

The following are general comments about the structure and contents of an academic essay written for university –they are not prescriptive and intended as an educational guide only.

Assignment 1: Essay | Date of assignment

**Q: Discuss the idea that 'overconsumption in the modern world is a serious threat to true sustainability'.**

It can be said that a growing trend of overconsumption, particularly in Western industrialised nations is rising considerably. This phenomena extends to a wide range of goods and products which at one time were built to be repaired and reused, but now deemed too expensive to do so, are simply tossed aside to make way for a brand new version of themselves. Also, it can be said that in these same developed nations especially, individuals consume and purchase far too many products, which are all too quickly consumed and not re-used, repaired nor recycled and after their usefulness has passed, are simply discarded or sent to landfill refuse sites. The overconsumption of goods and products therefore is seen as one of many common problems arising in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and will continue to be ever more problematic until action is taken. As populations rise and become more affluent and developed, the consumption of goods and natural resources generally tend to grow exponentially and in many cases unsustainably leading to serious consequences. This essay will therefore discuss some of the main reasons for why overconsumption has become a worrying issue and a detrimental trend in the modern world. Also, possible strategies in which to reduce this growing epidemic in the future will be outlined and explored.

The reasons for overconsumption in modern developed societies could be said to be somewhat complex and not only linked to many countries' greater affluence but also to satisfy individuals' personal needs. Bourdieu (1984) states that in modern society, consumer patterns and buying behaviour represent an individual's way of expressing the particular group to which they identify with in society. However, it could be stated that the main reasons for this increasing trend tend to be linked to industrially developed and developing societies of nations generally becoming more affluent; as well as the rise of modern machinery which can produce goods cheaper and more efficiently than ever before. A further factor could also be outlined in that a globalised economy is helping to buy and exchange goods on an immense international scale; which is further enhanced through global internet trading and increased economies of scale in modern manufacturing. Consequently, it can be deduced that it is mainly these phenomena which are driving the over consumption

**Comment [FoB1]:** ① Good idea to have a header –with the assignment title and date at the top. Also a header with your name and student I.D at the bottom, along with the page number.

**Comment [FoB2]:** There is no need to write the question at the top of your assignment. This is for information only- Your introduction will paraphrase the question –so that the reader understands.

**Comment [FoB3]:** The essay starts by **setting the scene/background** with information to orientate the reader as to the topic

**Comment [FoB4]:** The introduction is also the perfect place to **restate the question**, so that the reader knows what it is, you'll be discussing.

**Comment [FoB5]:** Here the **'thesis statement'** or the writer's 'main point of view' is outlined

**Comment [FoB6]:** Towards the end of the introduction, the main points of what the essay will discuss are pointed out, making it clear to the reader what the points are going to be discussed.

**Comment [FoB7]:** The paragraph starts with a **topic sentence**- which is the 'main point' of what the paragraph will discuss/argue

**Comment [FoB8]:** Paraphrased reference here –supporting the writer's ideas.

**Comment [FoB9]:** The paragraph subsequently builds up with supporting points/arguments throughout the body of the paragraph.

① It's a good idea to add your name and student ID# to the bottom of your page for identification purposes.

of goods in modern day society. Pape et al. (2011, p. 26) state that 'overconsumption in industrialised countries still presents major challenges to achieving sustainable development goals' and it is vital that governments begin to recognise this. The authors go on to state that increased household consumption in these nations has been identified as a key contributing factor to global problems...such as climate change, depletion of energy resources and biodiversity loss' (Pape et al. 2011, p. 27). It should also be stated that this practice of overconsumption cannot be sustained into the long term future and that the consumption of natural resources and fossil fuels for manufacturing at this present rate cannot continue long term either. It is clear then that action and 'mindfulness' regarding this trend of rapid consumption needs to be undertaken; as well as ensuring that emerging developing countries and the increasing middle classes which inhabit them do not also follow similar unsustainable consumer practices that western countries display.

**Comment [FoB10]:** Here a direct quote is used from an external source. As it is a 'direct quote', the reference must also show a page number. Because there are more than 3 authors we abbreviate all but the first to 'et al.'

**Comment [FoB11]:** Again the writer is using a direct quote here so a page number is also given.

**Comment [FoB12]:** The paragraph ends with a 'concluding sentence' which is trying to summarise the main points raised in the paragraph. It also 'rounds' the paragraph off nicely.

There are several ways that society at large could attempt to reduce individuals' consumption of too many products. Firstly perhaps, the importance of developing 'behavioural change' along with a possible return to the previous generations' days of fixing and repairing faulty or damaged goods would be one way of reducing the amount of electrical goods (so called e-waste) that are often discarded (Gilleard & Higgs 2009; Pape et al. 2011). Further, to increase and actively promote full recycling (as well as the government legislation) to endorse it within the home/organisation; so as to more effectively reduce paper and energy misuse would be of immense added benefit. Schafer, Jaeger-Erben and dos Santos (2011) and SERI (2009) both state that society needs to understand the dangers of producing and over utilising too many precious resources in the needless overproduction of goods; and the potential devastating environmental effects that will subsequently occur. This is further complemented by the idea from Mason (2004) who argues that:

**Comment [FoB13]:** Again, paragraphs need to start with a topic sentence which will outline and inform the reader what the paragraph will talk about.

**Comment [FoB14]:** Supporting sentences follow, which build on the idea outlined in the topic sentence. This is where the writer builds their argument through giving opinions, making points, using references and reliable sources of information etc.

**Comment [FoB15]:** Here the writer is using 2 references together- as they share the same opinion (there is an alternative way of doing this at the end of the previous sentence). This is good to show you have critically reflected on your background reading/sources. The original information has been paraphrased into the writer's own words. ⓈNote that: most references need to be paraphrased in your writing and try to keep 'direct quotes' to a minimum in your work as a general rule.

*The consumerist lifestyle feeds itself through a spiralling desire for material gratification that can never be sated and that attention should turn to opposing today's excessive consumerism by focusing on the benefits of a lifestyle of moderation and self-restraint. This should be of key focus to all.*

(Mason 2004, p. 52).

**Comment [FoB16]:** Here a longer quote (over 30 words) has been used. When using longer direct quotes – the writer must indent in a separate paragraph in a smaller font and also provide the reference along with a page number. Quote marks are not required.

This may be an idealist's viewpoint, however its key message has some significant merit and certainly to address this problem a change in human behaviour and attitude must first be realised.

**Comment [FoB17]:** The paragraph finishes with a concluding sentence which ties up and summarises the points made within the paragraph. This obviously also links back to the topic sentence of the paragraph.

In conclusion therefore, the issue of overconsumption is one which needs much debate, behavioural change coupled with government action. This essay has discussed some of the main reasons for over consumption in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and as such unless action is taken, the effects on natural resources will take a devastating toll. Although the reasons for this trend this can be described as somewhat complex, they are generally classified and linked to the development of richer, faster growing societies with more disposable income to buy cheaper mass produced items. Therefore, in terms of trying to reduce consumption rates within this faster growing worldwide population, it is strongly recommended that society in general moves towards buying less, recycling more, increased repair of damaged/faulty goods and a general and significant move away from 'fast manufacturing-fast consumption' types of behaviour/products. This is no mean feat to achieve of course and will take a significant change of thinking and action from every individual but to fail to do so, will be ultimately devastating and have significant negative effects upon Earth's precious natural resources and cause widespread problems for the generations that follow.

**Comment [FoB18]:** The essay conclusion has a few jobs to do as follows:

- Needs to generally restate the question again for the reader
- Needs to briefly summarise the points made within the essay without being repetitive
- Finishes with some final comments to promote further thought for the reader

**Comment [FoB19]:**  
① Some general comments on academic writing at university:

- Note how in this essay:**
- The paragraphs are well structured.
  - The language and vocabulary are relatively formal.
  - No casual language or terms are used.
  - The grammar use is quite formal.
  - It sounds relatively professional and has a formal 'tone'.
  - It is NOT written in the 1<sup>st</sup> person (no I, me, I think, I feel). This is what is generally required at university –unless advised to do so.

**Comment [FoB20]:** The reference list must be provided on a separate page. See *next page*.

## Reference List:

- Bourdieu, P. 1984, *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Gilleard, C. & Higgs, P. 2009, 'The Third Age: field, habitus or identity?', in I.R. Jones, P. Higgs & D.J. Ekerdt (eds), *Consumption and generational change: the rise of consumer lifestyles*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, N.J., pp. 23-36.
- Mason, M. 2004, 'The end of over-consumption: towards a lifestyle of moderation and self-restraint', *European Environment: The Journal of European Environmental Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 52-3.
- Pape, J., Rau, H., Fahy, F. & Davies, A. 2011, 'Developing policies and instruments for sustainable household consumption: Irish experiences and futures', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 25-42.
- Schafer, M., Jaeger-Erben, M. & dos Santos, A. 2011, 'Leapfrogging to sustainable consumption? An explorative survey of consumption habits and orientations in southern Brazil', *Journal of Consumer Policy*, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 175-96.
- SERI 2009, *Overconsumption? A report on European and global resource use by SERI, GLOBAL 2000 and Friends of the Earth*, viewed 11 January 2012, <<http://seri.at/news/2009/09/24/overconsumption/>>.

**Comment [FoB21]:**

① The reference list should always be on a separate sheet at the end of your assignment.

Entries must be in alphabetical order.

A reference list **IS NOT** a bibliography. They are different things and do different jobs.

A reference list is a full list of all the sources/references **WITHIN** the body of your assignment.

All entries are listed alphabetically by first author surname, no matter what type of source they are e.g. website, journal, book etc.

In this list, the first reference is a book, the second is a chapter from a book, the next three are journal articles, and the final reference is a website.

Check a referencing guide to ensure your entries are formatted correctly.