Easy Access English

Designed for the Masses

Read the text and using the following expressions, answer the questions giving your opinion.

I really feel that
I do think that
It seems to me that
In my view
Clearly

Obviously
Essentially
Basically
However
Furthermore

IKEA aims (to quote a US press release), to provide « **Beauty and function for the masses »** « The chain has continually evolved, but the fundamental idea has always remained the same; creating affordable, well-designed furniture for the masses, providing versatility and clever design solutions… The idea behind IKEA, is beautiful, functional and affordable products that can be easily interchanged with complementary accessories. »

Ikea in Holland states their aim to help "Assert the rights of ordinary people to take charge of their own interior design ». Garth Collins, head of Chinese expansion has said '"According to the IKEA philosophy, IKEA it is not for the rich, it aims to improve the life of ordinary people,"

As a BBC News article put it « Whether it's couples fitting out their first one-bedroom flat, or parents of children who have woken up one day as teenagers and require the replacement of all their cartoon-character themed bedroom furnishings, all must go to Ikea as a modern rite of passage. The advent of Ikea may leave customers with the unnerving feeling of recognising all the furniture in other people's homes, but there is no doubt that it has improved our interiors. »

With their 'design for the masses' philosophy echoing around the globe Ikea cannot claim to be offering exclusive or original design. The worry is that this approach could one day run lead to a negative perception of IKEA design being too ordinary. What do you think?
(*By J.Franklin)*

1. Has this mass appeal made IKEA too obviously identifiable?
2. Has IKEA become a negative word for some people?
3. Do the IKEA designers need to start offering some really unique, special edition design to surprise their customers?
4. Will you start to lose out to your competitors (for example Alinea) if you are not able to diversify more?
5. Will 'the masses' always be content to have the same furniture as their neighbours?
6. Do you think that you are trying too hard to cater for 'most people, do you offer enough unusual design for people with unusual taste?
7. Give some examples of items **not** designed for the majority of people.

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Read the text paying attention to your intonation and pronunciation.

Scandinavian Dreams: DIY, Democratisation and IKEA

There is a scene in *Fight Club* where the protagonist played by Ed Norton vividly discusses how he, and presumably society, consumes IKEA furnishings. He describes the consumption of IKEA furnishings as part of an attempt to reproduce the lifestyles shown in the magazine-style phone catalogues.

Through the practices of consumption and arrangement of IKEA furnishings, he conforms to this consumer lifestyle, which he would soon attempt to bring down. The film highlights one man's attempt to break free from an anodyne consumer society and tracks his psychological journey. This scene from *Fight Club* highlights the visibility of IKEA as a **global commodity lifestyle brand**. In the film IKEA is a metaphor for a sterile, depthless consumer society. IKEA, as *Fight Club* points out, does indeed represent an new-middle-class consumption-focused lifestyle, and also has a role in the blurring of class and class-cultures, witnessed in its ability to blur notions of high and mass or popular culture.

In the post-modern world, the division between the formerly separate spheres of high and mass or popular culture has become increasingly blurred. IKEA is an example of a modernist-design furnishings company, which adheres to the philosophies, theories and aesthetic styling of modernism, including the famous maxim "form follows function."

Central, to modernism, is the notion of distinction, a distinction between the past and the present-future. But there is also a distinction centred on class. Modernism as an intentional reaction against the elitism of 19 th century bourgeois culture, and a movement which sought to provide design for the poorest classes through the use of new materials and more modern mass-production techniques.

IKEA is a modernist-design company par excellence. It obeys many of modernism's central tenets. It places a great deal of emphasis upon innovative but functional design, mass production, the use of new, cheaper materials, and offers its products to all social classes, particularly an ever-expanding mass-middle-class.

IKEA operates on the concept of "**democratic design**." Such a concept was derived from a trip taken by IKEA founder Ingvar Kamprad, to the Milan design fair in the 1950's. There he saw inside the homes of "ordinary" Italians with their "heavy, dark furniture," a marked contrast to the contemporary furniture on display at the fair. From this developed the concept of "democratic design": "a design that was not just good but also from the start adapted to machine production and thus cheap to produce. With a design of that kind, and the innovation of self-assembly, we could save a great deal of money in the factories and on transport, as well as keep down the price to the customer" (Kamprad, qtd. in Torekull 53).

Hence IKEA's democratic design runs from design through production to consumption. Good, innovative and functional design is essential to their brand image. The production process must be based on mass machine production, which will lower the overall cost to the company. Such cost-savings are passed on to the consumer through cheaper products. This is where the democratic element comes into the process. It makes modern-design furniture available for the masses, for those formerly denied access.

IKEA's "democratic design" offers cheap, mass-produced **modernist**-design furniture. Consequently, modernism as an aesthetic style and a sign of distinction becomes democratised, available to the majority of people in society. IKEA makes available elite, and modernist-design furniture, for mass cultural consumption.

(Source ‘Transformations’ **Buck Clifford Rosenberg**)

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Answer the following questions using these expressions:

Essentially	To all intents and	It seems that
Basically	purposes	It's obvious that
First and foremost	In brief	By all accounts
By and large	According to the article	Realistically

Questions:

1. Why does IKEA feature in the film Fight Club and what does the scene illustrate?
2. What does IKEA represent in this film and according to the author?
3. Why does IKEA contribute to the blurring between high and popular culture?
4. What is modernism according to this text?
5. Why is IKEA a good example of a modernist design company?
6. What is the idea of democratic design and what does it derive from?

Now give your **opinion** again using the expressions from the first page.

Your opinion:

1. Is democratic design sustainable or will it no longer be desirable at some point because of the very fact that it is mass-produced?

2. Does democratic **modernist** design still have a role to play today now that it is accessible to everyone or should other design styles now be used by Ikea for democratic design (for example democratic antique design or democratic baroque design or democratic exotic design..)?

3. What ideas do you have for diversifying IKEA's product range in order to maintain a long term, wide appeal?

4. Which of your competitors have imitated the 'Scandinavian' feel and 'modernist' design in their range?

5. Which of your competitors have a more varied range and appeal than IKEA?

6. Which departments in IKEA have the most varied design styles?

7. What do you think of these items?

Frank Flavell ***Michel Haillard*** ***Judson Beaumonts***





