AP English Language and Composition

Suggested reading time—15 minutes

Suggested writing time—40 minutes

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying seven sources.

This question requires you to synthesize a variety of sources into a coherent, well-written essay. When you synthesize sources you refer to them to develop your position and cite them accurately. *Your argument should be central; the sources should support this argument. Avoid merely summarizing sources.*

Remember to attribute both direct and indirect citations.

Introduction

The popularity of "fast fashion" has risen over the past few decades as manufacturers have moved production overseas in response to a globalized economy. As materials have become cheaper and mass production has become easier, clothing has become less durable and threatens the environment, including the water supply.

Assignment

Read the following sources (including any introductory information) carefully. **Then write an essay in which you evaluate what a consumer would need to consider before making clothing purchases. Synthesize at least three of the sources for support.**

Refer to the sources by their titles (Source A, Source B, etc.) or by the descriptions in the parentheses.

Source A	(Monroe)
Source B	(Youngzine)
Source C	(UNToday)
Source D	(Gindis)
Source E	(Crisitello)
Source F	(Magnin)
Source G	(Photo)

Source A

Monroe, Rachel. "Ultra-Fast Fashion Is Eating the World." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 6 Feb. 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/03/ultra-fast-fashion-is-eating-the-world/617794/.

The following is an excerpt from an article published in The Atlantic in March 2021.

LAST FEBRUARY, on a sunny afternoon in West Hollywood, two girls with precise eye makeup paused on Melrose Avenue and peered in the windows of a building whose interior was painted a bright, happy pink. Two pink, winged unicorns flanked racks of clothes: ribbed crop tops, snakeskin-print pants, white sleeveless bodysuits. One of the girls tugged on the door, then frowned. It was locked, which was weird. She tugged again. Inside, a broad-chested security guard regarded them impassively from behind a pink security desk.

Erin Cullison, the U.S. public-relations rep for PrettyLittleThing, a fast-fashion brand founded in 2012, watched the girls give up and walk away. She sighed. Although the West Hollywood showroom closely resembles a store, it is not, in fact, a store. It is not open to the public; the clothes on the racks don't have price tags. "People try to give us cash, but we're not even set up to take money," Cullison told me. Instead, the clientele is made up of the brand's influencer partners—thousands of them—who can make an appointment to visit the showroom every couple of weeks and "get gifted." They try on the latest styles and take advantage of various "photo moments": lounging on the plush pink couch, posing on the pink staircase, peeking out of the London phone booth repainted—yes—pink. They can snack on a pink-frosted cupcake, and (provided they're 21 or older) drink a glass of rosé at the store's pink bar, before heading home with several items of free clothing.

PrettyLittleThing is part of the Boohoo Group, a company that has become a dominant force in retail fashion over the past decade; along with several other aggressive and like-minded companies, it is quickly reshaping the industry. Boohoo stock is now publicly traded on the London Stock Exchange (LSE: BOO), but it started as a family business. As the legend goes, the family patriarch, Abdullah Kamani, immigrated to the U.K. from Kenya in the 1960s and began selling handbags from a street stand. Eventually, he opened a textile

factory that supplied the retailers that, starting in the 1990s, shook the fashion world with their cheap clothes and high merchandise turnover: H&M, Topshop, and the Irish fast-fashion juggernaut Primark.

Abdullah's business was successful enough that he bought himself a Rolls-Royce; his son Mahmud saw the potential for even greater profits. In 2006, Mahmud and his business partner, Carol Kane, began selling cheap clothes directly to consumers through Boohoo.com. Without the burden of retail stores, the company's costs were relatively low, except when it came to marketing. Young girls who went on YouTube (and, later, Instagram) were inundated with microtargeted ads for Boohoo bodysuits and minidresses. Boohoo's founders understood that social media could be leveraged to make new brands quickly seem ubiquitous to their target audience. "If you have that imagery out there you are perceived as a much larger business than you actually are," Kane told the trade publication *Drapers*.

Social media wasn't just a convenient place to advertise—it was also changing how we think about our clothes. Fashion brands have always played on our aspirations and insecurities, and on the seemingly innate desire to express ourselves through our clothing. Now those companies had access to their target shoppers not just when they stood below a billboard in SoHo or saw an ad on prime-time TV, but in more intimate spaces and at all hours of the day. Brands flooded our feeds with their wares, whether through their own channels or, more surreptitiously, by enlisting influencers to make an item seem irresistible, or at least unavoidable.

The more we began documenting our own lives for public consumption, meanwhile, the more we became aware of ourselves (and our clothing) being seen. Young people, and young women in particular, came to feel an unspoken obligation not to repeat an #outfitoftheday; according to a 2017 poll, 41 percent of women ages 18 to 25 felt pressure to wear a different outfit every time they went out.

Boohoo's founders understood that the company had to hustle to keep customers' attention—to "be fresh all the time," as Kane has put it. "A traditional retailer might buy three or four styles, but we'll buy 25," Kane told *The Guardian* in 2014. Not having to keep hundreds of stores stocked meant Boohoo could be flexible about inventory management. In 2018, H&M was sitting on $4.3 billion worth of unsold items. Boohoo, by contrast, could order as few as 300 or 500 units of a given style—just enough to see whether it would catch on. Only about a quarter of the initial styles were reordered, according to Kane.

Over time, Boohoo accumulated rich data about online consumer behavior, and further tailored the shopping experience to its shoppers' tastes. "They know that first-time customers like to see *this* product category, or customers from this geographic area like *this* color palette," Matt Katz, a managing partner at the consulting firm SSA & Company, told me.

In normal times, Boohoo's agility and ingenuity offered crucial advantages over the competition. When the pandemic hit, those advantages became decisive.

Source B

"The Problem With Fast Fashion." *Youngzine*, 26 Apr. 2022, p. NA. *Gale In Context: High School*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A702352699/SUIC?u=phoe47208&sid=bookmark-SUIC&xid=ab761962. Accessed 14 Dec. 2022. **Gale Document Number:** GALE|A702352699

The following is an excerpt from an article from the BBC.

What Is Fast Fashion?

Fast fashion refers to the rapid manufacture of garments to keep up with what's "cute and trendy" and to market them at a low cost. The quality of the clothing suffers, which, believe it or not, is the goal of fast fashion!

By mass-producing cheap garments, large retail stores earn high profits from a never-ending cycle of individuals purchasing new items to replace garments worn out after just a few wears. Other times, because of how cheap the clothing is, many end up in heaps in the landfill. According to the Columbia Climate School, "less than 1 percent of clothing is recycled to make new clothes."

What's worse, garment factory workers are often forced to work under sweatshop conditions, facing dangerous and unsanitary conditions and a salary unable to sustain the basic necessities of life. In many of these factories, labor laws are only loosely enforced, and there are no regulations regarding minimum wage.

Impact On The Environment

Fast fashion is the fourth greatest contributor to climate change, preceded only by food, housing, and transport, as reported by the European Environment Agency. It causes 10% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and nearly 20% of water pollution annually.

When companies color their fabrics using toxic chemicals, the untreated water contaminates canals and endangers aquatic life. Overall, clothing production uses 93 billion cubic meters of water every year, enough to meet the daily living needs of 5 million people!

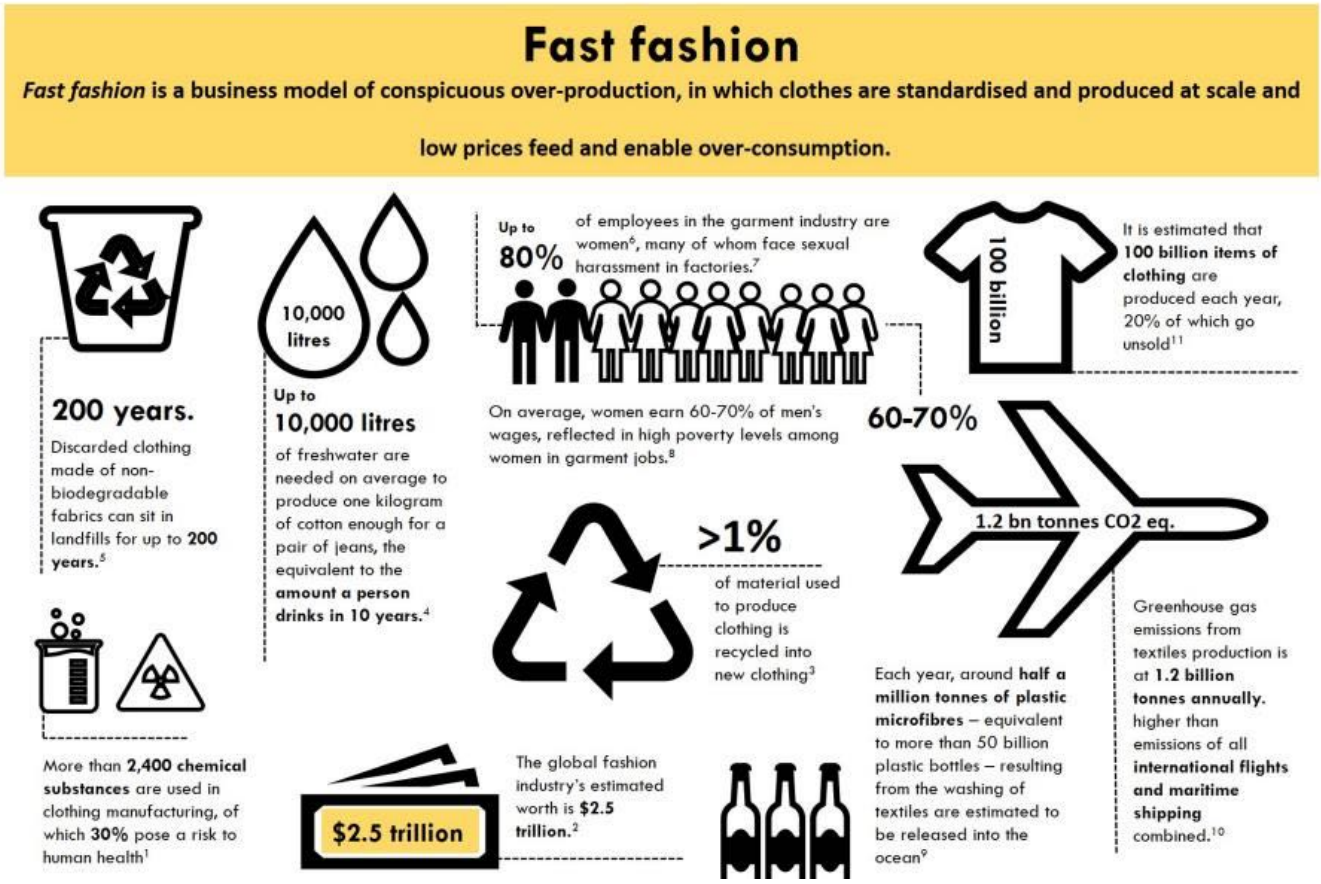
Fabrics frequently used in the industry are also heavily reliant on natural resources. Did you know that a whopping 70 million tons of trees are cut down annually to create wood pulp for the production of materials like rayon and viscose! Researchers predict this would double by 2034 and lead to even more deforestation if action against fast fashion is not taken quickly.

To encourage greater sustainability, some companies are opting for less resource-reliant materials such as bamboo in place of cotton and other fabrics that gobble up millions of tons of water every year. One company has even developed an alternative technique for dyeing fabric, which uses waste CO2 instead of water. Designers are using 3D virtual sampling of materials to eliminate some parts of the process of trial and error in sewing the clothing. As potential consumers, our efforts are just as essential; knowing the negative consequences of fast fashion, we are called to consider every purchase more carefully. Perhaps a favorite pair of jeans or a t-shirt can be revived through some quick mending. Investing in a secondhand store also creates a lower impact wardrobe. Ultimately, as consumers and citizens of society, we must realize that fast fashion is an issue inextricably tied to the well-being of every individual and the future of the planet. When we become aware that every dollar spent on a certain store is a vote in support of their practice, we have the power to stop fast fashion in its tracks.

Source C

"The 'Fast Fashion' Business Model." *UN Today*, https://untoday.org/the-fast-fashion-business-model/.

The following excerpt is from UNToday.org in 2020.



Source D

Gindis, Mia. "Fashion Act Is a Crucial Step Toward a Sustainable Future." *University Wire*, 02/04 2022. *ProQuest; SIRS Issues Researcher*, https://explore.proquest.com/sirsissuesresearcher/document/2638818376?accountid=25135.

The following is an excerpt from an article in University Wire.

The Fashion Sustainability and Social Accountability Act, introduced by The New Standard Institute and sponsored by Assembly Member Anna Kelles, as well as Sen. Alessandra Biaggi, proposes that any brand operating out of New York with global revenue of $100 million or higher be expected to meet a certain standard of environmental consciousness.

Companies will be evaluated based on their ability to hit science-based targets, which include disclosing their material production volumes and providing a comprehensible, transparent report on greenhouse gas emissions, plastic, water and chemical management. They will also be evaluated on their performance of due diligence to avoid labor abuses.

Failure to meet any of these targets would result in a fine of 2% of the brand's annual revenue, with a caveat that these funds be distributed among environmental justice organizations.

If passed, this legislature would undoubtedly level the playing field of an often-times unconscientious industry by demanding that the same standards be met by luxury powerhouses and fast-fashion giants alike.

"Right now, companies are uncompetitive if they do the right thing," Maxine Bédat, the founder of the New Standard Institute, said to Vogue. "That is not a framework for success. By making these regulations the floor of doing business, every company will have to comply, and every company will have to do the right thing. Of course, they can go above and beyond that and show leadership in other ways, too."

In the past, the fashion industry has been notorious for being unregulated. A single company's operations could span across continents, making it impossible to standardize a practice that falls under the jurisdiction of different governments, and consequently, different laws about labor and the environment.

Many instances of major brands exploiting this lack of regulation to the detriment of their employees and the environment have come under the limelight more in recent years.

In 2020, an investigation by The Guardian led to the discovery that fast fashion brand Boohoo was mistreating Pakistani factory workers by paying them well below minimum wage. The employees faced appalling conditions and were sometimes called on for 24-hour shifts.

Source E

Crisitello, Sabina. "Fast Fashion: The Garment Industry's Biggest Black Mark." *University Wire*, 03/26 2022. *ProQuest; SIRS Issues Researcher*, https://explore.proquest.com/sirsissuesresearcher/document/2649800473?accountid=25135.

The following is excerpted from an article about practices in the garment industry.

The price tags don't lie. Fast fashion is cheap. According to New York Magazine, the average product at H&M retails for $18. That final price includes raw material cost, manufacturing, packaging, shipping, operating costs and labor, all topped off with a company markup.

With only $18 to work with, how do companies stretch the budget? Who pays for the overflow?

The answer is both humanitarian and environmental. According to experts and activists alike, fast fashion runs off of two involuntary benefactors: underpaid laborers and the environment.

Defined as inexpensive clothing mass produced to satisfy the regenerative trend cycle, fast fashion has become a major player in the modern shopping experience. According to the Wall Street Journal, the average consumer will wear an item seven times throughout the duration of its lifespan.

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After the seventh wear, the garment will join the 21 billion tons of textiles that end up in landfills each year, according to Vogue. As trend turnover continues to speed up, experts predict this number will only increase.

Sara Kunkel, junior in apparel merchandising and managing editor for SWATCH, believes that technology plays a large role in the decreased lifespan of modern trends. "We were given the tools, through technology, to overconsume," Kunkel said.

Source F

Magnin, Alex. “Who Made Your Clothes? (Cartoon #17).” *Sustainability Illustrated*, 22 Apr. 2020, https://sustainabilityillustrated.com/en/2018/11/20/clothes-sustainable-fashion-cartoon/.

The following is a cartoon from Sustainability Illustrated in 2020.

Source G

"Fast Fashion Parade Against Black Friday." *Gale Global Issues Online Collection*, Gale, 2021. *Gale In Context: Global Issues*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/YNEYCG689158359/GPS?u=phoe47208&sid=bookmark-GPS&xid=a9137414. Accessed 14 Dec. 2022.

The following is a photograph from a Black Friday demonstration in 2021.

A group of Extinction Rebellion activists walks through a busy shopping district while holding banners against Black Friday and fast fashion in Amsterdam, Netherlands, on 27 November 2021.© *Romy Arroyo Fernandez/NurPhoto via Getty ImagesThis image may be used for personal, non-commercial purposes only.*