

Reducing Waste - Background Information

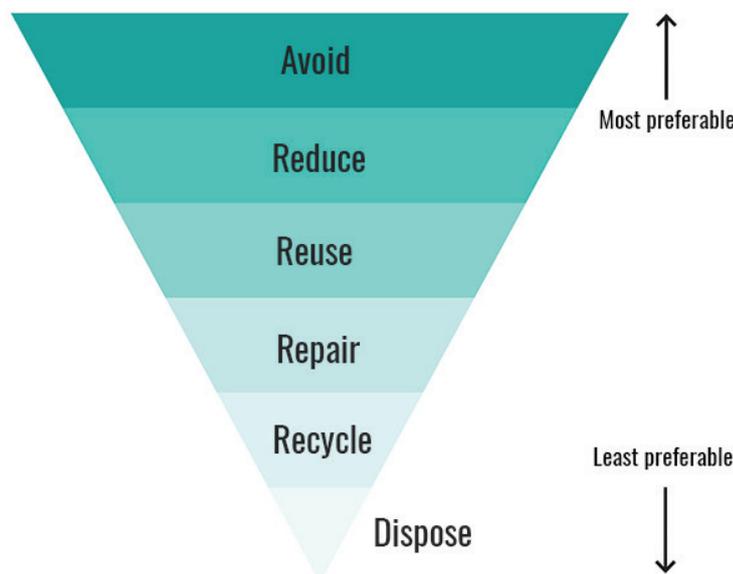
For a long time now we've been thinking of waste as something that should go in the bin. But it wasn't always this way; for many years and in many cultures the things we no longer want or need can be turned into something else, given to someone else to use, or repaired and used again. As the waste we currently create continues to harm our environment, it's time to shift our thinking around waste again - what if we thought of waste as a resource for creating new products? Can we rethink our relationship to waste?



We're already familiar with recycling and we know that it is key to this thinking as it means we can return recyclables to be made into new products. As well as reducing the amount of waste that ends up in our environment, this also means we need fewer natural resources from our environment: this is called 'closing the loop'. Closed-loop recycling assumes that materials will be reused over and over again.

One of the other benefits of closing the loop is reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Extracting, processing and transporting natural resources uses a lot of energy and creates a lot of emissions. Thinking carefully about what you buy and what you do with waste can reduce the number of emissions contributing to climate change.

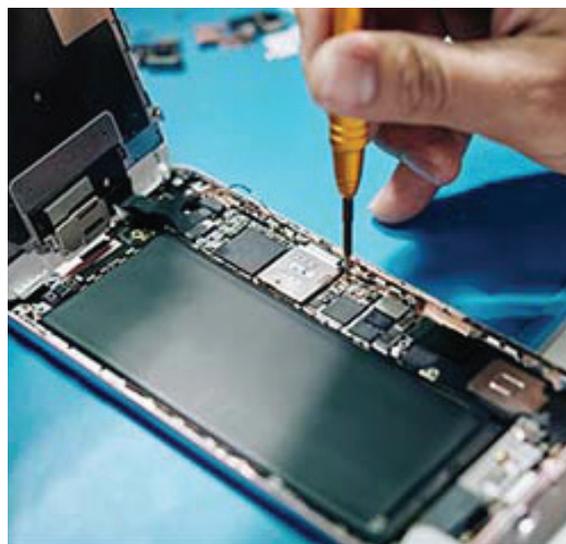
But there are other ways of reducing waste before we get to recycling. The waste hierarchy image below shows us the other options:



On the following page you can find information about what each of the layers in the waste hierarchy means.

Avoid: 'Avoid' means to not do something in order to cut the waste you will produce. A simple example of this is to not accept a plastic shopping bag from the shop assistant when you have bought only one small item. Another example is to not use aluminium foil to roast potatoes in their jackets in the oven.

Reduce: 'Reduce' means buying and using things more carefully so that you produce less waste overall. For example, if you buy one large box of cereal instead of two small ones, that means you will have less cardboard packaging overall. Packing the right amount of food for your school lunch means that you will have less uneaten food to throw away after lunch.



Reuse: 'Reuse' means to use more than once for the same or a different purpose. For example, a student might use a Ziploc bag for some biscuits for lunch and then wash the bag and use it over and over again to hold different sorts of snacks.

Repair: Can you fix it before throwing it away? For example, if the straps on that recycled plastic shopping bag from the supermarket have come loose, can you sew them back on? Maybe the broken toy can be fixed instead of just being thrown away.

Recycle: 'Recycle' refers to the process of making something new from something that has been thrown away. The new product can be the same as the old one or something quite different. For example, a sheet of photocopy paper could be made into another sheet of photocopy paper (same) or it could be made into a cardboard box (different). With some materials (e.g. glass, metals and plastic), heat is used in the recycling process, bringing about a change of state from solid to liquid and back to solid again.

Dispose: 'Dispose' means putting something in the rubbish/landfill bin should be the last resort. It's unavoidable but if you can think carefully about the things you're putting in the bin and assess whether you can reuse, repair or recycle first, you could be helping prevent more waste from ending up in landfills.

By rethinking the stuff we buy and what we do with it, we can all help to keep our beautiful planet clean.