

Sustainable Consumption: Exploring the Impact of “Green” Products

This assignment is required for all students taking College Composition I and Integrated College Composition I and must be submitted as one of the essays included in the final portfolio. You will be working on this assignment in class over a period of several days and will go through the process of prewriting, drafting, and revising. Please read this description carefully and be sure you understand all of the requirements.

Assignment objectives

By writing this paper, you will learn and practice how to:

- Use pre-writing strategies to develop ideas
- Revise in response to feedback on a draft
- Make decisions about how to write the essay based on the intended audience and purpose
- Analyze and respond to what other people have written on this issue
- Edit your grammar, spelling, and mechanics to meet the expectations of academic writing
- Use information from published sources to explore the issue and support your position
- Use Academic Search Premier to locate additional sources on your own
- Draw on your own experience and perceptions to discuss the issue
- Use informal citation to identify your sources
- Uphold academic integrity principles and avoid plagiarism
- Analyze and understand various points of view on the issue

Background on the topic

In 1994, the Oslo Symposium defined sustainable consumption as “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations.” More recently, particularly since the 2006 release of Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*, Americans have become increasingly aware of how their consumer habits impact the environment. As a result, “green” products, such as compact fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs, organic foods, and nontoxic cleaning products, have begun to flood the consumer market. In fact, last year’s annual Green Brands Survey predicted that consumers would spend approximately \$550 billion on environmentally friendly products and services during 2008. Many colleges and universities, including Rowan University, are major consumers of these products and are making attempts, often led by student initiatives, to engage in sustainable consumption.

At first glance, these efforts are commendable, yet critics argue that some so-called green products may not be so green after all. A number of organizations, such as TerraChoice, are

tracking the practice of “greenwashing,” the widespread use of misleading or false information about the environmental benefits of a product. Many so-called green products have hidden environmental costs, and many are produced by large corporations that are major energy users and polluters. Other critics claim that the best way consumers can help the environment is to simply consume fewer goods and less energy, rather than purchase green products. Some experts contend that the most significant contribution to sustainable consumption will occur only when we eliminate or significantly reduce the planned obsolescence built into many consumer goods. For instance, in her film *The Story of Stuff*, Annie Leonard reports that only one percent of the products we buy are in use just six months after we purchase them.

Assignment description

Reflect on the issues raised in connection with the rise of green consumption. Is this term contradictory? Can consumption be part of promoting sustainability? How should we evaluate the trade-offs between the benefits of green products and the inevitable negative impacts of consumption? Why do so many products become obsolete so quickly? Can this be avoided?

Develop and write an essay that addresses one of the following perspectives. The questions are meant to spark your thinking; your essay does not necessarily have to discuss all of them, nor are you restricted only to the questions that are suggested.

- Evaluate a particular category of green products, such as hybrid cars, nontoxic cleaning products, organic foods, biofuels, green cosmetics, or any product made from recycled materials. Develop a recommendation in favor of or against the purchase of this type of product. What are the intended environmental benefits of the product? How effective is the product, both in terms of its actual purpose and its environmental benefits? Are there any hidden costs that should be considered? Would you recommend the product to consumers who wish to be more environmentally responsible? Or would they be better off just cutting back and buying less instead?
- Analyze a product that currently has a negative environmental impact. This negative impact may involve energy costs, pollution or emissions, or disposal issues, and may be hidden or obvious. Explain why the product has this impact and what the consequences are. Then propose an environmentally friendly solution, which may be an improvement on the current product or an entirely new product. What is needed to implement the solution? How does it address the problem? Why is it a better alternative than the current product?
- Assess the effectiveness of campus green initiatives similar to Rowan University’s RU Green. Rowan University is only one of many colleges and universities across the country that has launched an initiative to make our campus more sustainable. College students are often at the forefront of these movements, urging administrators and fellow students to purchase green products and services, and to engage in environmentally friendly behavior. Decide whether efforts to make a campus “green” are worthwhile and make a difference. How aware are Rowan students about sustainability issues? Are there any active green organizations on

campus? Do students practice green consumerism? Can students affect the behavior of other consumers? Are campus initiatives worthwhile? How much impact can a university have?

This assignment can be interpreted in a variety of ways. You should begin with the required sources listed below to become informed about the issues. Through class discussions, supplementary activities, and/or additional research, your instructor will help you develop a specific focus and audience for your essay.

Source and research requirements

Your paper must include information from and refer to the following background source:

Weeks, Jennifer. "Buying Green." *CQ Researcher* 18.9 (2008): 193-216.

This source provides an extensive overview of issues relating to this topic. You can locate it through the Campbell Library website (Click on *Find/Find by Title A-Z List/CQ Researcher*, then search for "Buying Green"). This link, along with a selection of additional resources to give you ideas and information for your essay, is also posted on the First-Year Writing website (www.rowan.edu/fyw). Click on Student Resources and scroll down to the CC1/iCC1 Signature Assignment link. You are particularly encouraged to watch the 20-minute film *The Story of Stuff*. A transcript and other helpful resources are included on *The Story of Stuff* website.

In addition to this source, you must also use information from **at least one additional source that you find on your own** using the library database *Academic Search Premier*. This source should be specific to your approach to the assignment. You may also include information from other kinds of sources as appropriate, including interviews, observations, and personal experience, as well as credible web sources.

Citations and references

List or describe all sources you used in the paper at the end under the heading **References**. Citation within the paper must be **informal**, using signal phrases and including selected information identifying the source within the sentence. Do not use formal parenthetical citations.

Length and due date

This essay must be at least three typed double-spaced pages in length (about 750 words). Your instructor will provide you with the due dates for drafts and revisions.

Academic integrity

As with all essays you write for this class, you are expected to do your own work. Sharing your essay with or copying your essay from another student is a Level 3 violation of the University's Academic Integrity Policy and will result in serious academic and disciplinary penalties as determined by the Academic Integrity Review Board.