

# Trash: recycling and cafeteria to-go boxes essay sample



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Trash. The wrappers, boxes, cups, plastic bags and so on seem to be in abundance, a never ending supply of things we throw away without further thought of where it goes or what is done with it. Once the trash leaves our garbage cans and migrates to a dumpster or garbage truck, it doesn't matter- right? Wrong. That is not the case. Unfortunately, many of us Americans suffer from an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality when it comes to the trash we generate. Once it is no longer overflowing from the can under the sink, once the offensive odors of a meal from days gone by no longer linger, many of us don't give a second thought to our garbage, but we should. Once our trash leaves the comforts of home, the problem is bigger and uglier than the bottom of the garbage can. Discarded chemicals and items that will not break down, or decompose, fill garbage dumps and landfills across the nation.

Hazardous chemicals can leech into the soil and be carried into water systems through run off. Plastics and metals don't break down and become one with the dirt, but instead pile up or are buried in giant pits at a landfill. I agree. Trash is a big problem, but I'm just one college student. How much could I possibly be contributing to the local landfill? I decided to find out. I decided to do a little experiment and save every piece of trash I generated over the course of just one weekend. I also determined to keep track of what kind of material built up. I wanted to see how much of my trash is biodegradable versus how much will sit in a landfill until the end of time. The results were surprising and disturbing. Collection of Garbage

I didn't realize that I was responsible for so much trash before I started to take note of how much I threw away and what my garbage was made out of.

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The grand total for number of pieces of garbage for the weekend came in at 20 individual items (see Appendix). I can't really say that it was an unusual amount of trash, but I was curious to see how my garbage can compared to other students'. After taking a quick survey of my neighbors and friends, I recorded numbers ranging from 15 up to 35 items. It seemed that my garbage production landed right in the middle of the scale. I found that not only was my amount of trash similar to other college students', we were also producing the same type of trash. Starbucks cups were the most common theme in our trash cans, with the cafeteria to-go boxes a close runner-up. Another thing I found in common with my fellow students was how we collected our garbage. We were all using old Wal-Mart or Safeway bags as trash can liners. It was comical to me to discover that we were using trash to bag our trash.

#### Analyzing of Garbage

The next thing I did was look at the type of material I had accumulated over the weekend. The Starbucks cups were pretty plentiful, so I looked at those first. I knew prior to this experiment that this company uses cup made of recycled materials AND provides customers with in-store recycling receptacles. With a little digging, though, I found that only 10% of the material used in the cup is recycled/biodegradable! This was shocking because Starbucks seems like such a "green" company. The main material in their hot beverage cup is a low-density polyethylene plastic which is NOT 100% recyclable. Now, on the plus side, the sleeve that they put on the cup is 100% biodegradable. The next piece of trash I studied was a potato chip bag (Doritos, I think). The labeling was full of confusing words and symbols.

With further research I found that bags like this are comprised of a chemical plastic known as Polyethylene terephthalate (PET).

This type of plastic does not allow other chemicals or nitrogen into the food that it is preserving, which is good from a keeping foods fresh standpoint, but because the plastic is so thick and doesn't allow the rotting of food, it also doesn't decompose. It is virtually indestructible naturally, but can be recycled using high heat, for use in other products. The most impressive thing I found while digging through my trash, was the to-go boxes from the cafeteria. These boxes are formed out of this hard, but somewhat flimsy-to-the-touch material. Again, with a little investigating, I found that the boxes were made of 100% recycled cardboard that has been shredded and then pressed back together to create a great way to carry cafeteria food back to your dorm room. The Problem

The problem with trash is twofold. First, the chemicals that can seep out of our trash can contribute to all kinds of pollution problems. Chemicals can erode and poison soil. Water flowing through these chemicals will poison waterways, making water undrinkable and deadly to animals. Evaporating chemicals produce acid rain. The second half of the trash problem is simply the build up in our landfills and dumps. Unfortunately, even items that are recyclable won't recycle themselves. According to George Scott an author for an online organic recycling site, " Landfills are unsustainable. There is only so much land in the world and every year about 175 million tons of refuse enters landfills. While some matter will decompose in landfills, some materials, like plastic and Styrofoam, will last millions of years. Every year landfills take up more and more space." With this knowledge we can see that <https://assignbuster.com/trash-recycling-and-cafeteria-to-go-boxes-essay-sample/>

if something is not changed about the way we throw things away and the types of plastics and metals we are using then we will continue wasting space and polluting the Earth. The Solution

The good news is, there are things we can do to reduce the amount of garbage we produce. For starters, we can be conscious of what types of products we're using and what they are made out of. As great as they are for trash can liners, ditch the plastic grocery bags and use paper sacks or reusable canvas totes. Conserv-energy-future. com gives useful ways to help reduce your impact on landfills and the environment. One tip is to refuse to buy plastic bottles from stores and to look for products that have the recycle sign or are produced organically. One of the most helpful tips was using natural, organic cleaning supplies for everyday household chores.

The website suggests, " Instead of buying cleaning solutions from markets to unclog your drain, use baking soda and vinegar for your cleaning projects. Baking soda has countless uses and, neither vinegar nor baking soda will hurt the environment." Lastly, take a moment to sort trash into what should be tossed and what can be recycled. You'll be amazed at how much longer it takes to fill up that garbage can when you start recycling!

In conclusion, even though there are many different types of " decomposable" and " biodegradable" items out there sometimes you have to look a little closer to see if they really are what they say they are. With the proper knowledge and a little effort, we can do our part to reduce waste and keep the environment clean.