



THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE SUSTAINABILITY TEAM

# How to conduct a waste audit.



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## 1. Introduction

Recycling and waste might not be the the most popular topic in your office, but it is one of the most visible environmental issues you can address. It can be really easy to assess through a simple audit, which can be communicated to staff, identifying areas of misunderstanding and making improvement.

## 2. Important things you want to find out:

1. The recycling rate, or the proportion of recycling compared to landfill waste. This is measured by taking the weight of each and calculating the percentage that recycling makes up the total.
2. The amount of 'contamination'. This means waste in the wrong bins, and is a particular issue for recycling bins, as recycling contaminated with landfill waste can be rejected by the recycling centre and the whole lot rejected!

## 3. Things you will need:

1. Rubber gloves!
2. A plastic or paper sheet (we used a couple of flipchart sheets).
3. Luggage scales (if you want to weigh your bins).

## 4. How it works:

1. Weigh the recycling and landfill bins and record the weights in kg. Calculate the recycling rate formula for this = ( weight of recycling / (weight of landfill + weight of recycling ) ) /100.
2. Carefully empty the bins onto the sheets on the ground.
3. Check through the recycling to see if there are any incorrect items within it. Record this, and take photos or note down the details of any items you are not sure about. You can send these to The Sustainability Team or check online about what can and can't be recycled.
4. Do a visual check of the landfill bin (if you don't want to tip it out) to see if any recycling items have been put in by accident. Record the results.

## 5. Reporting back:

Report back to your department on:

- Rates of recycling and contamination.
- Any items put in the wrong bins and where they should go.
- Maybe set some targets for improvement, then repeat the audit a few days, weeks or months later and see whether things have changed!

Further guidance: [WRAP has a useful waste audit](#)