



Sustainability Advice

Sustainability is a journey, with different paths to follow along the way. The materials you print on make up one of the paths, moving towards those that are more sustainable than some of the traditional materials as new options become available.

There are many new and highly innovative materials that made big improvements on what we had. There is no perfect, one material yet that resolves all the issues and works for everyone – ours is a complicated industry with many different needs that the materials must fulfil. But don't let perfection be the enemy of the good: journeys comprise many steps forward to reach the goal.

When choosing your materials there are many things to consider. Materials that are better in one area may not be in others; focus on improvements on what you currently use. Much of the information might be outside your current knowledge or experience; certifications, standards and ecolabels can help here (see the Certifications content).

The list below of things to consider is intended as a guide. It's important to think about what happens during the whole life cycle of a material, from raw materials through manufacture the processing you and others carry out to achieve the final product and what happens when it's fulfilled its current purpose. But don't worry if you can't find answers to everything; it's a journey.

- **Think circular**
- **Protecting resources: materials that have recycled content or are recyclable – this includes those made from a single material rather than different things sandwiched together, or that can be printed on directly so there is no need to laminate other materials on**
- **Protecting biodiversity and avoiding deforestation: certifications for timber-based products, cotton materials, other bio-based materials help here**
- **Energy efficiency: does making the material need a lot of energy, if so what is the manufacturer doing about it; is it more energy efficient for you to use**
- **Minimising pollution: how was the material made or grown, what processing will be needed over its life and at end-of-life; what is the manufacturer doing to avoid hazardous substances**
- **And think about what you will be doing to the material - will the processes affect reuse or recycling, for example.**

Social Issues

Social issues are also part of making sustainable choices. Some manufacturers make strong commitments in this area and to global or local schemes, which set standards and require evidence they are being met. A few examples are:

- **B-Corps certification tells you that a business is meeting high standards of verified performance, accountability and transparency on factors from employee benefits and charitable giving to supply chain practices and input materials.**
- **The Ethical Trading Initiative members are committed to workers' rights; the FairTrade standard includes social, financial and environmental criteria.**



Considerations for fitness for purpose:

- **When, where and how the material will be used**
- **How long it needs to last (if the material is not durable enough and therefore the item needs replacing, this involves the impacts of processing again)**
- **What will happen after use – do the material and process allow the item to be reused or repurposed? Will the end user do so? How easy will it be for them to do so?**
- **For clothing, additional considerations are washing and ironing temperatures, and ease of drying**

For more information, look on the General Guidance display for information on the Circular Economy model.

There are many regional schemes, such as the UK Living Wage Foundation as well. Asking suppliers or prospective suppliers about what they are doing (or looking on their websites), then learning more about any such schemes they are part of will help with improving the social aspects of your path to more sustainable choices.

