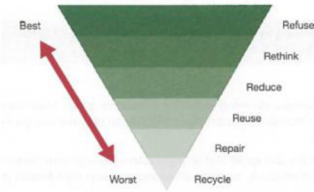


Knowledge Organiser AQA Design & Technology 8552

The 6 R's

The 6 Rs are an important checklist. They are used by designers to reduce the environmental impact of products. They can also be used to evaluate the environmental impact of other products.

The **hierarchy of sustainability** places the strategies that are best for the planet about those that have a greater negative impact on the environment.



1. Refuse

The first stage in the process is to ask whether the proposed product, part, purchase or even journey is required at all. Asking the question 'Is it really necessary?' can play a major role in reducing the demand on materials. Simply not using something saves 100% of what you have chosen not to use.

Example include:

- Using your own carrier bag rather than purchasing a new one.
- Walking or cycling to school instead of being driven.
- Not using products such as some pesticides that are known to be harmful to the environment.
- Not eating (or using) products that are over-farmed, over-fished or on the endangered list.

7. Sustainability

Our planet has to provide all of our basic human needs, such as food, shelter and warmth.

Designers now have a much better understanding of which materials are sustainable and which are not. The general principle is that resources fall into two categories: **Finite resources** – are ones which are in limited supply or cannot be reproduced.

Non-finite resources – are ones which are in abundant supply and are unlikely to be exhausted.

2. Rethink

Consumers have a growing number of choices to make about where and on what they spend their income. Greener and more sustainable options are not always the cheapest or the best, but making informed decision and rethinking ones spending power can play a huge part in conserving resources.

Deciding on the design of a product, e.g. the materials being used in its production, will directly affect its sustainability.

The types of questions designers need to ask are:

- Are the materials locally sourced?
- Are they sustainably produced?
- Is it essential to use this material, of which there is a finite supply?

By rethinking how the product is likely to be made, the product can often be redesigned in a more responsible way.

3. Reduce

Reduction is often the result of having re-thought a design or action. Materials and energy are saved due to efficient manufacturing practices and the use of clever design, incorporating sustainable materials.

- Modern materials that are lighter and stronger than traditional ones have contributed to the miniaturisation of products, saving material and energy in manufacture and use.
- Reducing the complexity or number of parts a product uses and reducing the number of different materials in a product makes recycling easier.
- In factories, schools and hotels, fitting motion sensitive lighting and smart heating systems can significantly reduce energy usage.
- Many large companies employ staff to conduct 'energy walks' to turn off unused appliances and lights and to ensure windows and doors are shut to conserve heat.

8. Recyclable materials

Once all useful and recyclable materials are removed, the majority of the remaining waste is organic matter and can be processed in one of two ways; '**Recover**' or '**Rot**'. Food waste and garden waste can be processed at a high temperature and turned into compost. The waste can also be buried in **landfill** sites where the resulting methane gas from the rotting matter is collected and burned and used to generate heat or electricity in the same way.

4. Reuse

Reusing products multiple times for the same purpose is also known as **primary recycling**. Reusing a product in a different way from the one it was designed for is known as **secondary recycling**.

The classic glass milk bottle is reused many times before it reaches the end of its useful life, at which point it is recycled. A plastic milk bottle, however, is intended to be used only once, although it can have many different subsequent uses.

Donating to and buying from charity shops extends the life of products and in recent years there has been a resurgence of in products having second lives, thanks to websites such as eBay, Freecycle or Gumtree.



It is also becoming popular for furniture and other household items to be **upcycled** with a coat of paint and some minor repairs or adaptations, extending their useful life by many years.

5. Repair

Being able to repair a product when it is broken or worn is a way of extending its life and delaying the purchase of a new one. Repairing is a positive option over replacement as it means that only some parts of the product are replaced. This creates jobs for skilled people who conduct repairs and stimulates a spare parts market.

Unfortunately, repairing products has become harder over years. Growing number of products are not designed to be repaired. There are a number of reasons why items may be designed this way, but it is usually because they are cheaper to replace than repair. Some products, especially modern electronic products, are designed to last only a few years as technology dates quickly and older products will be superseded by newer, faster, more efficient models. This is called **planned obsolescence**.

6. Recycle

Tertiary recycling, although a very important stage, is lower down the hierarchy of preferred options because most materials that are recycled this way tend to be of lower quality than the original material. It takes a lot of energy to recycle materials.

This form of recycling requires the reprocessing of the material and in many cases involves chemicals and/or heat to recover the recycled materials. In an ideal world, tertiary recycling would remove all recyclable materials from our household waste so that only biodegradable materials would be left. Only very few parts of the world are set up to cope with this level of processing.