

Biology 3103 - Ecology Laboratory

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Summer 2018

"Shouldn't you be working on your dissertation?" - Katherine Hooker

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Preface

Filler.

Why read this book

More filler.

Structure of the book

Chapters ?? introduces a new topic, and ...

Software information and conventions

I used the **knitr** package (Xie, 2015) and the **bookdown** package (Xie, 2018) to compile my book. My R session information is shown below:

```
sessionInfo()  
  
## R version 3.5.1 (2018-07-02)  
## Platform: x86_64-w64-mingw32/x64 (64-bit)  
## Running under: Windows 10 x64 (build 17134)  
##  
## Matrix products: default  
##  
## locale:  
## [1] LC_COLLATE=English_United States.1252  
## [2] LC_CTYPE=English_United States.1252  
## [3] LC_MONETARY=English_United States.1252  
## [4] LC_NUMERIC=C
```

```
## [5] LC_TIME=English_United States.1252
##
## attached base packages:
## [1] stats      graphics   grDevices utils      datasets
## [6] methods    base
##
## loaded via a namespace (and not attached):
## [1] compiler_3.5.1  backports_1.1.2 bookdown_0.7
## [4] magrittr_1.5    rprojroot_1.3-2 tools_3.5.1
## [7] htmltools_0.3.6 rstudioapi_0.7  yaml_2.2.0
## [10] Rcpp_0.12.18   stringi_1.1.7  rmarkdown_1.10
## [13] knitr_1.20     xfun_0.3     stringr_1.3.1
## [16] digest_0.6.15  evaluate_0.11
```

Package names are in bold text (e.g., **rmarkdown**), and inline code and file-names are formatted in a typewriter font (e.g., `knitr::knit('foo.Rmd')`). Function names are followed by parentheses (e.g., `bookdown::render_book()`).

Acknowledgments

There are lots.

Chapter 1

Population Ecology

1.1 Background information

Organisms have evolved different life history strategies which differ in their methods of reproduction, care of offspring, timing of growth, means of resource acquisition, and prey avoidance. While these factors and how they interact can be highly complex, **survivorship** offers a simple means to quantify how a particular population ensures their reproductive success. For example, humans devote an enormous amount of energy and resources to offspring care, which results in low mortality rates among their young. On the other hand, most insects produce a massive number of offspring that have extremely high rates of mortality.

Plotting the number of survivors against age yields what is called a ‘survivorship-curve’ (Fig. 1.1), which is a visual way to assess how various organisms differ in their **life-history strategies** (number of offspring, number of reproductive cycles, degree of parental care, etc.). Scientists can use these plots to examine differences in organisms, or assess changes within subsets of a population.

1.2 Objectives

You will use the cemetery data, as well as data generated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service ([Milsap et al., 2016](#)), to address hypotheses about different populations. We can use birth and death years on gravestones, as well as names (to infer gender), to collect simple but useful information to collect demographic data for the local human population. The survivorship curve you will generate from this data will inform some ideas about the life history strategy of humans.

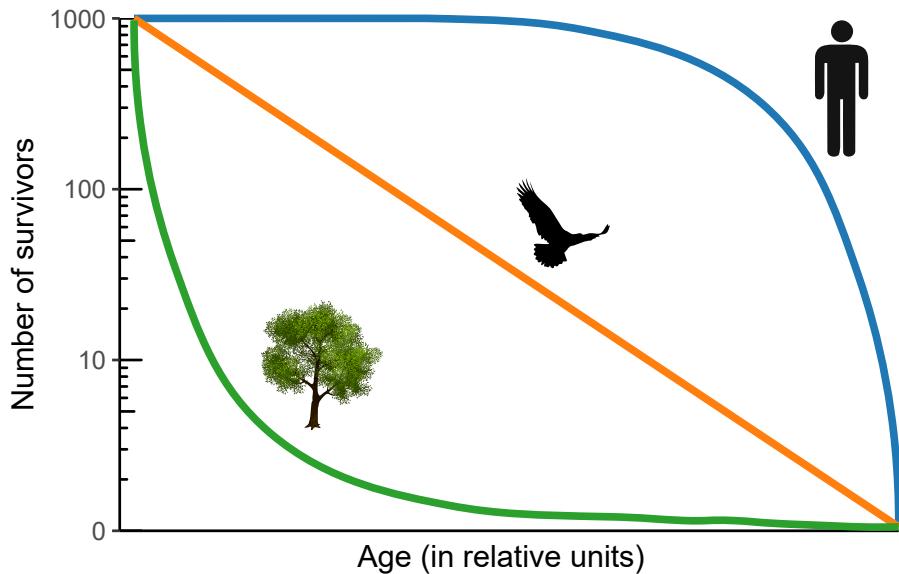


Figure 1.1: Idealized examples of Types I, II, and III survivorship curves overlaid with example organisms. Type I survivorship is characterized by high probability of survival early in life, followed by a rapid decline as individuals reach older age. Type II survivorship displays roughly constant mortality throughout the lifespan of the organism, and Type III exhibits high mortality among young offspring.

Additionally, survey data collected by state and federal agencies provide valuable information about natural population. We can use ancillary data about individuals within a population to examine how different forces influence demographics within a population. Golden Eagles are federally protected in the United States, and Fish & Wildlife collects detailed information from tagged individuals (Fig. 1.2).

We will use this data to test hypotheses addressing the following questions:

1. Do humans and eagles display different life history strategies?
2. Does gender affect survivorship in human populations?
 - And if so, how?
3. Does human impact affect survivorship in eagle populations?
 - And if so, how?

Please form testable null hypotheses to address question number 1 and **either** question 2 or 3 (pick one). If you want, you may also substitute question 2 or 3 to address a hypothesis using the extra data we generated from the gravestones (height of gravestones as a proxy of material wealth).

To evaluate your hypotheses, you will...



Figure 1.2: Migratory Golden eagle in Denali National Park and Preserve. Mating pairs return each year to northern nesting territory in the spring, and most new fledglings leave the nest by mid-August. During winter their range extends from southern Canada to south of the Rocky Mountains(Brown et al., 2017).

1. Statistically address differences in survivorship between groups using a **t-test**, and display that information using a **bar-graph**
2. Unpack question 1 by **computing** and **displaying survivorship** (no statistical test needed for this part).

1.3 Data analysis

1. Calculate the age at death of every individuals in both data sets
2. If necessary, use Excel to sort (Google it) the data based on your column of interest (i.e. gender).
 - Sorting the data easily splits the population into groups that you can then run the calculations (below) on. If you are doing the entire population, you will not need to split the population, but for within-population questions this step will come in handy. Keep in mind that every time you split the data based on a categorical variable, you will normalize to a hypothetical population of 1000 for the survivorship plots below.
3. Calculate mean age at death, as well as a measure of variation around that mean for use in the **bar-graphs**.
 - The **bar-graph** is just a visual representation of the data. You will perform a **t-test** on this data and report the results to determine if the population means are actually different.
4. Create a survivorship table

- Create “bins” of individuals
 - 0 to 1, 1 to 2, 2 to 3, etc... for Golden Eagles
 - 0-9, 10-19, 20-29, etc... for humans
 - Calculate the number of individuals surviving to that age class (the ‘countif’ function in Excel will come in handy here). Keep in mind that for the first group you will want to count **all** of the observations in the data set, so your condition will be ‘ $>=0$ ’.
 - Normalize survivors to a hypothetical population of 1000
 - This will make comparisons possible between unequal sample – so if you have 1250 observations in the data set, your normalized number for the first age class will be $1250/1250 = 1.0$, which is a proportion you can multiply by 1000. For the second age class (if you have some mortality), it might be $975/1250 = 0.78$, which you can then multiply by 1000 which equals 780.
5. Plot the number of survivors (y-axis values) against age class (x-axis values) to construct the survivorship curves. You may plot the data from the survivorship table either as normalized survivors, or on a logarithmic x-axis (typically how this data is displayed, as in Fig. 1.1).

The procedure above will ultimately yield survivorship (number of surviving individuals at a particular age class), which you may plot to visually explore differences between groups of interest to you.

1.4 Lab Report Specifics

Below are some specific guidelines for this lab report, but you should also utilize the general grading rubric in the Syllabus!

- **Participation** (1 pts)
- **Introduction** (3 pts)
 - General information about population ecology / life history strategies
 - How are survivorship curves used in population ecology?
 - Build up rationale to lead into your objectives/hypotheses statements.
- **Methods** (3 pts)
 - Explanation of data collection and analysis
- **Results** (6 pts)
 - Summary statistics in the text
 - Bar-plots and associated t-tests for each question
 - Survivorship curves for each question
- **Discussion** (3 pts)
 - Explain your results in light of your hypotheses
 - What are some plausible explanations for differences (or lack thereof) between groups?
 - Place your results in an evolutionary context.

Chapter 2

Physiological Ecology

2.1 Background information

In the presence of light, photosynthetic organisms can utilize light and carbon dioxide (CO_2) to make sugars - the process of photosynthesis. The sugars made are used by these organisms (and organisms that eat them) as a source of energy. A by-product of the photosynthetic process is the liberation of oxygen (O_2).

At the same time, these organisms are consuming oxygen via respiration. Although respiration and photosynthesis both take place in the light, in the dark only respiration occurs (since photosynthesis is a light-dependent process). Though it is impossible to directly measure gross photosynthesis (or the total amount of O_2 produced (Wohlfahrt and Gu, 2015), we *can* measure respiration (R) as the **rate of O_2 decrease** in the dark, and the **rate of oxygen increase** in the presence of light as a measure of net photosynthesis (P_{net}). Combining these direct measurements, we can estimate gross photosynthesis (P_{gross}).

$$P_{\text{net}} = P_{\text{gross}} - R \quad (2.1)$$

Using equation (2.1), we can use the directly measured terms in **blue**, and may use them to calculate **P_{gross}** .

Organisms capable of photosynthesis span an incredible range of phylogeny, from *unicellular algae* to *vascular plants* (Fig. 2.1). While every algae cell is photosynthetic, *aquatic macrophytes* (i.e. vascular plants adapted to live in aquatic ecosystems) have large amounts of specialized tissue devoted to the transportation of resources and structural support. These two organisms are in competition for very similar resources (such as sunlight and dissolved nutrients) - how do their morphological adaptations convey a competitive advantage?

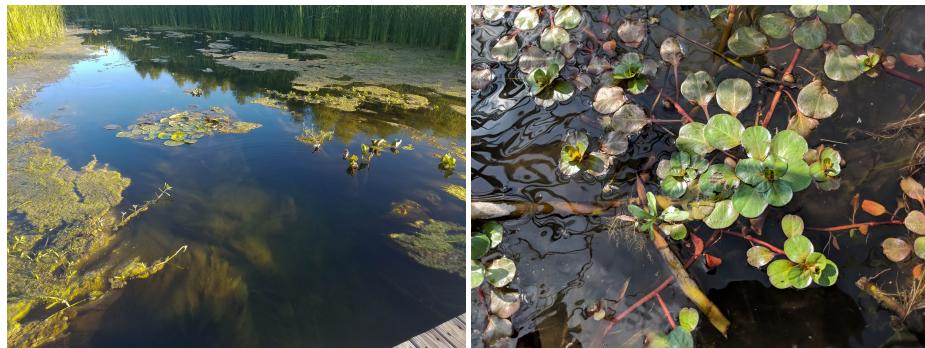


Figure 2.1: Aquatic algae (left pane, in both meta- and periphyton communities) and aquatic macrophytes (right pane) are photosynthetic organisms that evolved in aquatic ecosystems.

2.2 Objectives

You will form hypotheses to test questions about photosynthesis in 2 aquatic organisms - algae and a common aquatic macrophyte.

1. Which organism has the highest rate of *biomass specific* gross photosynthesis?
2. Which organism has the highest rate of *biomass-specific* respiration?
3. Which organism has the highest rate of net primary production (NPP) per day?

2.3 Materials & methods

You will be using a common **oxygen-change method** to determine rates of photosynthesis and respiration. Biological oxygen demand (BOD) bottles use a stopper that prevents gas exchange, which provides a means of isolating processes happening inside the bottle from the outside environment.

2.3.1 Materials

- 10 L photosynthesis solution¹
(40% air saturation²)
- Samples of algae and macrophytes
- 330 mL BOD bottles
- Dissolved O₂ meter (DO Meter)
- Light source (> 400 E m⁻²s⁻¹)
- Aluminum foil
- Stir bars / stir plate
- Sieves (fine mesh)
- Forceps
- Drying boats (aluminum)
- Analytical balance
(capable of 0.001 g)
- Drying oven

Oxygen production varies with the intensity of light, but reaches saturation as light intensity increases (Fig. 2.2). Since different organisms display different light-response curves, we need to saturate their photosystems with high light levels to account for a potential confounding variable in our experiment.

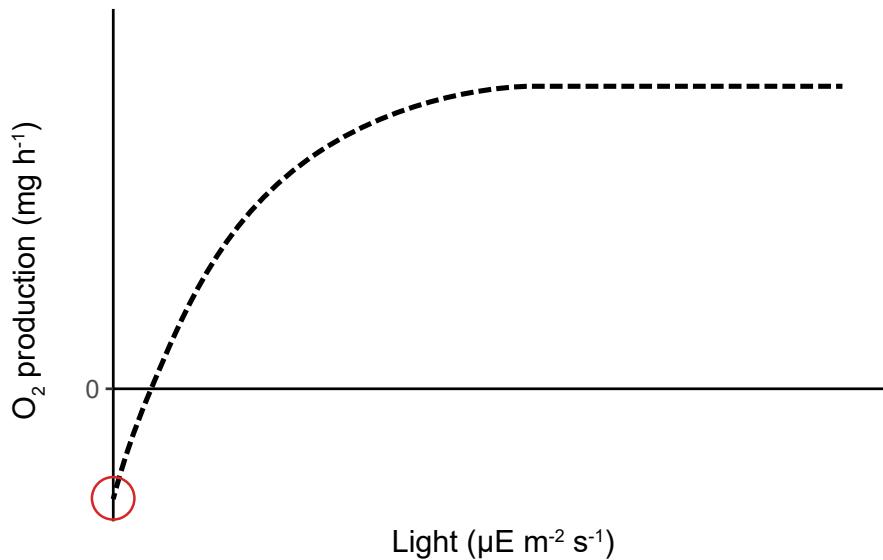


Figure 2.2: A photosynthesis light-response curve illustrates that as light intensity increases, dissolved oxygen (DO) production eventually becomes saturated. In the dark, photosynthesis shuts off, and respiration causes the rate of DO production to fall below 0 (red circle on the y-axis).

¹10 L DI Water, 917 mg CaCl₂, 960 mg MgSO₄, 584 mg NaHCO₃, 154 mg KHCO₃

²Aerate with N₂ gas for 10 minutes

2.3.2 Methods

1. Each group will be responsible for **one** of the two species. Fill 9 BOD bottles with photosynthesis solution (fill to brim - the idea with BOD bottles is for the glass stopper to push any excess water out of the seal the stopper creates).
2. Carefully transfer a representative sample of your organism into 8 of the BOD bottles. Add a small stir bar to each bottle, and place the glass stopper and plastic cap on the bottle to seal. Use the DO probe to measure oxygen concentration in the remaining bottle (your control bottle).
3. You will have 4 replicates for the dark treatment, and 4 for the light. Wrap the dark treatment bottles in aluminum foil, and place the light treatment bottles under the light source. Record the intial times for these samples.
4. While you wait (at least 1.5 hours)...
 - Observe samples of these organisms under a dissecting/compound microscope and note differences in morphology. Note differences in the proportion of support tissues (i.e. stems) vs. photosynthetic tissues for each organism.
5. After at least 1.5 hours, measure DO concentrations in the light bottles. Make sure to record the end time each time you take a DO measurement.
6. After 2 hours, measure the DO concentrations in the dark bottles. Make sure to record the end time each time you take a DO measurement.
7. Carefully empty the BOD bottle into a fine-mesh sieve to separate the sample from the photosynthesis solution. Collect/scrape the sample into a labeled aluminum drying tin, and place tins into a drying oven for 24 hrs at 105°C.

2.4 Data analysis

You can directly determine P_{net} (from the light treatment bottles) and R (from the dark treatment bottles) by calculating the change (Δ) in dissolved oxygen (DO) concentrations:

$$\Delta DO = DO_{final} - DO_{initial} \quad (2.2)$$

You also recorded the elapsed incubation time(Δh), the volume of the BOD bottles (0.330 L), and the mass of the sample (in dry weight, g). Using equation (2.1), after getting ΔDO normalized to volume (L) and dry weight (g), you can then calculate P_{gross} , or the total oxygen produced by photosynthesis per unit biomass.

For the 1st, and 2nd questions, a two-sample t-test comparing the rates of each process (P_{gross} and R) will tell you if there are significant differences between each organism. Bar-graphs (with error-bars display the standard error of the mean) are a good way of displaying this data visually.

The 3rd question requires you to construct a simple **model**. A model is a way to represent a natural process using mathematics. Some models are simple (like the one you will construct), and some are incredibly complex. What assumptions can you make to tackle question 3? If we assume that these organisms respire for 24 hours a day, and only photosynthesize when the sun is out (10 hours a day), we can use these values as a foundation for our model (Fig. 2.3). While this makes the maths significantly easier, what are the limitations of this assumption?

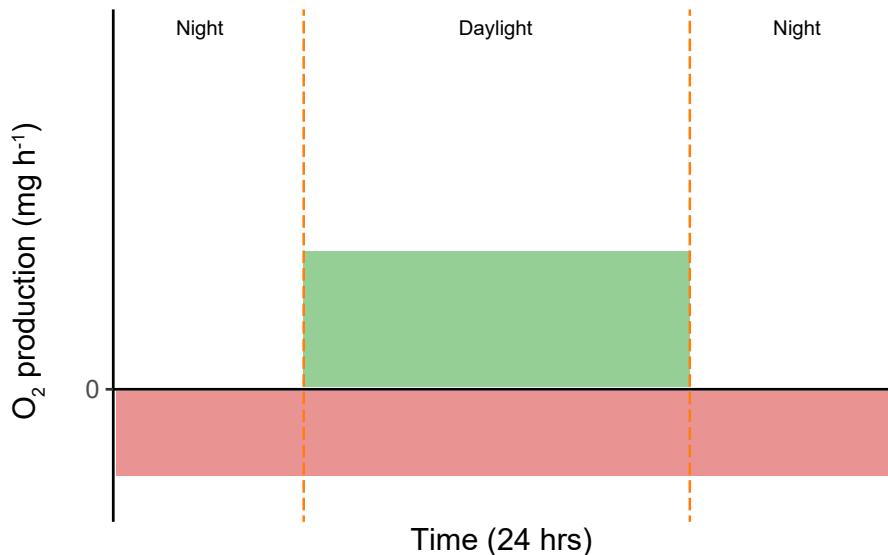


Figure 2.3: A photosynthesis light-response curve illustrates that as light intensity increases, dissolved oxygen (DO) production eventually becomes saturated. In the dark, photosynthesis shuts off, and respiration causes the rate of DO production to fall below 0 (red circle on the y-axis).

There are no associated statistical tests for question 3, since you should calculate daily values using mean P_{gross} and mean R (no replicate values for this question). You can present the results of your model in the text of your results section.

2.5 Lab report specifics

1. Introduction
 - Importance of photosynthesis
 - Morphological adaptations of aquatic photosynthesizers
 - Objectives
 - Hypotheses
2. Methods
 - Oxygen change method (light/dark treatments)
 - Experimental design
 - Calculations / statistics / model explanation
3. Results
 - Graphs/statistics for questions 1 and 2
 - Results for question 3
4. Discussion
 - Hypotheses rejected/supported
 - Provide a coherent explanation for the patterns you see in the photosynthesis and respiration data (use your observations of morphology)

2.5. LAB REPORT SPECIFICS

BOD No.	Organism	Treatment	Initial time	Initial DO (mg/L)	Final time	Final DO (mg/L)	Dish ID	Weight (g)
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Control						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Control						

BOD No.	Organism	Treatment	Elapsed time (h)	Delta DO (mg/L)	Delta DO (mg)	Net Rate O ₂ (mg/(g*h))	Rate (mg/(g*h))	Daily
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Light						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Dark						
	Algae	Control						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Light						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Dark						
	Macrophyte	Control						

Chapter 3

Biodiversity & ecosystem management

3.1 Background information

Community ecology depends directly on our ability to quantify the various species that compose the community or a component of the community (such as the plants present). Quantification of community composition is essential for understanding changes through time or impacts of management actions. This week we will quantify the community composition of wetland plants at the Lake Waco Wetlands (LWWs).

The LWWs has historically been strongly dominated by *Typha* (cattail). Although native to Texas, cattails are very agressive and frequently dominant wetlands to the exclusion of other species. To counter this dominance tendency, managers have tried to increase the diversity of the plant community in some areas of the LWWs by planting other species [especially *Schenoplectus* (bulrush) and *Pontederia* (pickerelweed)], or by hand-harvesting cattail out of some areas in the hopes that other species will colonize the open areas (Fig. 3.1).

3.2 Objectives

You will collect vegetation data from two zones in the LWWs which have different management histories. One area in Cell 1 adjacent to the floating boardwalk is a high visitation area where frequent management has taken place. In contrast, Cell 2 has had virtually no management. Five transects will be made originating from the boardwalk (cell 1) and from the levee (cell 2). Data about community composition will be recorded from 5 quadrats (area of 1 m²) along each transect.

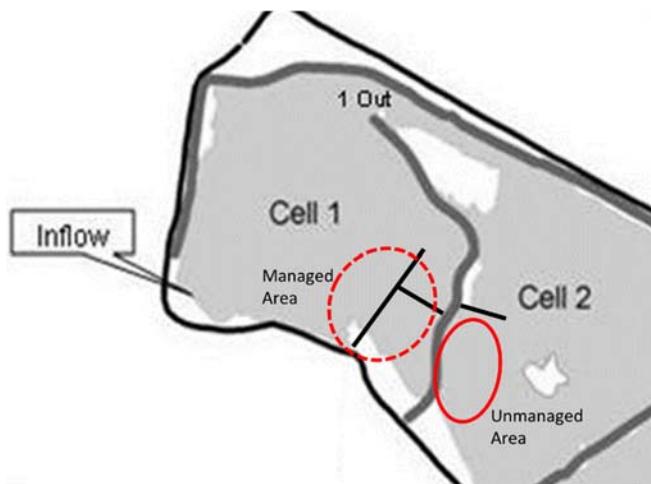


Figure 3.1: Map showing cells 1 and 2 of the Lake Waco Wetlands (LWWs). The boardwalk in cell 1 has had frequent management for several years (dotted red circle), while cell 2 has had no management (solid red circle).

Using the data generated and appropriate statistical analyses (contingency table or t-test), address the following questions:

1. Is management activity influencing the **abundance** of cattail?
 - A 2x2 contingency table is appropriate for this question.
2. Is management activity influencing the **dominance** of cattail?
 - A 2x2 contingency table is appropriate for this question.
3. Is management activity influencing **species richness**?
 - Could be addressed using a 2x2 contingency table or a t-test.
4. Does cattail dominance influence **species richness**?
 - Could be addressed using a 2x2 contingency table or a t-test. For this question, the grouping variable is *cattail dominance*, so you should use data from both cells!

3.3 Lab report specifics

1. Introduction
 - Why is biodiversity important?
 - Why sample vegetation?
 - Objectives
 - Hypotheses
2. Methods
 - Experimental design
 - Review how data was collected
 - Calculations / statistics
3. Results
 - Question 1 (text **AND** graph/table)
 - Question 2 (text **AND** graph/table)
 - Question 3 (text **AND** graph/table)
 - Question 4 (text **AND** graph/table)
4. Discussion
 - Hypotheses rejected/supported
 - Provide a coherent explanation/interpretation of your results

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