# Episode 1 - It all starts - v1.mp3

**Inspector John Pratt:** Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's podcast, This is Tas Police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania. And before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work, and pay our respects to elders, past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Welcome back to season two of This is Tas Police. In this season of the podcast, we're going to follow our newest recruits as they complete their training at the Tasmania Police Academy. We'll ask what motivated them to join the service, and we'll find out how they're feeling as they progress through the course. We'll also talk to some of the trainers and course directors to get an insider's perspective and offer some advice to our listeners who might be interested in a career with Tas Police.

**Inspector John Pratt:** It's no secret becoming a Tasmania police officer requires dedication and commitment. The 28 week course run at the Tasmania Police Academy in Rokeby and at our satellite campus in Launceston, includes a combination of theory and practical training to ensure our recruits gain the skills they need to be a professional and effective police officer. In this episode, we'll be talking to a few of our newest recruits trainee constables Emma Thompson, Madison Dove and Sean Walters. We'll also hear from one of our course director, Sergeant Dave Walkley. Thanks for joining us all today. Let's get into it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Before we get started, I'd like to hear a bit about our recruits. Emma, can you tell me a bit about yourself, your background, and what made you make the decision to join Tas police?

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Thanks, Inspector. So myself, Emma, 36 years of age. I am a mum, a wife. I've got two beautiful young children. My background is actually 15 years in the finance industry. I worked for one of the big four organisations, the most recent role being in a project role for scams and fraud. I always wanted to join the Tas Police, as most of my colleagues I think are in the same boat. I actually applied 15 years ago and was unsuccessful at the time, given life experience or lack thereof. And I think coming back, I'm I'm so grateful I've gone and done that. So for me, it was about wanting to work with the community and in particular career diversity.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And how's it going, bearing in mind you do have a young family?

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Yeah, look, it's certainly had its challenges. But for me, I think it's been organisation. That's the biggest thing I've had to do, it's I guess a non-negotiable for me, it's I have to organise my outside life for the two children to make sure that they, you know, get to school on time. Husband's got all the support he needs and for me to be able to, I guess, study and do what I need to do to be most successful, I can be down here.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So with a background in fraud and finance, does that mean you're interested in a career with CIB looking into frauds?

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Never say never. I think that's certainly on my list. One thing I have learnt since being down here, though, is that there are just so many doors and opportunities. I think I've quite a few topics of interest so far, and I'm only nearly end of five weeks in, so. But it is definitely on the list of the investigative side of things. I think I'm pretty excited for.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So as you say, only five weeks in, but so far no regrets about the decision you've made.

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Absolutely not. I think an end of day one. I knew I'd made the right decision, to be honest with you, so I think it was a day one, I guess everyone probably that pinch moment where you're like, you know what? I'm actually doing this and doing something that I've always wanted to do. So yeah, 100%. Yeah. No regrets.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thanks, Emma. Madison, what about you? What was your driving force behind making this move?

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** So I did the CDP program, um, the career development program last year in year 12. So I'm 18 years old. And that drove me to want to pursue this career. I've always wanted to do it. I've just as soon as I pretty much came out of the womb. I've always wanted to be a cop and it's just interested me. I wanted to be a forensic scientist for a long time, but then wanted to merge more in towards the frontline policing duties. So once I got told I could do the career development program, I was over the moon. I thought it was the best thing ever. I came here in July last year and I did not want to leave. I had a feedback session at the end and they said, oh, how do you think you went? I said, I think it went pretty well, but I don't want to go anywhere. Like I loved learning about the different doors, like Emma said, that you can go down in the one career. There's just jobs under the sun. There's heaps that you can do. And for me, being so young, I have been told, or do you think you can cope with it? And I think I'm ready for the challenge. And it's been a challenge so far for the first five weeks. But it's been incredible, really driven me to want to get through these last the well, not halfway yet, but once we get going to push through to then continue my career out in the big world.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So the career development program is a one week program for people that are just about to leave college, and it gives a very good snapshot as to what it's like to join Tasmania Police and train to be a police officer. Do you think that CDP course gave you the necessary skills and a really good insight?

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Oh yeah. Like leading into the interviewing process and things like that. You were basically exposed to that all in that one week, and it just gave you an insight into what a police officer does, their duties, their roles, how they are high visibility in the community, all the different jobs within the one career. It just really set you up to determine whether or not you think you're ready for the job, as well as when the police think you are ready to step into this new career.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So for people that are in grade 12, so thinking about a career with Tasmania Police, you'd recommend it as something to do if they had the opportunity.

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Oh, 100%. Like even if it's just slightly in the back of your head, I'd say get in there, put your application in to do it through your school, wherever you go to college, because it's not everyone gets to do it. So it's just an eye opener into the real world of everything. So yeah, 100% recommend it to anyone to do it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thanks, Madison. Sean, what about yourself? Can you tell us a bit about your background and what's led up to you joining Tasmania Police?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Yeah, thanks, Inspector. I'm Sean, I'm 30. I'm from Hobart. My working background is mostly military. I spent eight years in the Navy. Since leaving the Navy, I've had a few jobs since then. I was really proud of my public service and serving my country. So I've decided to join Tas Police so I can continue that service in Tas Police. They have a lot of opportunities here, a lot of avenues we can go down. So, there are lots of jobs within the job, and that definitely interests me.

**Inspector John Pratt:** As you've explained to us, you have a background in the Navy and the ADF, and then since leaving that you've had a number of other jobs. Could you just tell us what's actually led up to you joining the recruit course that you're on at the moment?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Thanks, Inspector. During my recruiting process, I was given the opportunity to join the radio room in Hobart for six months. I worked up there to give me further experience into the job. I was very lucky to be working with some very experienced officers who were a wealth of knowledge and insight. Got to use the police radio systems, police computer systems and I did get to see how the operation was run from there, which gave me a lot of valuable insight to the job.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So sending people to radio dispatch services, or RDS as it's known, is one of the avenues that we have available to us, and it does give people a greater insight, provides more experience, and it also, in some situations enables us to conduct further assessments on applicants for Tasmania Police. Do you think it's helped you so far? Given you more experience and insight?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. It's given me a really great insight into what police attend to day to day. I came into it having an idea of what it looked like, but it was a real eye opener, getting to see just the broad range of jobs that police do attend to on a daily basis.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And I would imagine just sort of getting to know a little bit about the culture. Acronyms that are used and processes and procedures are a great advantage.

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Madison, you told us a bit about the CDP program that you undertook prior to joining Tasmania Police. Can you tell us about any other processes or things that you did to help prior to joining?

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Yes. So podcast, the podcast has been really helpful for me, and I'm from the North West Coast. So the day I got told about my interview, I planned to listen to the podcast from the entirety of my drive down from Ulverstone all the way down to Hobart, and that taught me a lot about what to prepare for regarding the interview, what police officers are like, their roles, the diversity in the job, all of that was provided within the podcast, and they were amazing to listen to, and it inspired me to even want to be on it one day, which now I am. So it just formed some more excitement and reassurance leading into the interviewing process about what the job is all about.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thanks, Madison. Just goes to show dreams do come true.

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Yes, exactly right.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Starting a new career is a big step, so I would imagine there have been a lot of different emotions for you all in the lead up to joining us here at the Academy. Sean, how did you feel in the weeks before your induction?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Yeah, and the weeks before my induction, I was really keen to just get straight into it. As I mentioned before, I was up in the radio room. Everyone was getting me excited to go, you know, giving me lots of, uh, lots of helpful advice going into the academy. I'm very excited just to get into it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Did you have much of a break between DDS and starting at the Academy?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** I had 2 to 3 days off.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So straight into it, then.

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Straight into it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Madison, how about yourself? What was your lead up like? Nervous. Excited.

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** I was over the moon. I since the CDP in July, pretty much. That's when my process started with getting through to the, um, psych testing and then the interview stage. So I was sitting on the fence on whether or not I'd obviously hoped to get in. And so once it got to October and I did my fitness test and got confirmed, I was just so keen to get up and running with the program and the course and to meet my course members. So I was full of excitement. Um, also a bit nervous being 18 and stepping into such a full on career, but it helped heaps. Speaking to previous and current police officers prior to attending the academy. Um, they gave me a wealth of knowledge into what to expect in my first few weeks here, what to bring down. The simple things like that really helped.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thanks, Madison. Emma, how about yourself? Having had a career before, how was your lead up? Excited. Nervous?

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Yeah, all of the above. Um, Sean had three days. I was lucky enough to have three months prior to coming into this role. So for me, it was all about that, I guess. A last minute holiday. We did a bit of traveling with the family up the east coast of Australia. As soon as I came back, though, it was very much into work mode I think naturally very nervous, but more I think for me it was the excitement. So, you know, I've actually done this and I'm doing it. So yeah, it was very much a countdown for the family and I for how many days or weeks, then days, and then all of a sudden, yeah, we were here.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And to date, has it been what you expected.

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Yeah, definitely. So um, very lucky that I know some people in the job, and that's probably something I'd highly recommend to any potential people either thinking about the job or going through the application process. Very, very lucky to have family member in the force as well as some close friends. So yeah, catching up for coffees to I guess ensure that one, I kind of knew what the role was actually all about, you know, what are some of, I guess, the challenges that they have faced throughout their career. And for me, just to really, I guess, make sure that, you know, this is what I want to do. And yeah, I'm sitting here today and yeah, like I said before, 100% do not regret a thing.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thanks, Emma. So the three of you have been at the academy now for about five weeks. So I certainly hope that you've started to develop relationships with your peers and settle into the routine. Given the nature of the work you're embarking on and the training required camaraderie within the group is very important. Emma, how has the group bonded and what have been the highlights or your favourite moments to date?

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** Yeah, definitely. I think for me we're a very mixed bunch in the way of age that I love. So Maddie is probably one of the youngest in the crew. So she is so 18. And then we've got Adrian at the other end of the spectrum. He won't mind me saying 48 years of age, so quite a broad range, but with that comes, I guess, a wealth of experience, I guess. Maddie, you know, you bring lots of things from school that has certainly helped me personally and others. And also, you know, myself 36. I'm kind of there in the middle thereabouts. But we've really bonded extremely well. I think a highlight for me, first one would probably be the team bonding day in week one. That was on the Thursday where we did a whole heap of activities, and I feel like that, for me was a pivotal moment where we really got to know each other personally. And at that moment, again, you kind of realise that, hey, I'm going to know these people for a very, very long time and hopefully make some really good friendships out of it. Other highlight was catching up with the Launceston. So at the end of week one the Launceston group went back up north, but I have kept in touch with a few of those guys actually. A couple, well one study session in particular where we jumped on a phone call and just did a face to face. And yeah, that's probably been a highlight to to try and keep that connection going with those guys.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Excellent. Madison. As it's been stated, you're the youngest one in the group. How has it gone for you integrating into the larger group of people? Any highlights for you.

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Yep, so I'm the I'm the second youngest. We have one other girl who's a couple of days younger than me. So we're December baby. So we're the the youngest of the group. But it's been amazing. Like, I really enjoy opening up who I have connections with. So having some of you older guys not saying you're old or anything, but having older wisdom that someone at 18 hasn't experienced yet has been really helpful to get us through these first five weeks. Just reaching out and making connections in not just your own little groups, but to to make it feel like a family because you are together for like seven months is it? Seven months. So you want to build a relationship with everyone just because you all want to have each other's backs. So that's a key thing about the job that we're learning, is that you all can be vulnerable with each other, but just know that someone has your back at the end of the day, when the days get tough, or when there are successes that you want to share.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Thank you very much, Sean. Firstly, can you tell us how you've settled into the course and then tell us what an average day at the Academy looks like?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Thanks, Inspector. So I think I've settled in quite well. It was a bit of an adjustment, getting used to the amount of study. My old career in the Navy. I was on the tools mostly, so I didn't do much paperwork then. So it's a bit of a change now, but the rest of the group is adjusting well. We're leaning on each other's strengths, especially some of those that have been fresh out of school. It's good to, uh, it's good to lean on them for a bit of advice there as well. So an average day at the Academy, we start with an early morning PT. Depending on the day it can be quite early. 5.25 start. So there we'll be doing either strength or cardio based workout for about an hour, and then the times ours until about 830, until we start instruction. So we can either go and do PT ourselves, some extra or some sport, or have breakfast here at the academy, which is provided. After 8.30 so we'll have a one class that will run us up until lunchtime. We have have lunch here provided by the Academy, and then in the afternoon we have two classes. And then usually our finish time is roughly about 4:00 pm.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And so far, highlights for you.

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Highlights for me, definitely the morning PTs. I think they're great for team building. I think they're great. You know, getting grouped up in different pairs. You're working with someone else each day and everyone pushes each other. I think it's really valuable.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And no issues now that the mornings are starting to get slightly darker.

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** No, not at all. Not at all, I like it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** It's no surprise that becoming a police officer requires dedication and commitment. The training is not only rigorous and disciplined, but it's physically and mentally demanding. What might be a surprise, though, is how diverse the program is. The 28 week course includes not only theory, but also a lot of practical training to ensure recruits have the skills needed to be a professional and effective police officer. I'd like to dig a little bit deeper into the elements of the training program now, starting with what are you most looking forward to learning as the course progresses? Emma, let's start with you.

**Trainee Constable Emma Thompson:** For me, I think it's probably the operational skills, the classroom that's been a change being back in the classroom Monday to Friday. I think I haven't been in school for quite a few years now, but in saying that, I do still enjoy it, but for me very much the the op skills in getting out and, you know, really understanding and learning how to protect ourselves, keep ourselves safe, our colleagues safe and the community.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Sean, are there any components that you're looking forward to?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Most definitely the driver training. I'm looking forward to the most.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Any particular reason for that? Cars an interest for you?

**Trainee Constable Sean Walters:** Yeah, yeah, cars, cars are interest for me. Yeah. No, I would just I'm really looking forward to it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And Madison, there's a lot of theory involved, as you've no doubt already aware and experienced through the CDP. What theoretical component are you looking forward to the most?

**Trainee Constable Madison Dove:** Oh, that's a good question. Well, we've started victimology. We started that yesterday, and I have been very intrigued by that. And also learning about Drug Investigation Unit, that's been something that has sparked my interest. So those two are definitely up there. But learning just when we're on the first day we got there, we got shown all our modules and just what we're. Going to learn in these next seven months is on a different level, like incredible. Coming out from school, the workloads pretty much the same, I'm finding. But yeah, the different modules are just so interesting. And learning what police officers actually do and investigate is something that I'm really looking forward to.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Emma, Madison and Sean, thanks very much for your time today. It's been great to get to know you a little bit more, and I certainly look forward to seeing how you go throughout the rest of the course. Good luck with it.

**All Trainees:** Thank you. Thanks. Thanks, Inspector.

**Inspector John Pratt:** We're now going to switch focus and talk to one of our course directors, Sergeant Dave Walkley, and hear a bit more about the course, the Academy and what the course directors expect from recruits as they progress through the training. Dave, can you tell me a bit about your background with Tas police and what your role is here at the Academy?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Yes. Thanks, Inspector. I'm Sergeant Dave Walkley. I've been a member of Tasmania Police now for 25 years. After joining Tasmania Police, I've worked predominantly in frontline uniform policing from the south of the state, uh, East Coast and the West Coast. I got promoted to sergeant in 2012. And from there I came to the academy here about three and a half years ago. And my role here is as a course director for the courses, currently on my fourth recruit course. And within that I also instruct in some of the modules that they do, as well as some of the operational training that they do.

**Inspector John Pratt:** The 44 members, of course 3 of 2023, were inducted into the Academy just a couple of weeks ago, and we've already heard from Sean, Madison and Emma about their experience so far. Dave, can you talk to me about the program from your perspective and what your expectations are in the early stages of a recruit course?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Yeah, the program from us covers off on, as you've heard from some of the recruits, 22 modules as well as their physical training and incorporated, that is their operational training. What we expect from them is a commitment from day one. They need to come into the Academy prepared for the learning that they're about to undertake. They need to be prepared to be challenged and to accept the challenges that are going to be put forward to them. We don't want recruits that just want to stay in the background and don't want to come forward and really push themselves to be the best that they can while they're here at the academy.

**Inspector John Pratt:** When we spoke to Madison, Emma and Sean, we heard from Madison, who had undertaken the career development program as part of her school prior to joining Tas Police. And we also heard from Sean, who had done a period of time in radio dispatch services. What can you suggest to people as to how to prepare for a recruit course?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Take any opportunity you can to learn more about Tasmania Police, and learn more about the career that you're putting yourself forward to. Go online. We've got excellent information with our recruit training online and that will tell you what the expectations are here, what the expectations are for your fitness before you come in. And make sure, particularly in regards to that fitness, that you're at a standard where even on a bad day you can make those fitness standards, but it's just getting all that information that you can have available to you. And whether or not that's as a school student volunteering for the CDP program, getting into that. Calling our recruiting branch, who will be able to give you a lot more information. Talking to friends of the family, if you have those that are that are in the job already and just have as much information and knowledge moving forward to prepare you for that interview process and for the recruit course should you be successful.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And once an applicant progresses through and they are selected and then commence on a recruit training course, how disciplined do they actually have to be as a recruit?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Self discipline and self motivation is is really important as well as organisational skills. You've heard from Emma with her family how important it is to be organised. And it's not just for someone who's got a family, but anyone who's undertaking this program needs to have that level of organisation so that they can put themselves in an excellent position to study, to have time away from the police department as well, which is really important. Self discipline is a key role for us here at the Academy. We can provide all the information and we can provide all the material. But without that discipline, without that ability to be prompt, on time, and the ability to motivate yourself. That's very, very hard to keep up with the workload that we do give the recruits over that seven month period. We have people come through of varying backgrounds. We've got people straight out of school year 12, we've got university students, then we've got people who've had careers for the past 25 years and haven't studied. And each of those, need to in their own way, find ways to be disciplined, to keep up with the workload that's coming through.

**Inspector John Pratt:** When we spoke to Sean, Madison and Emma, they told us about the components of the course that they were most looking forward to. Do you have a particular component of the course that you like delivering?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** That's an interesting question because I deliver across about five different modules here at the academy, from classroom learning to operational skills, firearm skills, driver training. But I'd say the bit that I enjoy most is being a course director, and not so much in delivering the modules, but interacting and meeting the recruits. I really enjoy the first day when everyone arrives here at the academy, just seeing the the difference in between the people that are really nervous, the people that come in with a little bit more confidence, how different age groups interact with each other. So. I guess I really enjoy the course directing side of things, but if I had to say which module I enjoy most, I think it's the operational side of things as well. I think the recruits enjoy that more. I think when they actually get out of the classroom and put all their skills that they've learnt theoretically into a practical practice, I see that they enjoy that and that brings enjoyment to me as well.

**Inspector John Pratt:** As you explained to us at the start, you've conducted or been responsible for running a number of recruit training courses here at the Tasmania Police Academy. Is there a particular time where you see the most growth and achievements in the recruits as they progress through a course?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Absolutely. I think around mid course to the 15 to 20 week mark, we start introducing some scenario based training, which links together a lot of the module learnings that they've done. A lot of the different things that they've learnt in isolation now start coming together. And when they do that as a practice scenario, they gather and gain a lot of confidence knowing that they can do what they've just been taught, if that makes sense. So going from the classroom, where it's all theoretical to I can actually do this and I can operate independently as a police officer, and I know what I'm doing now. And, and you see a build in confidence and really starts to give them a drive to get to that graduation day where they can join the front line.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Dave as you are aware, we're continually reviewing and evolving our training here at the Tasmania Police Academy to cater for changes in things like legislation, practices, procedures and indeed public expectations. As part of that review and evolution, we've extended the period of time that recruits now spend in outstations during a recruit training course. What do you think the benefits are of this part of the course compared to when you were training?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Yes. So when I was training, it was 32 weeks and we only spent two weeks in field. Whereas the recruits from my course will do a six week in field period. And for me, I personally learn really well by observing others and observing practices in real life and in real life scenarios. And I believe that having that extended period will give all the recruits the opportunity to not only see how things are done in a real world scenario, but get the opportunity to practice doing those in a real world scenario, which will cement their academic learnings that they've done here at the Academy. And I believe moving forward, when they graduate, having that experience will mean that they're further developed in their career from the day they walk out of the door at the academy.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So as you mentioned, you did 32 weeks training when you went through the police academy, and the course is now 28 weeks in length. Could you just tell us about a couple of the changes in training that have evolved over the years? And could you also tell us what you remember about your time at the Academy?

**Sergeant Dave Walkley:** Yeah, so I believe that the there's probably a couple key things that have changed here at the Academy since I came through 25 years ago now. And the one of them, or one of the big ones, is the introduction of the university. We've moved to a more of a higher learning model, whereby when I came through there was a lot of the how to do things, but now they're teaching the why are we doing behind the how. So there's a lot more goes into the perceptions of a police officer and your role within the community. And that leads on to more of a rounded police officer, I guess than when I came through. And the second big change that I've seen over that time is we've moved away from having to everyone stay at the Academy. We were all based at the Academy. We couldn't leave the academy, be away from the Academy past 8:00 at night. Now we've gone to a more family friendly model whereby if you live close to the academy, there's no requirement to stay at the academy. You can stay at home and live at home with your family. You don't have to be away from children. You can maintain that family support and come to the academy more in a school-based model where you come in the morning. Granted, it is early at 525 for PT and leave in the afternoon and go back home and back to your family into that supporting environment. However, if you do live on the northwest coast or away from the academy, we still have the availability to to stay here at the academy. So they're probably the two biggest changes that I've observed with the academy here. And so far as my memories, I have very fond memories of the academy. I came through quite young, and I guess the friendships I made during my time here at the academy is a big thing that still sticks with me. 25 years later, I'm still catching up with people, still talking. Develop friendships that have lasted a genuine lifetime.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Dave, thanks very much for your time today and giving us an insight into the work that you do. And also, thanks very much for all the work you do in preparing the recruits as they go through for a career with Tasmania Police.

**Inspector John Pratt:** That's it for this episode of This is Tas Palace. I hope you enjoyed the conversation. Join us next time when we catch up with our recruits again at the two month mark. To find out more about life at the Academy, stay up to date with all our episodes by subscribing on your favourite podcast app, and you can find all our previous episodes on the Tasmania Police recruitment website: recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.