



# CIRCULAR ECONOMY

***“Anyone who believes in indefinite growth of anything physical on a physically finite planet is either a madman or an economist.”***

Kenneth Boulding (1910 – 1993), American economist

## 1. Circular Economy Discussion

1. What is a circular economy? What things does it involve? How would a circular economy be different from our current economic model?
2. What are the main benefits of a circular economy? What are the main benefits of our current economic model?
3. What are the problems associated with our current economic model?
4. Why do products seem to last for less time than in the past? Can you think of any examples?
5. Does the circular economy mean anything other than recycling? What can we do with all the waste we've already thrown away over the last few decades?
6. How and when did our current economic model become obsessed with, and dependent on, mass consumption?
7. What is the connection between economic growth and living standards?
8. What does economic progress or success mean to you?

## 2. Circular Economy Vocabulary

- **GDP (gross domestic product)** (noun) – *the total value or cost of goods and services in an economy in one year.*
- **economic growth** (noun) – *an increase in GDP over time.*
- **product life cycle** (noun) – *the stages a product goes through starting from its introduction to a market and its eventual withdrawal from the market.*
- **planned obsolescence** (noun) – *a deliberate strategy to shorten the life cycle of a product to encourage further consumption by making the product, or product parts, out of date.*
- **raw materials** (noun) – *materials in their natural state before they are processed to be used to manufacture goods.*
- **linear economy** (noun) – *the current economic model consisting of exploiting natural resources, making products with them, consuming those products, and then discarding them when they have served their purpose (often summarised by take, make, waste).*

**Using the vocabulary words above, complete the following sentences (remember to use the correct form of the word, e.g. verb conjugation or plural noun)**

1. Companies often conduct market research to understand consumer preferences at different stages of the **product life cycle**, ensuring timely updates and improvements.
2. Investments in infrastructure and technology have led to significant **economic growth** in the region.
3. **Planned obsolescence** in electronics industry results in unnecessary waste, as products are deliberately designed to have a limited lifespan.
4. The country's **GDP** increased by 3% last quarter, indicating a boost in economic activity.
5. The mining industry plays a crucial role in providing **raw materials** for various sectors, including manufacturing and construction.
6. Transitioning from a **linear economy** requires innovative approaches to recycling and reducing waste in the production process.

### **Circular Economy vocabulary comprehension questions**

1. Is GDP growth/economic growth the best way to measure economic success? Why or why not?
2. Is it possible for economies to grow indefinitely? Why or why not? What other indicators do you think should be used to define economic success rather than a simple increase in production?
3. Can you think of any examples of planned obsolescence? What are the different ways companies ensure planned obsolescence?
4. What are some ways companies can extend their product life cycles?
5. How can raw materials be used in a sustainable way?
6. What will the world look like in 100 years if we persist with a linear economy? Is it even possible to move away from the capitalist economic model of consumption? If so, how? If not, why?

### 3. Video: Solving The Plastics Problem

You are going to watch a video by Bloomberg Originals called "Can the Circular Economy Solve Our Plastics Problem?"

Watch the video here: <https://youenglishpal.com/blog/esl-conversation-lesson-plan-circular-economy/>

While you watch the video, answer the following questions:

#### Multiple choice

- How is our current system of recycling?  
**a) inefficient**                      b) sufficient                      c) efficient
- By how much has plastic consumption increased since the 1970s?  
a) doubled                      b) tripled                      **c) quadrupled**
- What has contributed to large amounts of plastic ending up in the ocean and in landfills?  
a) laziness                      **b) confusing labels**                      c) a lack of education
- Where have microplastics been detected?  
a) human food                      **b) human blood**                      c) human bone tissue

#### Sentence completion

- The Netherlands has an **impressive (80%)** rate of recycling.
- Despite positive signs in the Netherlands recycling aims, it is still behind **schedule**.
- In Senegal, local people have started their own **informal** circular economy.
- The Indonesian government aims to achieve **near zero** plastic pollution in the ocean by 2040.

#### Short answer

- By how much has plastic pollution in oceans in Indonesia already reduced by thanks to local initiatives? **15%**
- What must the circular economy be if it is going to function properly? **A collective effort**
- What might waste pickers in Senegal lose because of government plans to outsource recycling? **Their livelihoods**
- What have we picked up over the last 100 years or so? **Problematic consumer habits**

## 4. Circular Economy Conversation Questions

1. Which would be most effective in creating a circular economy: government regulations or encouraging businesses to make changes voluntarily? Why?
2. Is it realistic to expect all businesses to extend the life cycle of their products and reduce waste? How could this be achieved? What are the barriers to this? Can you think of any ideas for specific industries?
3. How would the transition to a circular economy affect employment?
4. Why might there be opposition to the concept of a circular economy?
5. In what ways could a circular economy be damaging for businesses?
6. Is it useful to focus on changing methods of production rather than changing the culture of consumption?
7. If the circular economy is dependent on reusing waste, doesn't that mean we will forever rely on producing more and more waste to meet ever growing consumer demands?
8. Should a circular economy seek to revise capitalism to make it more sustainable or seek to replace it altogether with a new economic model?

## 5. Circular Economy Writing Task

Write about your opinion of the circular economy. Try to use some of the vocabulary you learned earlier in this lesson. In your answer, you could include some of the following topics:

- What the circular economy involves.
- The benefits of a circular economy.
- Any problems with the circular economy.

### **Alternative exam practice question:**

Some people argue that unless we transition to a circular economy, there could be disastrous consequences for the world and mankind. Others argue that there is no alternative, and any attempts to deviate from our current economic model could result in economic disaster. Discuss both sides and give your own opinion.