

Christmas shopping online? Don't fall into the ratings trap

Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

1 Warmer

Complete the shopping questionnaire.

- How often do you shop online?
 - every day
 - once a week
 - once a month
 - never
- What do you buy online? You can choose more than one answer.
 - music
 - clothes
 - books
 - electronic goods
- What is the biggest problem with online shopping?
 - You can't actually see or touch the product.
 - security
 - the length of time it takes for your order to arrive
 - problems if you have to send a product back

2 Key words

Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers will help you.

product

review

rating

bin bag

blackout blind

- A _____ is a window cover that blocks out light. (para 1)
- A _____ is a written opinion about something. (para 1)
- A _____ is a measurement of how good something is. (para 1)
- A _____ is something that you can buy. (para 2)
- A _____ is a plastic bag you put rubbish in. (para 2)

jar

influences

reassuring

psychologist

likely

- If something is _____, it makes you feel less worried. (para 3)
- If something _____ you, it affects the way you think or behave. (para 3)
- A _____ is someone who studies how people's minds work and how this affects their behaviour. (para 3)
- If something is _____ to be bad, it will probably be bad. (para 4)
- A _____ is a glass container with a lid used for keeping food such as jam. (para 5)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

- What did the author want to buy?
- How much time does the author of the article have between the time his baby goes to bed and the time he falls asleep himself?
- What is Derek Powell's job?
- Why do annoying TV adverts work?

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Oliver Burkeman

10 November, 2017

- 1 In the summer of 2016, I made a mistake that, I now know, is common when people shop online. Our baby goes to bed before dark so I wanted to make the bedroom darker. I found a blackout blind that promised to stick to the windows as if by magic (though, actually, by static electricity). It got a lot of reviews online but a bad average rating because, sometimes, it didn't stick to the window at all.
- 2 But, I thought that a product bought by so many people couldn't be so bad. Unfortunately, it was. For the money I paid, I could have put bin bags on the windows, then spent the rest of the money on a nice bottle of whisky to enjoy in the 45 minutes I have each evening between the baby going to bed and me falling asleep.
- 3 It's reassuring, I suppose, to learn from an article in *Psychological Science* that this is something all humans do: the number of other people who have chosen a product influences us more than what the people thought of the product. The Stanford University psychologist Derek Powell showed people pairs of products as they might see them on Amazon, one with a bad average rating with lots of reviews, the other with a low rating with only a few reviews. People chose the product with more reviews.
- 4 This makes no sense: if a product has lots of bad reviews, the product is more likely to be bad.
- 5 This is the "law of large numbers". If you ask 1,000 people to guess the number of sweets in a jar, the average of their guesses will be very close to the truth. If you ask three people, it probably won't. So, if you have to choose between two such products, it's better to choose the one with fewer reviews because there's a bigger chance the people who hated it are wrong and their bad experience won't be the same as yours.
- 6 This is similar to how we start to like anything we see a lot, even if it is bad. That's one reason that annoying TV adverts work. They're annoying but we notice them more because they're annoying and if you notice something a lot, you will start to like it.
- 7 In both cases, people seem to feel reassured if they see lots of product reviews or see an advert lots of times. With online shopping, you have to think carefully to understand that the more people who bought a product, the more you should believe what they say – and not buy something if they hated it.
- 8 This is the kind of thinking it's much harder to practise when you're tired.

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4 Comprehension check

Match the beginnings and endings to make statements about the text.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The author bought the blackout blind because ... | a. ... their average guess will be very close to the true number. |
| 2. He thinks it would have been better and cheaper to ... | b. ... the fact that they are annoying means that we notice them. |
| 3. People are influenced more by the number of people who choose a product ... | c. ... a lot of people reviewed it online. |
| 4. If you ask 1,000 people to guess the number of sweets in a jar, ... | d. ... put bin bags on the windows. |
| 5. People don't like annoying TV adverts but ... | e. ... if a lot of people hated it. |
| 6. The author says you shouldn't buy something ... | f. ... than by what they thought of the product. |

5 Chunks

Rearrange the words to make phrases or sentences from the text.

- no makes sense this
- close truth very to the
- between choose products two
- bad lots reviews of
- large law numbers the of
- bad a rating average

6 Prepositions

Choose the correct prepositions to complete the phrases.

- the summer **in / of** 2016
- close **from / to** the truth
- choose **among / between** two products
- by / from** magic
- in / for** both cases
- spend money **on / for**

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7 Word stress

Put these words from the text into two groups depending on their stress.

review	promise	product	enjoy
mistake	average	magic	asleep

A o o	B o o

8 Discussion

- What was the last thing you bought online? Why didn't you buy it in a shop?
- What kinds of things do you buy online? What do you prefer to buy in a shop? Why?
- Do you look at ratings of products before you buy them? Why? Why not?

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KEY

2 Key words

1. blackout blind
2. review
3. rating
4. product
5. bin bag
6. reassuring
7. influences
8. psychologist
9. likely
10. jar

3 Find the information

1. a blackout blind
2. 45 minutes
3. psychologist
4. because people notice them a lot

4 Comprehension check

1. c
2. d
3. f
4. a
5. b
6. e

5 Chunks

1. this makes no sense
2. very close to the truth
3. choose between two products
4. lots of bad reviews
5. the law of large numbers
6. a bad average rating

6 Prepositions

1. of
2. to
3. between
4. by
5. in
6. on

7 Word stress

A 0 0	B 0 0
promise	review
product	enjoy
average	mistake
magic	asleep