

# The latest thing

## Fashion and trends, consumerism

### Fashion and trends

- 1.1 Which of the adjectives in the box might be used to describe the clothes in picture A and picture B?

fashionable    mundane    trendy    elegant  
stylish    drab    sophisticated    practical  
chic    comfortable    impractical

- 1.2 ▶ 24 Listen to a woman talking about fashion. What does she say about following fashion?  
Choose A, B or C.

- A She realised the problems with fashion at an early age.  
B She feels it's important to keep up-to-date with fashion.  
C She spends a lot of money on buying the latest styles.

- 1.3 ▶ 24 Now listen again and complete the sentences.

- They were all the \_\_\_\_\_.
- They were a \_\_\_\_\_ item.
- They went \_\_\_\_\_ fashion.
- I'm not very fashion-\_\_\_\_\_.
- They know what's \_\_\_\_\_ fashion.
- They spend their money on the \_\_\_\_\_.
- It's just a \_\_\_\_\_ trend.
- It will soon be \_\_\_\_\_-date.

- 1.4 Match the phrases in bold in 1.3 with the meanings (a-d).  
You will need to use some letters more than once.

- a no longer popular  
b very popular at the moment  
c aware of fashion  
d a temporary fashion



### Vocabulary note

Fashion can be both countable (when talking about different items of clothing) or uncountable (when talking about style in general):

*The latest fashion at the moment is to wear several T-shirts at once.*  
(uncountable)

*We went to Milan to see all the latest fashions.* (countable)

**2 COLLOCATION** Cross out the word in each list which does not collocate with the word in bold. Do the other words go before or after the word in bold?

- fashion** statement clothes accessory conscious
- designer** label handbag goods supplies
- dress** traditional evening casual waterproof
- clothes** wardrobe hanger basket line
- look** individual classic youth sophisticated

**3** Spend one minute preparing for the following Speaking test Part 2. Try to use as many new words as you can. Record your talk if possible. When you have finished, listen and consider how you might improve it.

Describe an expensive item you bought recently. You should say

- what you bought
- why you chose it
- what you use or need it for
- whether it was good value

and whether you are happy with it, and why / why not.

**!** Error warning



Clothes is always plural. If you want to use the singular, you need to say the name of the item: *I bought some new clothes. I bought a shirt in that shop.*

Use an item of clothing in a more formal situation: *The police took away an item of clothing.*

Dress can mean one item, e.g. *she wore a red dress*, or clothes of a particular type, e.g. *ceremonial dress*.

## Consumerism

**4.1** Use a dictionary to help you put the verbs in the box into the correct column.

store dispose of hoard archive throw away abandon maintain discard  
save consume stockpile dump retain eradicate preserve conserve

<i>keep</i>	<i>get rid of</i>

**4.2** Now complete the following sentences with the most suitable verb from the table.

- Rather than \_\_\_\_\_ plastic bags, people should recycle them.
- To prevent littering, the company has put a warning on the label asking us to \_\_\_\_\_ the wrapping carefully.
- The snow was so heavy that we had to \_\_\_\_\_ our car and walk.
- If you have a wood-burning fire, you need a special container to \_\_\_\_\_ the fuel in.
- Companies will cause an environmental disaster if they illegally \_\_\_\_\_ waste in our rivers.

## 5.1 Read the passage and answer the questions below with YES, NO or NOT GIVEN.

As the United States became the economic leader around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it also took the lead in consumerism. By 2003, personal consumption accounted for 70% of the nation's gross domestic product. In 1950, the trend for families in the US was to own one car and save for a second. In 2000, nearly one in five families owned three cars or more. And while some other countries pride themselves on thriftiness, the converse would appear to be true for the US, where people spend more on garbage bags than 90 of the world's 210 countries spend on everything.

Why is our appetite for 'stuff' so insatiable? For one thing, we have come to think that buying is an essential expression of freedom and individualism. The normal pattern is: 'You get more money, you spend more money,' says Cornell economist Robert Frank. And yet, since the mid-1970s, when the disposable income of 80% of the US population virtually stopped growing, our spending patterns have bewilderingly continued expanding.

Much of our ferocious consumption arises simply from the sheer number of goods available. But, according to Professor James Twitchell, mass branding also spurred us to shop. Take, for example, Ralph Lauren's description of the Polo philosophy: 'What began with a tie ... has grown into an entire world that has redefined how American style and quality is perceived.' Now, says Twitchell, to curb our acquisitiveness we would have to de-brand: 'It's a scarf; it's not a Hermes scarf. It's a car; it's not a Lexus. You put it around your neck or you drive it.'

And after you get all the loot home, then what? Just as American as the need to buy, social observers say, is buyer's remorse. The backlash against American consumerism dates nearly to its conception. These days, our ambivalence and need to purge come in slick, packaged form: a magazine called *Real Simple* that specialises in de-cluttering. It can be yours for just \$3.95.

<sup>1</sup>The writer uses *stuff* to show their low opinion of consumer products. It is informal, and you should not use it in the IELTS exam.

- 1 People in the US clearly like to show how good they are at reusing and recycling goods.
- 2 Spending patterns in the US are surprising given the income trends there.
- 3 In the 1970s, spending in the US was at an all-time high.
- 4 Having so many things to choose from can prevent people from spending.
- 5 In order to reduce spending, people need to ignore brands and see only useable products.
- 6 Many Americans return goods to the store after purchase.

## 5.2 Study the way the words and phrases in the box are used in the reading passage. Then use them to complete the sentences below.

consumerism    personal consumption    disposable income  
spending patterns    mass branding    acquisitiveness

- 1 Our natural \_\_\_\_\_ is not good for the environment or for our own bank balance.
- 2 Many special celebrations have lost their meaning because they have been taken over by \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3 The money you have left over after you have paid all of your expenses and bills is your \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ is a way of marketing your goods to the widest possible audience.
- 5 Individuals can help save the environment by reducing their own \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 The chart shows the \_\_\_\_\_ of the average household in Berlin between 1990 and 2010.

## Reading

You should spend about 20 minutes on **Questions 1–13**, which are based on the Reading Passage below.

### The environmental impact of the clothing industry

On a Saturday afternoon, a group of teenage girls leaf through glossy fashion magazines at an American shopping mall. Their shopping bags are brimming with new purchases as they talk excitedly about what's in style this summer. Far away in Tanzania, a young man wears a T-shirt bearing the logo of an American basketball team while shopping at the local second-hand goods market. Although seemingly disparate, these two scenes are connected through the surprising life cycle of clothing. How does a T-shirt sold in a US shopping mall to promote an American sports team end up being worn by a teenager in Africa?

Globalisation, consumerism, and recycling all converge to connect these scenes. Globalisation has made it possible to produce clothing at increasingly lower prices, prices so low that many consumers consider this clothing to be disposable. Some call it 'fast fashion', the clothing equivalent of fast food. Fuelling the demand are fashion magazines that help create the desire for new 'must-haves' for each season. 'Girls especially are insatiable when it comes to fashion. They have to have the latest thing,' says Mayra Diaz, mother of a 10-year-old girl.

Yet fast fashion leaves a pollution footprint, generating both environmental and occupational hazards. For example, polyester, the most widely used manufactured fibre, is made from petroleum. With the rise in production in the fashion industry, demand for man-made fibres has nearly doubled in the last 15 years. The manufacture of polyester and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil and releasing emissions which can cause or aggravate respiratory disease. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) considers many textile manufacturing facilities to be hazardous waste generators.

These issues do not apply only to the production of man-made fabrics. Cotton, one of the most popular fibres used in clothing manufacture, also has a significant environmental footprint. This crop accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States. Much of the cotton produced in the United States is exported to China and other

countries with low labour costs, where the material is woven into fabrics, cut and assembled according to the fashion industry's specifications. In her 2005 book *The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy*, Pietra Rivoli, a professor at Georgetown University, writes that each year Americans purchase approximately one billion garments made in China, the equivalent of four pieces of clothing for every US citizen.

Once bought, an estimated 21% of annual clothing purchases stay in the home, increasing the stocks of clothing and other textiles held by consumers, according to *Recycling of Low Grade Clothing Waste*, by consultant Oakdene Hollins. The report calls this stockpiling an increase in the 'national wardrobe', which is considered to represent a potentially large quantity of latent waste that will eventually enter the solid waste stream. According to the EPA Office of Solid Waste, Americans throw away more than 68 pounds of clothing and textiles per person per year, and this represents about 4% of the municipal solid waste. But this figure is rapidly growing.

In her book *Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash*, Susan Strasser, a professor of history at the University of Delaware, traces the 'progressive obsolescence' of clothing and other consumer goods to the 1920s. Before then, and especially during World War I, most clothing was repaired, mended or tailored to fit other family members, or recycled within the home as rags or quilts. During that war, clothing manufacturers reduced the varieties, sizes and colours of their productions and even urged designers to create styles that would use less fabric and avoid needless decoration. The US government's conservation campaign used slogans such as 'Make economy fashionable lest it become obligatory' and resulted in an approximate 10% reduction in the production of trash.

However, the spirit of conservation did not last long; by the mid-1920s, consumerism was back in style. During World War II, consumption rose with increased employment as the United States mobilised for the war. Industrialisation brought



consumerism with it as an integral part of the economy. When it comes to clothing, the rate of purchase and disposal has dramatically increased, so the path that a T-shirt travels from the sales floor to the landfill site has become shorter. Yet even today, the journey of a piece of clothing does not always end at the landfill site. A proportion of clothing purchases are recycled, mainly in three ways: clothing may be resold by the primary consumer to other consumers at a lower price, it may be exported in bulk for sale in developing countries, or it may be chemically or mechanically recycled into raw material that can be used to produce insulation.

Domestic resale has boomed in the era of the internet. Many people sell directly to other individuals through auction websites such as eBay. Another increasingly popular outlet is charity and thrift shops, though only about one-fifth of the

clothing donated to charities is directly used or sold in their thrift shops. Says Rivoli, 'There are nowhere near enough people in America to absorb the mountains of cast-offs, even if they were given away.' So charities find another way to fund their programmes, using the clothing that they cannot sell. About 45% of these textiles continue their life as clothing, just not domestically. Certain brands and rare collectible items are imported by Japan. Clothing that is not considered vintage or high-end is baled for export to developing nations. For Tanzania, where used clothing is sold at the markets that dot the country, these items are the number one import from the United States. Observers such as Rivoli predict that the trend toward increasing exports of used clothing to developing countries will continue to accelerate because of the rise of consumerism in the United States and Europe and the falling prices of new clothing.

### Questions 1-5

Look at the following statements and the list of people below.

Match each statement with the correct person.

Write the correct letter, **A-D**, next to questions 1-5.

**NB** You may use any letter more than once.

- The amount of recycled clothing available in the US exceeds demand.
- Countries like Tanzania will receive even more used clothing from North America in the future.
- A change in manufacturers' attitudes helped decrease the amount of waste that was generated.
- Our gender has an influence on our increased desire to shop.
- A future waste problem may occur because people add to the clothes they already own each year.

#### List of people

- A** Mayra Diaz
- B** Pietra Rivoli
- C** Oakdene Hollins
- D** Susan Strasser



#### Test tip

With any matching type question, the questions are not in the same order as in the text. A good strategy is to circle or underline the names of each of the people in the text, read what they say carefully and match what they say with the statements in the questions. NB You will be told if you need to use any of the people more than once and there may be people you do not need to use.

**Questions 6–8**

Which **THREE** possible consequences of the fashion industry are mentioned by the writer of the passage?

Choose **THREE** of the letters, **A–G**.

- A increased health problems
- B increases in petrol prices
- C increased use of chemicals
- D reduced wages for workers
- E lower profits for small local manufacturers
- F negative effects on other industries
- G production of unwanted dangerous materials

**Test tip**

In the Reading test, for multiple choice questions you may need to choose 1 out of 4 possible options, or 2 out of 5 options, or 3 out of 7 options. Pay close attention to the instructions and make sure you choose the right number of answers.

**Questions 9–13**

Answer the questions below.

Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS AND/OR A NUMBER** from the passage for each answer.

- 9 What is the name of one material that is not natural?
- 10 What percentage of household garbage is made up of clothes?
- 11 In what era did Americans stop reusing old clothes?
- 12 What has caused the selling of used clothing to increase in the US?
- 13 To which country does America export a lot of its good quality used clothing?

**Test tip**

The question will always tell you how many words you should write but remember that '**NO MORE THAN THREE WORDS**' means the answer might be one word, two words or three words.