



Why Some Products Are Less Likely To Make It To The Recycling Bin

¹ A researcher used to get upset. He often saw people throwing things in the wastebasket, for example soda cans or gum wrappers, that they should have put in the recycling bins. Then he became interested in why they do that. As a result, he set up some experiments.

² In one study, 150 volunteer students were asked to give their opinion about a pair of scissors. (The students thought the study was about the scissors, but actually, the researchers were secretly studying recycling.) They gave each of the students a sheet of paper. They told half of them to practice with the scissors by cutting the paper into eight pieces. The other half were told to just hold and practice squeezing the scissors but not cut the paper.

³ Then the researchers asked them to clean up the papers as they were leaving the room. Just outside the room, there was a garbage can and a recycling bin. Interestingly, 80% of students who had not cut their paper put it in the recycling bin, but only 44% of the cutters put their tiny piece of paper in the recycling bin.

⁴ In a similar study, researchers found that after the participants had drunk some soda, when the cans were undamaged, the cans went in the recycling. But if the cans were dented or crushed in any way, the participants ended up putting those crushed cans in the garbage.

⁵ The researcher came to this conclusion. After we finish using a product, we somehow evaluate it: does the product still look like it could be useful? A can that isn't dented still looks like a can; it could possibly still hold soda in it, and so we think of it as being useful. We believe that useful things go in the recycling.

⁶ However, when a product is clearly damaged or changed in size or form, people believe it to be less useful. And when they perceive it as less useful, they're more likely to throw it in the garbage, as opposed to recycling it.

⁷ Things that could have been recycled actually make up a large portion of what's thrown in the garbage every year. The first step in changing these habits is to be aware of our misunderstanding about usefulness.

⁸ This researcher is now thinking about putting big red frowny faces ☹ on the trash cans in an effort to get people to stop and think for a second and consider using the recycling bin.

Comprehension Exercise

Directions: Write T (true) or F (false) next to each sentence.

- ___ 1. The researcher wanted to understand why people didn't recycle when they should have.
- ___ 2. The volunteers thought the study was about recycling.
- ___ 3. Half the volunteer cut small pieces of paper and half cut large pieces.
- ___ 4. 56% of the cutters put their pieces of paper in the garbage bin.
- ___ 5. If a can is dented, we should not recycle it.
- ___ 6. If a product does not look useful, many people think that it should go into the garbage.

Paraphrasing Exercise

Directions: Imagine that you have this conversation with a friend.

You: I just read this interesting article.

Friend: Oh yeah. What did it say?

Write what you would tell your friend. Include as many details as you can.

After you finish writing a first draft, you can re-read the article and revise your draft.

However, don't look at the article while you are writing. You can use some of these **key words** in your paraphrase.

Key Words

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• wastebasket• gum wrappers• 150 volunteers• scissors• sheet of paper• 80%• 44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• undamaged• dented or crushed• products• less useful• be aware• big red frowny face
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Reflection Exercise

Directions: Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reflection, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*