

Lifestyle Project

(Modified from Kirk and Thomas, 2003)

Purpose:

Often in class we touch on how our lifestyles and values affect the environment. This project is a challenge to make temporary changes to your lifestyle that will be beneficial to the environment, would be realistic to make, and might even improve the quality of your life.

Our version of the project borrows heavily, with a few modifications, from a project developed at Skidmore College:

<http://www.skidmore.edu/~jthomas/lifestyleproject/> (link provided on Sakai)

Kirk, Karin B., and John J. Thomas, 2003. The Lifestyle Project. *Journal of Geoscience Education*, v. 51, n. 5, p. 496-499.

The project has three parts:

A brief description of each part is given here, with the due dates for each part. More detailed descriptions of each part are given on the following pages.

I. Baseline Data Collection and Analysis

There are two parts to the Baseline Data Collection. You have done the first part; you collected data about ALL CATEGORIES of your activities for a 48-hour period (see separate handout). Next week, you will do the second part, the analysis of your data.

This assignment will be graded as a lab. Baseline data collection and analysis is due **Friday September 23**.

II. Journal and changing your lifestyle

The description of the specifics of the project, the rules and the categories that you will be addressing are on the following pages. Pay close attention to the details that are given. The instructions for the journal are provided on page 4.

Due: Weekly, on Monday in lecture, for three weeks

Week 1 Journal: **October 17**

Week 2 Journal: **October 24**

Week 3 Journal: **October 31**

The journals are 30% of the Lifestyle Project grade.

III. Lifestyle Reflection Paper

In the final paper, you will critically reflect on changing to a lifestyle that is more likely to conserve resources. The details of the paper are provided on pages 5-6.

Due: Friday November 18 (in lecture)

The paper is 70% of the Lifestyle Project grade.

The Rules:

1. The idea of this project is to make changes in your lifestyle that will have a beneficial effect on the environment. The changes aren't difficult, but they are significant. Mostly they will require planning and thinking about your actions.
2. You will slowly increase the degree or frequency of the changes, week by week, for a total period of three weeks. You can pick which days will count as your "project days."
3. You will keep a journal with entries for each day that you complete your project requirements. You will use your journal to write a paper reflecting on your experiences, decisions you had to make, and their impact on your life (for better, for worse and/or just different).
4. The Lifestyle Project involves making changes to your personal lifestyle. If you feel that these changes might negatively affect your health, happiness, and well being in any way, or if they conflict with your religious or philosophical beliefs, then you may choose another assignment.

For the Lifestyle Project weeks, choose **any TWO categories** from the five choices below. **(Remember that you will need to collect data in all categories for the baseline data exercise.)** Don't pick something that you already normally do, as the idea of this project is to make changes. Some changes won't be possible in your particular living situation; please pick categories that describe changes that you are able to make.

The Categories:

1. **HEAT** - Expand your comfort zone by turning your heat down 3 degrees Fahrenheit from its normal setting. Continue lowering the heat by 3 degrees every week until you have reduced it by 9 degrees at the end of three weeks. **The heat reduction applies for the entire week.** This option is limited to those who have control over their own thermostats and who have cooperative housemates! If you choose to monitor your heat usage, then your journal must contain a **daily** reflection for each of seven days within the week.
2. **GARBAGE** - Spend each project day producing no waste at all. **You will have two waste-free days the first week, then three days the second week and four days for the last week.** The idea of reducing your input to landfills follows a certain hierarchy. The best thing is to reduce the amount of garbage you make by simply using less, buying less, and wasting less. The second option is to reuse whatever you can to avoid buying new things that will eventually end up as garbage. Recycling and composting are the last options, to be used only when the first two options fail. So on your waste-free days you must live by these rules, and not contribute anything to the landfill on those days. Even though some types of plastics are recyclable, if you aren't able to recycle a particular type of plastic, it counts as garbage. Make sure you write on both sides of the paper, make copies only when necessary, and use the backs of old paper instead of using a fresh sheet. It is considered cheating to just hang on to something until you're given waste-free days pass, and then throw it out. Toilet paper does not count as garbage; it goes to the wastewater treatment plant, not the landfill. Cigarette butts are exempt from this category as well, because quitting smoking is beyond the scope of this project. However, all butts must be put in the garbage can, not on the ground or out your car window.

3. ELECTRICITY AND WATER - Trim the fat off your excess energy consumption by reducing your water and electricity needs **by at least 50%**. To do this, you can do the following things: turn the lights off when you're not around; turn on only one light instead of two; study next to a window; leave the TV and the stereo off; cook meals that don't require lots of burners at once or long cooking times; use the microwave instead of the stove or oven; take a shower at half the usual duration; turn the water down in the shower so it's not full blast; take a cooler shower; don't leave the water running while washing, shaving, brushing your teeth, or washing dishes; skip the blow dryer and electric razor; don't use any unnecessary appliances; run the washing machine and dishwasher only when totally full; and hang laundry to dry instead of using the dryer. If you do all of these things it is possible to cut your consumption by 50% or more. The first week, you'll do this on two days, and you will add one more day each week, until you have four days for the last week.

4. LEAVE THE CAR AT HOME - Experience the thrill of the outdoors by riding your bike, walking or taking the bus in your daily travels. Hitching a ride with your friends or roommates does reduce the amount of driving, but is still a less sustainable practice, so please avoid that option unless there are no other alternatives. You will start with two days and increase the number of car-free days per week by one, until you have four days of bike riding (or whatever mode of transportation you choose in place of a car) during the last week.

5. EAT EFFICIENTLY - The production of meat requires a large amount of water and energy, and also produces considerable waste. Approximately ninety percent of the grain grown in the US is fed to livestock. If you ate the grain crop directly, instead of the livestock, you would be using resources more efficiently. For example, 16 pounds of grain fed to beef cattle produces only one pound of edible meat (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). The majority of the calorie content is used up by the animal for metabolism. This means that you ingest only about 6% of the original calories produced by the grain crop. Milk and milk products are less of an issue. One cow produces about 18,500 pounds of milk in a year and produces between 8 – 30 pounds of milk for each pound of feed (<http://www.usda.gov/nass/aggraphs/milk1.htm>). Another way of looking at this is by the amount of water required to produce different foods. For example, it takes 160 gallons of water to produce a loaf of bread, but it takes 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). By reducing the amount of meat that we eat, we can have a smaller environmental impact. Also consider packaging and processing of your food. Packaging uses energy and resources and creates waste. Highly processed foods are made using water and energy.

So, for your first week, spend two days feasting on healthy and delicious fruits, vegetables, nuts, and grains; just cut out the meat and cut back on processed and packaged foods on these days. Add one vegetarian/low processing/low packaging day each week, until you have four days by the end of the project. You should also be very vigilant about not wasting food during the project. Think of all the resources that go into the production of the food that are wasted if food is thrown out.

Note: If you eat a balanced diet otherwise, you don't need to worry about getting enough protein without meat. An average adult needs about 40 grams of protein per day (Cunningham and Saigo, 1999). Vegetarian sources of protein include whole grain bread (4 g per slice), beans (7 g per serving), pasta (7 g per serving), peanut butter (7 g per serving) and yogurt (11 g per cup). In any case, you should consult a physician or nutritionist before making changes to your diet or if you have any questions about your ability to complete this aspect of the project.

Cunningham, W.P., and Saigo, B.W., 1999, *Environmental Science: A Global Concern*: New York, McGraw-Hill, 650 p

THE ACTIVIST PROJECT – ANOTHER PROJECT OPTION

This option is offered to people who are interested in becoming more active in campus environmental issues. The activist project provides an alternate project for people who feel they already lead an environmentally sound lifestyle, or for people that are not interested in changing their personal lifestyle. Investigate an environmental issue on campus. Examples include junk mail overflowing from campus mailboxes, and contamination of recycling (which requires sending entire dumpsters of recycling to the landfill). Before embarking on a project, you'll need to meet with me to organize your plan and generate solutions. Record plans, meetings, phone calls, and any roadblocks that you encounter in your journal. At the completion of the project, you will write a short paper about the results of your efforts.

Part II. The Lifestyle Project Journal

Due: Weekly, on Monday in lecture, for three weeks

Week 1 Journal: **October 17**

Week 2 Journal: **October 24**

Week 3 Journal: **October 31**

Keep a journal of your activities in the project with **one entry for each day of participation** during the project week. If you choose to monitor your heat usage, then your journal must contain a **daily** reflection for each of seven days within the week.

Each journal entry should include a description of how you met the requirements of the project, an assessment of whether you met the goals, and a reflection of how the lifestyle changes affected you.

Describe exactly what you did, such as the thermostat temperature, the length of your showers, your mode of transportation and your diet. You also need to present the data and evaluating if you have met the goals for the categories that you have selected. This will mean putting it into categories of degree of processing (for food), determining the total BTUs of gallons used (for electricity and water), etc. and then comparing it to your baseline data.

In your reflection, you need to reflect deeply. Consider many different perspectives. Was it easy or difficult? What helped and what didn't? What advance planning was necessary? What adaptations were required? How did you feel physically, emotionally? Additional questions may be provided to focus your reflection each week.

Consider ways to make your journal environmentally-friendly. It can be typed (preferably) or hand-written – but it must be **legible!**

Each time that you submit your journal, you must attach the Baseline Data and the previous journal entries.

Each weekly journal entry will be graded based on the following criteria: complete and thoughtful response to the questions, complete description of your activities to fulfill the project, and the degree to which you are adhering to the project requirements in your areas. These grades, combined with your project paper will determine your grade on the class project (see syllabus).

Part III. Lifestyle Reflection Paper

Due: Friday November 18 (at the beginning of class) – **NOTE:** No emailed entries are accepted as this paper must be accompanied by your Baseline data and all your journal entries.

Use your journal and experiences during the last 3 weeks to write a paper that critically reflects on changing to a lifestyle that is more likely to conserve resources. There are many things to include in the paper:

- **Your experience:** What have you learned? Part of your reflection should include the decisions you had to make, how easy it was to remember or forget to change your habits, and any difficulties that prevented you from meeting the project goals (personal). The reflection should incorporate what you learned about your habits and whether they reflect your environmental values. Please discuss which changes you could maintain in your every day life. Will you? Which changes would not be possible for you to make on a long-term basis? Are there other ways you could achieve a sustainable lifestyle? What changes do you think have the biggest environmental impact?
- **Impact and assistance from others:** Your reflection should also include the role that people in your life played in helping you, any negotiations with roommates or friends (or partners or parents) and whether the people close to you joined in willingly, reminded you of your goals, or tried to keep you from meeting your goals (family/friends). At the next level, is the PLU or local community supportive? If you asked people (at the UC or in a restaurant, for example) to do something differently to help you meet your goals, were they willing (even if they were surprised)?
- **Social context for lifestyle changes:** What societal barriers and support systems did you encounter during this project? Advertising for example, tries to convince us that we need more products so that we can be worthwhile and fulfilled people (whether it is a faster car, a 'better' beer, or whiter teeth). Because it is easy in our current societal and cultural setting to be heavily influenced to consume, be very clear about how family and friends, the community, and society influence your decisions while retaining the final responsibility for your choices.
- **Large-scale implementation of resource conservation:** You should also address what your experience with the previous three points (above) suggests about what aspects of conservation of natural resources could be implemented or encouraged on a large community-wide or national scale. How would you implement these changes? What sustainable practices could you ask people to adopt? What difficulties would you encounter in encouraging people to consider sustainability in their every day lives? What social or economic factors would you have to consider. What are the potential impacts of large-scale changes in the American lifestyle? What long-term environmental change could we reasonably strive for? What would this newer, sustainable America look like?
- **Tying it all together:** Finally, how does what you experienced and learned through this project relate to the material that was discussed during the class and that you examined during the laboratory activities? Think about the four major questions that we used to focus the class. How does this project help you formulate answers to these questions?

Use specific examples to illustrate and support your reflection paper.

Although the paper should reflect your thinking and personal style, it should also be organized and written using formal English. In other words, the paper should flow from beginning to end, the paragraphs should be organized around a single idea, the sentences should be grammatically correct, and correct spelling (with minimal use of slang) and punctuation should be used throughout. Grading will be based on content, writing and formatting (see the following Rubric). This paper will be 70% of your lifestyle project grade (the rest of the project grade is from your journal).

The paper must be double spaced, with font at least **11 point**, with **1 inch margins**. To keep in the spirit of the project, you may **use no more than 4 sheets** of paper or **8 single sides** if you are **reusing** paper.

Criteria and Grading Scheme for Lifestyle Paper

- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1- Thoughtful consideration of all five points listed on previous page: | 25 points |
| 2- Use of specific examples from your experience to support your ideas: | 10 points |
| 3- Spelling, grammar, clarity of writing, and organization: | 10 points |
| 4- Adherence to font size and page set up: | 5 points |
| (See elaboration on criteria below) | Total: 50 points |

Papers turned in after the **beginning** of class, Friday November 18th will be considered late. Late papers will be penalized with a loss of 5 points each day.

Grade	Content Criteria (1 and 2)
35	Superb reflection, really stretched to meet goals, numerous specific examples, excellent presentation—I'm blinded by brilliance
30	Goes beyond adequate and explored unusual options to meet goals; excellent reflection and good use of experiences to support the reflection; thorough, well-explained, detailed exploration of interaction between personal choices and family/friends, community, and society; implementation thoughtfully discussed
25	Good solid paper, goals met, and reflection is adequate and clearly supported experiences; the role of family/friends, community, and society explored; implementation explored
20	Goals barely met or often sidestepped for personal convenience, reflection presented is general or with minimal specific experiences; or coverage is accurate but cursory and does not meet the minimum requirement for a complete answer.
15	Ideas are muddled and goals not met at all, role of personal choices, and influences of others not clear, thinking and experiences not supported with specific examples

Grade	Writing Criteria (3)
10	Excellent text/paragraph organization; interesting sentences; good grammar; few, minor spelling errors
8	Solid organization; good writing; or excellent writing with many spelling errors (no spell checking has been done)
6	Moderate organization; serviceable writing; or good writing with many spelling errors (no spell checking has been done)
4	Disorganized; awkward sentence structure; poor grammar; poor spelling
2	Extreme examples of number 2