

# How to Conduct a Classroom/Lunchroom Waste Audit

## Materials needed

- Waste containers labeled for garbage, recycling, and compost
- Two washable plastic tarps
- Plastic gloves and safety glasses for each student on the sorting team
- A scale to measure the waste in pounds
- Parent/guardian permission slip

## Procedure

1. Obtain permission from school administration and parents. Find a sample permission letter below.
2. On the day of the audit you will collect garbage, recycling, and compost (see table below). Place the containers where trashcans are usually located. If you are doing a classroom audit, instruct students to put their waste in the correct containers throughout the day. If you are performing a lunchroom audit, work with your food service staff to place the containers in the lunchroom. Assign student monitors to ensure that the correct bins are used.

GARBAGE	RECYCLING	COMPOST
Thin plastic bags, wrappers, Styrofoam, milk cartons, drink pouches, pens and pencils, meat, dairy, greasy foods, soiled paper	Paper, aluminum and tin, glass jars and bottles, plastic containers and bottles	Fruits, vegetables, landscape clippings

3. Divide your class into three groups: sorting, weighing, and analysis.
4. At the end of the collection period, have the sorting team dump the recycling and garbage onto separate tarps and sort into these groups:

GARBAGE	RECYCLING
Meat, dairy, greasy foods	Paper and cardboard
Soiled paper and wooden pencils	Aluminum and tin
Plastic wrappers, drink pouches and pens	Glass
Styrofoam	Plastic

5. Have the weighing team weigh the wet waste, recyclable, and non recyclable waste separately. Have the analysis team record each weight on the waste audit worksheet (below).
6. Complete the worksheet with your class and have a discussion about the implications of your results. How much of your waste ends up in a landfill? How long will it be there? If you do not already have one in place, consider starting a [composting program](#).

Sample Permission Slip

On (date) \_\_\_\_\_ our class will be performing a waste audit to study the amount of waste generated by our school. This will involve the handling of school garbage from our classroom and/or lunchroom. Students will only handle dry waste. Students will be provided with gloves and safety glasses, we will coach them in safety procedures, and every precaution will be taken to ensure your child's safety. A faculty member will be present. We need your permission for your child to participate in this activity. If this meets your approval, please sign the statement below.

If you have any questions please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at School.

My child, \_\_\_\_\_ has my permission to participate in the school waste audit to be conducted at School.

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Waste Audit Worksheet

GARBAGE				RECYCLING			COMPOST		
SORTING GROUP	Time in landfill	Weight	Group % of total garbage weight	SORTING GROUP	Weight	Group % of total recycling weight	Weight	% of total weight	
Meat, dairy, greasy foods	2-4 months			Paper and cardboard					
Soiled paper	2-4 weeks			Aluminum and tin			<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 100%; position: relative;"> <span style="position: absolute; top: 0; right: 0;">X</span> </div>		
Plastic wrappers, drink pouches, pens	500 + years			Glass					
Styrofoam	1 million years			Plastic					
TOTAL WEIGHT OF GARBAGE				TOTAL WEIGHT OF RECYCLING				TOTAL WEIGHT OF COMPOST	
GARBAGE AS % OF TOTAL WEIGHT				RECYCLING AS % OF TOTAL WEIGHT				COMPOST AS % OF TOTAL WEIGHT	