NEWS LESSON

The Returned Jacket Nobody Wants



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you order three sizes if returns were free?
2. What makes you hesitate before buying clothes online?
3. Would you pay a little more for a shop with a fitting room?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**logistics**	☐	A	a person whose job is to manage and check money records
2	**stock**	☐	B	the money you pay to send something by post
3	**destination**	☐	C	the strong effect that something has
4	**impact**	☐	D	the act of stopping an order that you made
5	**cancellation**	☐	E	amounts of money that you have to pay
6	**postage**	☐	F	the place where something is going
7	**accountant**	☐	G	the goods that a shop has ready to sell
8	**charges**	☐	H	the work of moving and storing goods

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

The label prints in seconds and the parcel leaves your life. Inside the retailer's warehouse, somebody still has to decide what that jacket is now worth.

1 You try on three jackets, keep one and seal the other two in their original bags. A returns label appears in seconds, and the parcel disappears from your life. Inside the retailer's system, however, the unwanted jackets begin a difficult journey in the wrong direction. They must be collected, opened, inspected and given a new destination. Some return to stock. Others end up losing value with every mile.

2 This is no small side operation. The US National Retail Federation expected around 19% of online sales to be returned in 2025. It also expected goods worth nearly $850 billion to come back to American retailers across all types of shopping that year. That figure is the value of the goods, not the cost of processing them, but it shows the scale of the problem. For a fashion business, a returned product is not simply a sale that vanished; it is a fresh logistics job with no guarantee of a second customer.

3 Each item may need collecting, transporting, checking, cleaning, repackaging and putting back into stock. If it is damaged or out of season, selling it again may be difficult. Some products are reduced in price, sold through other businesses or discarded. Research supported by the British Fashion Council has highlighted the environmental impact of clothing returns, including extra transport, wasted materials and garments that cannot be resold. A generous returns policy therefore has consequences for both company profits and the planet.

4 Retailers have started responding with return charges, shorter deadlines and stricter conditions. From a business perspective, making customers pay a small fee can help claw back some costs. But there is a risk: people who cannot try products on before buying them may decide the shop is no longer worth the trouble. In an October 2026 Guardian business column, an accountant argued that sensible companies should plan for the normal cost of returns instead of treating them as a surprise.

5 There is also a legal difference between returning something because you have changed your mind and returning a faulty product. In Britain, most online shoppers have a fourteen-day cancellation period after delivery, with another fourteen days to return the goods. They may have to cover the return postage for unwanted items when properly informed, while the retailer must normally refund the standard original delivery charge. A September investigation by Which? found that some well-known shops failed to meet their refund obligations, even when customers were entitled to their money back.

6 The more useful solution may begin before the customer clicks Buy. Accurate measurements, photographs showing clothes on different body types and more dependable product descriptions could prevent unnecessary orders. Customers, meanwhile, can avoid ordering a pile of items with little intention of keeping them. Easy returns remain an important part of online shopping, but pretending they cost nothing helps nobody understand the trade-offs involved.

Sources: The Guardian. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The $850 billion figure is what American retailers spend on processing returns. T F NG
2. A small return fee might help a shop recover some costs but could also lose it customers. T F NG
3. The accountant quoted in the Guardian column works for a clothing retailer. T F NG
4. A British shopper who cancels on the last allowed day still has two more weeks to return the goods. T F NG
5. The text says a returned product is just a lost sale and creates no extra work for the retailer. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

dependable	discarded	entitled	obligations	reduced	refunded	reluctant	scale

1. Stock that is too damaged to repair is often _____ and sent to landfill.
2. Shoppers are _____ to compensation if the goods arrive in poor condition.
3. Companies that break consumer law may fail to meet their legal _____ .
4. Reviews written by real customers are a more _____ guide to sizing than a shop's own photographs.
5. The sheer _____ of the operation surprised even experienced managers.
6. Last season's coats have been _____ in price to clear the shelves.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time the parcel reached the depot, the season _____ . (END)
2. Each returned jacket _____ by a member of staff before it goes back on sale. (INSPECT)
3. If shoppers _____ the real cost, they might order fewer items. (KNOW)
4. The faulty jacket _____ back to the supplier last week. (SEND)
5. The retailer _____ its returns policy twice since January. (CHANGE)

7 Language focus: collocations

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many verbs go with only a few nouns. Ask which verb a native speaker would choose.

charge	cover	face	lift	refund	strike	waive

1. Retailers must _____ a balance between low prices and happy customers.
2. Shoppers may have to _____ the return postage themselves.
3. Some sellers _____ customers a small fee to make them think before ordering.
4. Companies that break the rules may _____ serious criticism.
5. Many shops offer a full _____ if the product is faulty.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Who should cover the cost when an online size guide is wrong?
2. Would a small return fee change how carefully you choose?
3. What would make online shopping easier without sending so many parcels back?

9 Role-play: should the shop charge for returns?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the shop owner

You run a small clothes shop online. Too many parcels come back and you're losing money. You want to charge a fee for returns. Explain why, and listen to your customer.

Student B · the regular customer

You often order two sizes and send one back. You don't want to pay a fee. Say why returns matter to you and suggest another way to cut the number of parcels.

Useful phrases

I'm afraid we can't afford free returns any more.
I'd rather pay a small fee than lose the service.
That's fair, but I can't try anything on first.
What if we improved the size guide?
I'd be happy to keep ordering if the fee stays low.
Could we find a compromise?

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree on a fee, and was it fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 G · 3 F · 4 C · 5 D · 6 B · 7 A · 8 E

4 True, false or not given

1 F · 2 T · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 discarded · 2 entitled · 3 obligations · 4 dependable · 5 scale · 6 reduced

6 Verb forms

1 had ended or ended · 2 is inspected · 3 knew · 4 was sent · 5 has changed

7 Language focus

1 strike · 2 cover · 3 charge · 4 face · 5 refund

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