

Rethinking Recycling: Why Reusing Needs to Be User Friendly

Emily Hanna

Department of English, Oregon State University

English 101: English Composition

Dr. Joseph Williams

March 13, 2020

Rethinking Recycling: Why Reusing Needs to Be User Friendly

Many people hold on to the belief that recycling is unnecessary, and even among those who believe in reducing waste, some find recycling to be inconvenient. Facilities do not always exist to handle certain materials (such as packaging and batteries), and some towns require residents to go through elaborate sorting processes or transport their recycling to a central location, all of which can seem like extra tasks in a busy world. But recycling is becoming increasingly important. According to Zellar (2008), in an article for *National Geographic* entitled “Recycling: The Big Picture,” “Every shrink-wrapped toy or tool or medical device we buy bears the stamp of its energy-intensive history . . . A product’s true cost includes greenhouse gases emitted in its creation as well as use, and pollutants that cause acid rain, smog, and fouled waterways” (para. 4). Essentially, recycling is necessary because of the amount of resources and energy required to produce new items from scratch. Furthermore, landfills have become too large to accommodate in some areas, and they emit unwanted gases that damage the environment (Kaufman, 2009). Because of the repercussions of wastefulness, recycling is essential. Thus, it should be universally available and streamlined for maximum benefits.

At Oregon State University, the administration, faculty, and students are used to seeing and using recycling containers to pitch water bottles, surplus paper from printers, and cardboard (Oregon State University, 2014). However, the administration does not systematically implement the recycling services on campus, creating misunderstanding about what can be recycled and where. The types of bins and services available vary by building and department, making it hard for those who live, work, and study on campus to make the most efficient recycling choices. For example, the residence halls have commingled recycling that accommodates some plastic, metal, cartons, and paper, whereas the library has different bins for paper or bottles and cans only. This

Commented [A1]: In her introduction, the writer introduces the problem and, here, begins hinting at a thesis that will follow in the next paragraph. In her introduction, she describes the importance of recycling and makes it clear that the process needs to be easier.

difference means that, in some campus locations, most waste continues to be sent to landfills. In addition, many of the vendors and departments on campus continue to use products—such as waxed paper cups, coffee-cup lids, and plastic utensils—that cannot be recycled on campus. To solve these problems, Oregon State University should implement a reorganized system that includes matching bins across campus to accommodate a wider range of items and the systematic replacement of everyday items that cannot be recycled with ecofriendly or recyclable options.

Commented [A2]: In a proposal argument, the thesis should clearly state the proposal. Here, the writer argues for a new system of recycling on her college campus.

Streamlined bins will allow staff, students, and faculty to learn about one recycling system and to use it regularly. If the recycling system in the library matches the system in the Memorial Union, those on campus will be less likely to toss things into the trash because they are not sure if it is recyclable. The University of Maryland (2010) has worked hard, and had success, with such measures on their campus. The school's website states that one of the university's goals was to make steps toward a "zero waste" initiative. Specifically, "These improvements include installing more recycling and compost collection bins, implementing education and outreach activities, and eliminating the distribution of condiment packets and instead creating condiment stations near food courts" (University of Maryland, 2010, para. 2). The university also made trash bins harder to access, allotting each faculty member a tiny desk bin that they then had to take to a central location. Such initiatives combined with a sleek, well-run recycling system increases recycling participation on campus.

Commented [A3]: Here, the writer begins to explain the details of her proposal. One part is providing a standard bin system, and she uses another college campus as an example to help support her argument.

New—and more—bins will require Oregon State to invest in additional education on recycling for members of the community. That is, students, faculty, and staff will need to be taught what can go in each bin and why these measures are so important. Things tend to go awry if new systems are not accompanied by clear instructions. According to Kaufman (2009), such a mishap occurred in Santa Monica, California when residents mistook compostable cutlery for

Commented [A4]: According to APA 7th edition, the singular they can now be used.

Commented [A5]: Education for the new recycling system is a part of her proposal.

plastic and put them into the recycling bins. She wrote, “Josephine Miller, an environmental official for the city of Santa Monica, Calif., which bans the use of polystyrene foam containers, said that some citizens had unwittingly put the plant-based alternatives into cans for recycling, where they had melted and had gummed up the works” (para. 26). Such problems can be avoided, she added, when education is part of the initiative.

The new system and education initiatives should be combined with a movement away from products that are the hardest to dispose of ethically and with concern for the environment. This not only limits waste, but also offsets some of the initial costs of the new endeavors. For example, the University of Maryland began using compostable takeout containers that cost a bit more than the old products (University of Maryland, 2010). However, they combined the use of these new products with an emphasis on using reusable plates, cups, and silverware. As a result, the food services produced less waste, needed fewer takeout containers, and spent less money. Zellar confirmed that one of the best ways to lessen the amount of waste being produced is to move away from heavily packaged items that contain unrecyclable elements.

Critics of recycling initiatives often cite wasted energy during collection, high costs, and poor user-friendliness as reasons that recycling does not work. Zellar (2008) made note of some opponents who felt the environmental impact of collecting recyclable waste offsets the benefits of recycling. However, Zellar demonstrated that creating brand new products actually uses significantly more energy than an efficiently run, frequently used recycling system. If members of the Oregon State University community are encouraged to use a simplified (but still comprehensive) system, the environmental impact is much smaller. Similarly, the costs of such a program are mitigated by using fewer disposable items and by a decreased need to haul trash to landfills. Zellar also noted that “some municipalities . . . are starting to demand that businesses

Commented [A6]: Part of her proposal clearly addresses the cost and savings associated with her new plan.

Commented [A7]: Here, the writer addresses the opposing view. She explores problems other might see in her proposal but brings her audience back to the benefits of her plan.

help cover the costs of recycling” (para. 14), certain materials that are expensive or difficult to recycle. This approach has the benefit of lowering recycling costs for consumers, along with the bonus of discouraging companies from creating and distributing products that are bad for the environment. Oregon State could, then, ask the city of Corvallis to consider such a measure.

According to sources cited by Kaufman (2009), large institutions have the most potential for affecting change in how waste and recycling are handled because they produce more waste and, thus, have the ability to change demand for certain products and services. She continued, “[C]ustomers will have to be taught to think about the destination of every throwaway if the zero-waste philosophy is to prevail, environmental officials say” (para. 27). As home base to thousands of employees and students, Oregon State University has the privilege of being an institution that can make a positive impact through education about and implementation of a comprehensive, user-friendly recycling system. If you see the need for this change to occur, contact your administrative officials in Business Affairs and tell them you want to see improved recycling efforts on your campus!

Commented [A8]: The writer concludes her essay by emphasizing her proposal and leaving her audience with a call to action.

References

- Kaufman, L. (2009, October 19). Nudging recycling from less waste to none. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/20/science/earth/20trash.html>
- Oregon State University. (2014). *Recycling FAQ*. <http://fa.oregonstate.edu/recycling/about-us/recycling-faq>
- University of Maryland. (2010). *Recycling, composting, and waste reduction*.
<http://www.sustainability.umd.edu/content/campus/recycling.php#SingleStream>
- Zellar, Jr., T. (2008). Recycling: The big picture. *National Geographic*.
<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/big-picture/>