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# Modeling and Non-modeling Genre-based Approach to Writing Argument-led Introduction Paragraphs: A Case of English Students in Iran

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## Abstract

Despite the crucial role of introductory sections in argumentative academic writing, the effects of genrebased approaches to writing introductory paragraphs have not been much explored yet. The present study aimed to investigate whether the provision of genre knowledge through modeling and non-modeling could enhance learners' ability in writing introductory paragraphs of argumentative essays. Adopting an intact group sampling within a quasi-experimental design, 75 graduate and post-graduate students with intermediate level of language proficiency were selected from three universities and randomly divided into three groups: modeling, non-modeling, and a control group. Modeling and non-modeling groups received genrebased treatment while the control group had a non-genre based treatment as placebo. The statistical procedures of dependent-samples t-tests, a one-way ANOVA, and correlational analyses significantly confirmed the positive effects of both modeling and non-modeling genre-based instruction on the writing ability of the learners. No significant difference, however, was found between the two genre-based groups.

**Keywords:** Argumentative essay writing, English as foreign language writing, Genre analysis, Modeling essay, Non-modeling essay

## **INTRODUCTION**

Numerous ESL writing studies have so far supported the view that good academic writing in English is partly, if not greatly, dependent on learners' genre knowledge and the skills to apply this knowledge in actual writing practice (Hyland, 2007, 2008, 2013; Kay & Dudley-Evans, 1998; Mustafa, 1995; Martin, 1989, 1993;

Myskow & Gordon, 2009; Swales, 1990; Swami, 2008; Wignell, Martin, & Eggins, 1989). Thee vidence for the genre-based approach has been so conclusive that many educators tend to integrate their process-oriented approach to writing with explication of the generic features of the assigned tasks in English as second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) classes (Badger & White, 2000; Walsh, 2004). Concerning the importance



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of writing, Hyland (2003) argues for the development of writing proficiency of countless students and academics in ESL settings since fluency in academic writing is a conclusive proof of one's professional and academic qualifications. Research on ESL/EFL writing skill has also convinced investigators to take genre knowledge as an explicit tool for enhancing written skills since appropriately composed texts, according to Hyland (2003), is attainable through genre background on how to set out genre stages.

What makes the genre-based approach particularly related to argumentative/argument-led writing, as is the case for this study, is the culture-specific nature of genres. Writers of diverse cultures and communities tend to use distinct and culture-specific argument styles, logical reasoning, and organizational patterns in their writings. In addition, culturally diverse writers do not normally share identical presuppositions about what role their readers should play as a reader and what characterizes a good piece of writing. Such differences are reportedly more noticeable in argumentative essays as the genre represents more unique national rhetorical styles across cultures and communities worldwide (Taylor, 2004). How to deal with such idiosyncrasies in teaching argumentative writing in EFL situations demands special pedagogic attention and the genre-based instruction of writing may be one alternative to deal with the issue. What further justifies a generic approach through modeling theoretically is Vygotsky's (1978) notion of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and taking such an approach as a scaffold for helping novice writers write more coherently and appropriately.

#### Significance of Writing

What numerous students and academics around the world need to acquire is fluency in ESL/EFL academic writing. A good writing skill, to learners, means the ticket to better college grades and greater academic achievement. Similarly, writing to academicians should mean the key to satisfy the professional standards and academic qualifications. Writing calls for a complex form of thinking process through which one may better appreciate the differences and complexities in spoken and written modes of language processing and the principles governing the two modes of communication (Clay, 1983).

Despite its importance, the writing skill may seem to be the most neglected language skill in ESL and, more severely, EFL contexts. To rectify the pedagogic loss, some teaching-learning schemes such as product-oriented, processoriented, genre-based approaches have been proposed so far. Relying on discourse and rhetoric of different types of writing, a genre-based approach has today attracted more attention because of theoretical support and practical utility it has proved to possess.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theoretically, a genre-based approach within the framework of discourse analysis gains support from at least two positions: Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (NH) and Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism. Concerning the first tradition, noticing, according to Schmidt (1990), had a crucial role in the process of second language acquisition (SLA) as it helped convert input; the language a learner encounters comprehensibly or otherwise, into intake; the comprehended input. Regarding noticing pivotal in SLA, (Swain (2000)) and Qi and Lapkin (2001) stated that intake could profoundly assist learners to do language processing. Thus, regarding consciousness for learning a necessity within NH framework (Schmidt, 1990; Schmitt, 2002; Truscott, 1998) and viewing writing a cultural accomplishment learned and enhanced through consciousness, a discourse-rhetoric genre-based approach through modeling could justifiably help learners change potentially incomprehensible input into pedagogically comprehensible intake in a secondlanguage writing class.

With regard to the second position, a genrebased modeling approach is compatible with social constructivist notion of Zone of Proximal

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development (ZPD) and the need for scaffolding the new learning experience for the novice, inexperienced learner through appropriate instruction and modeling by the experienced instructor. In other words, to assist ESL/EFL learners to convert their encountered input into comprehensible intake and to internalize features of argumentative writing through model genre modeling approach as a scaffold to organize genre knowledge and put that consciously registered knowledge more readily into practice in writing classes. Hyland (2003, p. 103) pointed out that "the model offers both teachers and learners clear pathways in learning to write". In a similar vein, Hyland (2007, p. 12) introduced modeling as a form of scaffolding which may take many forms such as "modeling and discussion of texts, explicit instruction and teacher input".

Considering genre-based modeling as a path to improve writing at various proficiency levels, Claggett (2005) classified modeling into two kinds of close, and near (or loose) based on the degree of exactness in retaining the model structures and words of the model. Taking functions of each genre model more pertinent, Wette (2014) proposed a three-fold scheme: text modeling, cognitive modeling and social modeling.

## **Discourse and Genre-Based Studies**

Discourse analysis of the above-sentence level study of language tends to identify the aims and functions beyond lexis, clause, and sentence and embedded meanings in linguistic forms in communication between the reader and writer (Bhatia, 1993; Hyland, 2008, 2013). Concerning interactions between writers and readers, Hyland (2005) believed that the writer needed to consider readers' expectations, their social, affective and cognitive characteristics to ensure perfect understanding of the intended meanings and purpose expressed through language forms. Hyland found genre knowledge and instruction of genre features necessary for successful communication between the reader and writer.

Concerning the advantages of genre-based instruction, Swales and Feak (1994) divided genre studies and generic knowledge into two types of macro-level and micro-level. By macro features they meant the key functions of a genre such as the introduction, thesis-statement, supporting paragraphs and conclusion-while micro-level features included sentence-level, grammatical and lexical characteristics. Hyland (2009, pp. 30-31) found genre-based instruction of writing advantageous and listed its pedagogic benefits as follows:

- *Explicit* in clarifying the teaching-learning point,
- *Systematic* in taking care of contextualization,
- *Needs-Based* in gearing course objectives with learners' needs,
- *Supportive* in scaffolding students' learning and creativity,
- *Empowering* for providing varied patterns in varied texts,
- *Critical* in providing the chance to access varied genres and challenge them,
- *Consciousness-raising* for providing textual schemata and knowledge.

## **Genre-Rhetoric Analysis**

Genre analysis as an approach to discourse studies searches for common and varied rhetorical patterns, layout, ordering, and contextually appropriate forms for a written or spoken task (Dudley-Evans, 1987). Virtually, inputs from various disciplines can be scrutinized, interpreted and described within an academic genre analytic framework for their pedagogic potentials, sociocognitive and communicative aspects (Bhatia, 1993). Genre analysis, according to Hyland (2009, p. 27) "is the major instrument in the text analyst's tool box", especially in English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses. Flowerdew (1993) contended that genre analysis has a process-oriented focus and is thus advantageous to product-oriented approaches to writing.

One area that practically connects genre knowledge to genre-analytic studies in writing is Swale's move analysis. Considering moves as distinct communicative acts, move analysis concentrates on identifying and analyzing moves and steps in written genres as discourse not lexicogrammatical units. Research-wise, the approach has proved helpful in enhancing different sections of academic articles writing in both first and second language contexts because of its conscious-raising role (Eisenhart, Lewin, Fine, & Young, 2004; Flowerdew, 2001). As the originator of move-model studies, Swales introduced his holistic genre-based view of academic discourse in 1981, a trend that was later taken up by some discourse analysts for describing linguistic and discoursal patterns of genres of different academic nature. Swales finally revised his earlier moveand-step analysis model in 1990.

Swales' move-analysis model was not without its own critics, however. Widdowson (1983) criticized that move-based genre approach is likely to have some dangers. In a similar vein, Brookes and Grundy (1990) argued that teaching academic writing through genre-rhetoric analysis would cause students gain a kind of mastery that is restrictive. Conversely, Swami (2008), who studied the effectiveness of instruction of writing through sensitizing learners to generic features, reported that raised awareness due to genre treatment assisted learners to critically think about how the moves were ordered and in turn how to render the same organization and order in their own writings. Badger and White (2000) recognized both positive and negative effects in the approach. They saw the positive side in conscious acquisition of through modeling and imitation of the practiced genre while the negative aspect related to the risk of assuming a more passive role as a learner and developing an unrealistic and undervalued impression of the skills underlying the ability to compose a good text.

## Argumentative Writing: English and Persian

Writing an argumentative essay is a challenging task because of its persuasive or debatable nature, and the requirement for a well-reasoned argument on a premise within a field. Another thing that makes writing argumentative essays challenging for ESL learners is their culture-specific nature and their variations in rhetorical styles across communities (Taylor, 2004). Concerning rhetorical idiosyncrasies, Hyland (1990) proposed a model for argumentative essay in which thesis, argument, and conclusion are the constituent parts. As shown in Figure 1, Hyland further elaborated that the thesis component may include five moves of gambit, informing, proposition, evaluation and marker in the introduction of the essay. Obviously, the introductory paragraph of an argumentative essay plays the most important part of this sub-genre of writing, as it is the icebreaker and thus overshadows the shape and structure of the whole essay.

Stage	Moves
<b>THESIS.</b> Introduces the proposition to be argued.	<ul> <li>(Gambit)</li> <li>Attention Grabbercontroversial statement or dramatic illustration.</li> <li>(Information)</li> <li>Presents background material for topic contextualization.</li> <li>Proposition</li> <li>Furnishes a specific statement of position to define the topic and give a focus to the entire composition</li> <li>(Evaluation)</li> <li>Positive glossbrief support of proposition</li> <li>(Marker)</li> <li>Introduces and/ or identifies a list.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Elements of Structure of the Argumentative Essay Taken from Hyland (1990, p. 69)

There are a few comparative studies of rhetorical and generic features of Persian and English argumentative writings. Zia and Derakhshan (2006) believed that despite systematic differ-

ences in generic-rhetoric features in the two languages in writing, the direction of transfer should be from the dominant language (Farsi) to the subordinate language (English). Khiabani and Pourghassemi (2009) conducted another comparative study and found no significant difference in organizational patterns of L1 and L2 compositions, a finding in contrast with the earlier expectations and predictions. Studying the rhetorical structures of English and Persian in argumentative writings, Khodabandeh. Jafarigohar. Soleimani, and Hemmati (2013) also found that almost all their Iranian participants utilized similar organizational patterns in their native and foreign languages; however, they cautioned that it might be because of compensatory effects of EFL generic-rhetoric knowledge of writing and its positive transfer effect into Farsi.

Analyzing 20 Persian and English essays in terms of frequency of four argumentation techniques of refutation, rhetorical questions, statistics, and appeal to authority, Biria and Yakhabi (2013) reported similar applications of the techniques in the two languages. However, the significant differences, they added, were related to the frequency of refutation and rhetorical questions as well as direct and explicit utterances and speech acts in English argumentative essays, a point they interpreted in light of sociocultural differences of individualism and collectivism in the two countries. Finally, Rashidi and Dastkhezr (2009) found that their Iranian students exhibited a preference for deductive order of organization and flexibility in the location of the main idea in the first and second language writings.

## Modeling or Non-Modeling?

The way to provide genre knowledge has been found important to educators as well. Concerning whether to provide the genre knowledge explicitly through modeling or implicitly through nonmodeling, Goby (1997), for instance, is in favor of genre-modeling because of its more useful pedagogical benefits in writing classes. Hyland (2003, p. 158) believed that "the model offers both teachers and learners a clear pathway in learning to write". Nevertheless, there are researchers who criticize modeling because of diminishing the writer's commitment and responsibility for creative development of writing tasks. Investigating the effectiveness of model based approaches; Abbuhl (2011) stated that movement from genre competence to genre performance requires instruction and recognition of the significance of explicit techniques for developing genre awareness. Conducting a study on the effects of genre-based reading on writing persuasive compositions, Ramos (2014) concluded that "learners prefer and benefit from more explicit instruction" (p. 664). Similarly, Kalali and Pishkar (2015) stated that "implementing a genre-based approach in teaching writing skill may lead to promising results in which the writing skill is improved greatly" (p. 10).

## PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Within the genre-rhetoric framework for teaching writing, the present study intended to examine the effects of genre-based instruction through modeling and non-modeling on Iranian EFL learners' writing argument-led introductory paragraphs. To this end two null hypotheses were formulated as follows:

 $H_{01}$ : Genre-based approach to teaching writing through modeling does not influence writing argument-led introductions of Iranian EFL learners  $H_{02}$ : Non-modeling genre-based teaching of writing does not influence writing introductions of argument-led essays of Iranian EFL learners

## METHODS

#### Participants

Initially, 100 graduate and post-graduate students, studying in disciplines other than English education, who attended crash courses for IELTS and TOEFL tests in three universities in Tehran, Iran were randomly selected as the sample population. For screening purposes, a TOEFL test was administered and based on the results 75 students (fe-male=39; male=36; age range= 9 (26 through 35) were chosen as qualified intermediate and upperintermediate participants for the next phase. The sample was then divided into three intact groups: 27 learners as Experimental Group A (EGA); 23 learners as Experimental Group B (EGB), and 25 participants as Control Group C (CGC).

## Materials

The genres assigned for familiarity and practice purposes included argument-led essays. The writing samples and models were taken from two sources : Bailey and Powell (2008) and Brook-Hart and Jakeman (2013).

## Instruments

To ensure the participants homogeneity, the researchers preferred to use the easier modality of TOEFL to administer. A PBT (Paper-based TOEFL) test with three sub-tests of listening, structure and written expression, and reading was administered in one session in each location.

## Procedure

The homogenized participants were placed in three intact groups of EGA (Genre-Modeling); EGB (Genre-Non-modeling); and CGC (Control Group). The participants were initially pretested by having them write an argumentative introduction on a familiar topic in order to check their writing ability just before treatment and make sure of their homogeneity on the dependent variable. They were then exposed to placebo or treatments for 8 sessions of 90 minutes within four weeks. The experimental groups (EGA & EGB) received Hyland's (1990) five-move model as treatment either with or without modeling after informing them about genre analysis strategy, expectations and assignments. EGA had a model paragraph as treatment each session while being coached to analyze the model. (un)scramble the moves based on the model texts, identify the moves and developmental patterns prior to developing their own paragraphs. Having written their own introductions, they were asked to analyze, discuss, and modify them within their peer groups by adopting either close or loose genre modeling based on Clagget's (2005) classification. For EGB (non-modeling group) the treatment procedure was relatively the same with the exception that the genre model text as explications was different and the participants

were discouraged and prevented from merely duplicating a practiced model were the genre instruction strategy. For the control group, the same assignments were required of them although the placebo treatment was implemented within a traditional product-oriented writing instruction scheme. Two trained IELTS instructors were asked to rate the pretest and posttest performances according to the British Council rating scale of IELTS.

## Design

The adopted design for the study was pretestposttest quasi-experimental for the three intact groups. The independent variable was genre-based writing instruction with two levels of modeling and non-modeling in EGA and EGB while the dependent variable was the ability to write argument-led introductory paragraph. Concerning the statistical analyses, three paired samples t-tests were run to capture the likely significance of treatments in post treatment condition. In addition, a one-way ANOVA and a post-hoc test of comparison were run to compare the performances of the groups. To ensure inter-rater consistency of the scores, Pearson r correlation was employed and proved to be high and acceptable (r=0.84).

## RESULTS

## **Descriptive Statistics**

To ensure consistency of the data two IELTS examiners were asked to score the writing samples in posttest condition. The Cronbach's Alpha for inter-rater reliability, as presented in Table 1, turned out to be very high, ranging from .80 to .91, indicating consistency and reliability in scoring across raters.

## Table 1

Cronbach's Alpha for Inter-rater Reliability in Posttest Condition

		Cronbach's Alpha	No. of raters
EGA	Modeling	.84	2
EGB	Non-modeling	.91	2
CGC	Control	.80	2

The descriptive statistics for the three groups are presented in Table 2 below. As for EGA, the scores showed an increase in posttest condition  $(\overline{X}\text{pre}=5.51 \text{ and } \overline{X}\text{post}=6.14)$  and the standard deviations showed a decrease (SD pre =.89 and SD post = .77). The distribution pattern for EGB was as follows: the mean scores for pretest  $(\overline{X}\text{pre}=5.59)$  was again smaller than that of posttest ( $\overline{X}$ post= 6.34) and the measure of dispersion was again smaller in the posttest (SD pre= .78, SD post=.52). As for CGC, the mean scores showed not a great increase in posttest condition ( $\overline{X}$ pre= 5.44 and  $\overline{X}$ post= 5.70) and the standard deviation showed again more homogeneity in the posttest (SD pre= .72, SD post=.60).

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for EGA and EGB in Pretest and Posttest

		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
EGA	Pretest	- 27	5.51	.89	38	81
	Posttest	- 21	6.14	.77	26	90
EGB	Pretest	- 23	5.59	.78	08	.79
	Posttest	- 23	6.34	.52	24	-1.22
CGC	Pretest	- 25	5.44	.72	04	.15
	Posttest	- 23	5.70	.60	.73	.02

#### **Inferential Statistics**

To examine the statistical significance in pre and post treatments in EGA and EGB two matched ttests were run. As shown in Table 2 above, there was a significant increase in writing performance from pretest (M= 5.51, SD= .89) to posttreatment test (M=6.14, SD= .77), t (26) = -5.10, p <.001(two-tailed) for EGA group. The mean difference in the writing performance was -.62 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -.88 to -.37. The eta-squared statistics (.50) indicated a large effect size for genre-based modeling treatment. As for EGB group receiving nonmodeling treatment, the paired-samples t-test once again showed a significant increase from pretest (M= 5.59, SD= .78) to post-treatment test (M=6.34, SD= .52, t (22) = -3.89, p <.001(twotailed). The eta squared statistics (.40) indicated again relatively large effect size. These findings allowed the researchers to reject both null hypotheses that claimed genre-based instruction (modeling and non-modeling) had no impact on performances on argument-led writing.

#### Table 3

Paired Samples T-	Test for EGA and	l EGB on Argument-led	Introductio
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	Paired Differences							
	Mean	Std.	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Inter- val of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Dev.	Iviean	Lower	Upper			
EGA	629	.640	.123	883	376	-5.107	26	.000
EGB	750	.923	.192	-1.149	350	-3.896	22	.001

To compare the variability of the mean scores for statistical significance after genre-based treatment, a one-way analysis of variance was run (Table 4 below). Inspecting the results obtained by the three groups by checking sig. statistic in ANOVA Table 5, we noticed a statistically significant difference at the p < .005 level for the groups: F (2, 72) = 5.84, p = .005. Despite reaching statistical significance, the difference in mean scores between the groups was not so great this time. The effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .14, which in Cohen's (1988, pp. 284-287) terms would be considered a small effect size.



	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.35	2	2.67	5.84	.004
Within Groups	33.00	72	.45		
Total	38.35	74			

Results of One-way ANOVA for the Study Groups on Argument-led Writing

Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test (Table 5 below) indicated that the mean score for

EGA ( $X^=6.14$ , SD = .77) was significantly different from CGC ( $X^=5.70$ , SD = .69). Once again

#### Table 5

Tukey HSD	Multiple Com	parisons of Means	on Argument-led	Writing

(I)	( <b>J</b> )	Mean Differ-	Std.	Sia	95% Confidence In- terval	
TREATMENT	TREATMENT	ence (I-J)	Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Modeling	Non-modeling	19	.19	.55	65	.26
	Placebo	$.44^{*}$	.18	.04	001	.89
Non-modeling	Modeling	.19	.19	.55	26	.65
	Placebo	.64*	.19	.004	.17	1.11
Placebo	Modeling	44*	.18	.04	89	.001
	Non-modeling	64*	.19	.004	-1.11	17

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

EGA, however, did not differ significantly from EGB ( $\overline{X} = 6.34$ , SD = .52). Comparing EGB with CGC showed a significant difference of mean scores at .005 level of significance, implying outperformance of EGB over the CGC.

#### DISCUSSION

This study examined the effects of genre based instruction with and without modeling on writing argument-led introductions. Sensitizing the participants to generic features through both modeling and non-modeling yielded significantly better pedagogical outcomes as anticipated and supported in a number of previous studies in ESL/EFL education (for example, Flowerdew, 2013; Hyland, 2009; Swales, 1990; Swami, 2008; Watson, 1982). Earlier genre-based research was however concerned with lower-intermediate to intermediate learners in ESL situations mostly with culturally divergent ESP students. This study extended its scope by inclusion of both non-English graduate and postgraduate ESP learners in a culturally homogeneous EFL context examining genre instructions as treatment.

The results supported the effectiveness of both

modeling and non-modeling genre-based approach to writing argument-led introductions with ESP learners once again, but this time in an EFL situation, where development of writing is not a major objective in Iranian mainstream language education. In addition, the results showed the groups of ESP learners receiving modeling and non-modeling treatments performed similarly in writing argument-led introductions. This finding may seem in contrast with the views favoring modeling genre-based approach for the allegedly additional pedagogical benefits it is claimed to have for the educators and learners (Abbuhl, 2011; Goby, 1997; Hyland, 2003; Ramos, 2014).

The other point derived from the results related genre-based instruction to Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis. The learners showed that they would write more efficiently if they were conscious of genre-based features. This genre-awareness could assist learners to see more clearly the important role of the moves in coming up with a more coherent piece of writing.. This is in line with some educators' view that genre-based teaching can provide a discourse framework, a pattern for learners to de-

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Table 4

tect and acquire the essential points and assists critical thinking by making them reflect on how the moves need to be created and sequenced (Gee, 1997; Swami, 2008). On the other hand, the awareness would function as a teaching strategy and easily transferable to writing classes, especially for high-stake standardized testing like IELTS or TOEFL, where success in writing demands linguistic and discourse competence.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The influence of genre based modeling and nonmodeling on composing the introductory paragraph requires an in-depth investigation of argumentative essays in both first and second languages due to their rhetorical, discoursal and cultural idiosyncrasies. The present study limited its scope only to introductory paragraphs of argumentative genre of writing and confirmed the results of earlier genre-based studies on the efficiency of genre knowledge and its transferability to argumentative introductory paragraphs. Despite the disadvantage germane to the lack of creativity associated with modeling approach, this study showed no significant difference in writing performances of the modeling and non-modeling groups of learner. A host of factors namely culture, working memory, first language background, approach to teaching writing and the learner characteristics whether they are holistic or analytical might have played a role in differential success in EFL writing; thus, the results might be interpreted within the limitations of the study. To be able to generalize the findings to a wider context, obviously we need to widen the scope by selecting more respondents and incorporating full sections of augmentative essays into the design of a future study. Needless to point, other generic analysis techniques such as interview with the writers and a questionnaire are crucial to shed more light on genre analysis.

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