing skill. The cycle consisted of four stages. They are Planning, Action, Observation and Reflection.

### **2. Subject of the Research**

The subjects of this research were the students of English department of UTM. The students here referred to the fourth semester students of B class of English Department of Tidar University of Magelang who took writing 3 subjects in 2011/2012 academic year. There were 26 students who were involved in the research. All of them had to write a composition of discussion texts, analytical exposition and hortatory exposition text.

### **3. Technique of Data Collection and Data Analysis**

To collect the data in this research, the writer used writing test, observation and interview. To analyze the data, she used quantitative and qualitative data analyses. It was to analyze data from the results of the teaching-learning process. It was done to compare the students' writing skill before and after the action or the results of pre-cycle test and post cycle tests. In analyzing the quantitative data, she used descriptive statistics. In analyzing this, the writer used Burns' theory (2010). It measured the central tendency and dispersion (or variability). In this case, the writer calculated the mean, and mode and the numbers which are spread, scattered, or dispersed across the data set. In addition to that, in analyzing qualitative data the writer used Constant Comparative method developed by Glaser and Strauss (1999). This method consists of four stages. They are comparing incidents applicable to each category, integrating categories and their properties, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The present study was conducted to investigate the improvement of the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts and the effectiveness of teaching-learning activity of writing class after implementing theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method. In this section the research findings are presented according to the research questions.

### **1. The Students' Competence in Developing a Paragraph of Discussion Texts**

The first purpose of present study was to investigate the improvement of the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts after implementing

theme-rheme negotiation. Based on the stages implemented by the writer in this classroom action research, it can be seen that implementing theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method in teaching paragraph writing can improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts. Based on the processes of implementing this model, it can be seen that through theme-rheme negotiation the students can recognize theme-rheme applied in each clause or clause complex. Based on the theme or rheme, the students can develop the next clause or clause complexes based on the previous theme or rheme to make the paragraphs coherent.

Since the focus of the study was on students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts, the writer used Brown's theory as writing scoring rubric. The research findings would be organization which consists of introduction, body and conclusion. Based on the results of the data analysis in pre-cycle, cycle one, cycle two and cycle three, it can be seen that the implementation of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts.

Besides that, this research was a classroom action research in which in each cycle it consisted of four stages. These stages were planning, action, observing and reflecting. In addition to that, this classroom action research was conducted in three cycles. The cycle 1 covered 5 meetings, cycle 2 consisted of 5 and cycle three covered 4 meetings. The cycle one stage was conducted on March, 26<sup>th</sup>, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, and 23<sup>rd</sup>. The cycle 2 stage was conducted on April, 30<sup>th</sup>, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and June 4<sup>th</sup>. The last cycle was cycle three stage. It was conducted in four meetings. They were June, 11<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup>. In each meeting, it consisted of three parts. They were opening, main activity and closing.

In the opening session, writer greeted the students, prayed, motivated the students and had a small talk about experience or previous material. Those activities were done to open the meeting and in order to relate the students' experience with what they were going to learn. In addition to the opening session, the writer implemented some activities in the main activities. Those activities were the main activities the writer planned to implement in order to improve the students' writing skill. The writer gave the examples of text, introduced the theme-rheme negotiation patterns applied in those texts, and asked the students to practice writing a paragraph of discussion texts by applying theme-rheme negotiation. These activities were done in cooperative learning groups. In this case, the students were given one clause or clause complex (sentence). Based on the sentence, the students were asked to develop the following clauses or sentences based on previous ones. They could apply the three patterns; it could be reiteration, zig-zag or multiple theme patterns. In addition to that, in implementing or in introducing the above patterns, the writer used grouping model. In this case, the writer applied cooperative learning method.

Talking about theme-rheme negotiation, introducing it through one example of text was not enough. The students needed more examples of theme-rheme negotiation applied in texts. Besides, they needed more exercises on developing coherent paragraphs by implementing theme-rheme negotiation. The above activities were conducted in order to improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts. In this case, the writer implemented thematic progression patterns in teaching paragraph writing. Based on the data, it could be seen that the implementation theme-rheme negotiation could improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts. It could be seen from the results of paragraph writing tests that could be seen in the following table.

**Table 2. The Summary of the Average Score Organization Aspects**

	<b>Organization Aspects</b>
Pre-cycle	10.85
Cycle 1	15.62
Cycle 2	17.31
Cycle 3	17.53

Based on the above data, it could be seen that there was an improvement of the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts after the writer implemented theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method. The improvements were on organization aspects. In pre cycle stage, the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts were in unacceptable category. There were shaky or minimally recognizable introduction; organization can barely be seen; severe problems with ordering of ideas; lack of ideas; lack of supporting evidence; conclusion weak or illogical; inadequate effort to organize. After implementing the model in three cycles, the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts were in excellent to good category. There was appropriate title, effective introductory paragraph, topic that is stated lead to body, transitional expression used; arrangement of material shows plan (could be outlined by reader); supporting evidence given for generalization conclusion logical and complete.

In other words, based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the implementation of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts.

## **2. The Effectiveness of Teaching-Learning Activity**

Based on students' and peers' observation and interview, it can be inferred that implementing theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can make the teaching-learning activities effective. After implementing this model, the writer found that there are twenty indicators existed as the characteristics of effective teaching. Among those twenty indicators, there were only twelve indicators that gave good contribution to the teaching-learning effectiveness. It is because the writer set the standard as good indicator if it emerges 76% or above (the mean score is 5.33 or above). Those twelve indicators were

- (1) instruction is guided by preplanned curriculum,
- (2) Students are carefully oriented to the lesson,
- (3) instruction is clear and focused,
- (4) learner progress is monitored closely,
- (5) when the students do not understand they are taught,
- (6) instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional need,
- (7) personal interaction between teachers and students are positive,
- (8) having positive attitude, having high expectation of what pupil can achieve,
- (9) strong lesson structuring,
- (10) the use of variety teaching methods,
- (11) using appropriate and varied questioning and
- (12) having high expectation of what pupil can achieve.

The above research findings were based on the results of students and peer observation besides interview. Each of these indicators was based on students' interview and peers' observation.

## DISCUSSION

The results of 3 cycles of implementation of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method in teaching paragraph writing showed improvement on the students' competence in developing a paragraph of discussion texts. It can be seen from the improvement of score especially in organization aspect. Through this model, the students are trained to develop the paragraph by developing the elements in the previous sentences or clauses. It means they can take the theme or the rheme elements of the previous clause or sentence to be the sentence of the following clauses or sentences.

There are three ways or three patterns the students can apply. It can be theme reiteration/constant theme patterns, zig-zag or multiple theme patterns. As stated by Martin and Rother in Paltridge (2000), in reiteration theme patterns, the element of preceding clause is the same as the subsequent clause, in zig-zag the rheme of the preceding clause contains an element which becomes the theme of subsequent clause and in the multiple theme patterns, the theme of one clause introduces a number of different pieces of information, each of which is then picked up and made in subsequent clause.

In line with Martin and Rother, Wang (2007) states that to convey information effectively, writers must be able to control the flow of given and new information in developing the argument in the text. A focus on theme and rheme structure in a clause can have startling and immediate results in teaching writing. Once a language teacher shows learner how to properly arrange old and new information, the students have gained a powerful tool for managing the meaning of their writings. The learners can consciously and strategically draw on this knowledge to construct cohesive writing. The cohesion in students' writing can be improved dramatically if attention is given to Theme selection and Thematic progression (theme-rheme negotiation) in text. Besides that, Wang (2007) states that by analyzing theme-rheme in a text, the students can learn to perform the same analysis in their own writings, and thus improve cohesion in their own work. The relationship between theme and rheme is essential in creating a cohesive text.

The above findings are also supported by Khedri and Ebrahimi's research (2012). They state that thematic progression plays a major role in organizing the message and in enabling it to be communicated and understood clearly. Further as said by Ventola in Khedri and Ebrahimi, in academic texts the theme/rheme patterns are important in guiding the reader through the logical paths constructed by the writer.

Besides the above research, Yang's research (2008) also supports this. Yang states that the reason of choosing thematic progression analysis in teaching explanation is that T-P analysis can be best demonstrate how writer gives New information on the base of Given information. Further it is stated that New information is developed on the base of Given information by repeating one of the elements in the previous clause as the theme of the next clause, in order to organize the article in a cohesively and orient readers from known to unknown.

In completing thematic progression patterns in teaching writing, the writer also implemented cooperative learning methods. This combination model improves the students' writing skill. This research is supported by Slavin and Cooper research (1999). It is stated that cooperative learning is to enhance academic achievement by providing students with increased opportunities for discussion, learning from each other, and by allowing students to divide up tasks in ways that tap into their academic strengths. Through this, it can increase the academic achievement of all students while simultaneously improve intergroup relations among students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. These are also in line with Slavin's opinion (2010) that learning environment for 21<sup>st</sup> century must be ones in which students are actively engaged with learning tasks and with each other. Today, teachers are in competition with television, computer games, and all sorts of engaging technology, and the expectation that children will learn passively



is becoming increasingly unrealistic. Cooperative learning offers a proven, practical means of creating existing social and engaging classroom environments to help students to master traditional skills and knowledge as well as develop the creative and interactive skills.

Talking about Cooperative Learning in teaching writing, Raimes (1983) states that during the writing process, students engage in several stages that include pre-writing, planning, drafting, and post writing activities. It means that students first try to generate ideas so as to organize them by considering the purpose, audience and genre of the text, then they make word choices, adding or deleting ideas by reviewing organization, grammar, logic and verifying if there is enough information, and last they share their ideas with real audience so this stage involves students with designing and publishing final draft. Further it is stated by Aldana (2005), learning to write is a natural process via cooperative learning because it provides the social structure for students to work cooperatively as teams and enhances their academic achievement. In this case, the achievement is the improvement of the writing skill. In addition to that, most of cooperative learning activities share the following characteristics: a small group of students complete clearly defined, collective tasks with a specified time, team members assume roles to support the overall process and product; and the students learn to respect the synergy of the group and the diversity of individual viewpoints (Millis, Nolinske, 1999).

In addition to that, the implementation of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method can create effective teaching because by implementing this model, it makes the teaching learning activities effective. The effectiveness of this model depends on teaching, the students (learners) and the lecturer factors. The first factor is teaching factor. To make effective teaching, instruction must be guided by preplanned curriculum, clear and focused, instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional need, strong lesson structuring, the use of variety teaching methods, and using appropriate and varied questioning. For the students or learners factor, Students are carefully oriented to the lesson, learner progress is monitored closely, and when the students do not understand they are taught. The lecturer factors are having high expectation of what pupil can achieve. The last two factors, personal interaction between teachers and students are positive and having positive attitude are factors which are embodied to both lecturer and learners' factors.

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method is effective model for teaching paragraph writing of discussion texts. It is because through this model the students are trained to develop the paragraph by presenting the first clause or sentence. Through this, the students are expected to develop by taking the elements of the previous clause or sentence. In addition to that, combining TP with cooperative learning (CL) is needed since in CL, the students are trained to work in a group, to cooperate and share in their groups. It has social benefit as well as academic since one of the essential elements of CL is the development of social skills. Besides, cooperative learning and process approach of writing can work together in the achievement of a common goal when writing a text.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

### **1. Conclusion**

Based on the finding and discussions of the research data, the conclusions are formulated as follows.

- a. Based on the stages implemented by the writer in this classroom action research, it can be concluded that implementing theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method in teaching paragraph writing of discussion texts can improve the students' competence in developing a paragraph. Based on the process of implementing this model, it can be seen that through theme-rheme negotiation the

students can recognize theme-rheme applied in each clause or clause complex. Based on the theme or rheme, the students can develop the next clause or clause complexes based on the previous theme or rheme to make the paragraphs coherent. While through CL, it can increase the students' motivation to participate in their learning process and finally it can increase the students' achievement.

- b. Implementation of theme-rheme negotiation with cooperative learning method in teaching paragraph writing of discussion texts showed improvement on the effectiveness of teaching-learning activity. It can be seen from the improvement of the indicators of effective teaching. This model matches with twelve indicators of effective teaching. They are Instruction is guided by a preplanned curriculum, students are carefully oriented to lesson, instruction is clear and focused, learner progress is monitored closely, when the students do not understand, they are taught, instructional groups formed in the classroom fit instructional needs, personal interactions between teachers and students are positive, having positive attitude, strong lesson structuring, the use of a variety of teaching methods, using appropriate and varied questioning, having high expectations of what pupil can achieve.

## 2. Suggestion

Based on the research findings, it is suggested that the lecturers of writing class should introduce text types together with social function, schematic structures and also language features to the students. They are recommended to apply text-based syllabus in teaching writing. Besides that, the lecturers should also introduce theme-rheme negotiation to the students in order that they can write the paragraph coherently and artistically. In this case, the lecturers should introduce various sentence beginnings as Themes of the clause to the students in order that the students' paragraphs/texts will be more interesting; not monotonous. In addition to that, the lecturers are expected to apply cooperative learning methods in teaching writing. Hopelly, by these methods, the students do not only get academic but also social benefit.

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