

SHORT READ
bite-sized
nonfiction

The average ticket price for Taylor Swift's most recent tour was \$215. The average resale price was \$1,425!

THE

GREAT TICKET DISASTER

High prices. Long wait times. Glitchy websites. Why is it so tough to get concert tickets these days? **By Mary Kate Frank**

Kaya Roy couldn't believe her luck. Her favorite artist, Taylor Swift, was on tour—and performing near Kaya's hometown. Even better? The concert was the night before Kaya's 15th birthday.

When tickets went on sale, Kaya's mom tried to buy seats. But the website kept crashing. Four frustrating hours went by. And then? The concert sold out!

Later, Kaya searched ticket **resale** sites only to find that the cheapest seats were 800 bucks. "I gave up," she remembers. "I was so disappointed."

Kaya is certainly not the only one who's had ticket troubles recently. Many fans say getting concert tickets has become nearly impossible. Websites can be **glitchy** when large numbers of people use them at the same time. Tickets to top shows are more expensive than ever (\$111 each, on average). Extra fees drive up the cost even more. And if lower-priced seats are available, automated computer programs often buy them up instantly.

Why is this happening? And can anything be done to fix this problem?

Swarming Bots

Buying concert tickets wasn't always such a headache. A few decades ago, you could purchase tickets over the phone (though it might take hours to get through to someone). Or you could go to a box office and wait in line. If the artist was especially popular, you might camp out the night before to be one of the first in line. But waiting with other fans was all part of the fun.

Today most tickets are sold online—and the vast majority of them by Ticketmaster, the largest ticket seller in the world.

If you want to buy a concert ticket, your best bet would be to try to buy it in a presale, when tickets are made available to a select group before the general public. To qualify for a presale, you might need to use a certain kind of credit card, for example, or buy the musician's new album.

Octavio Jones/TAS2/Getty Images for TAS Rights Management (Taylor Swift)

Getting into a presale doesn't guarantee a seat though. Websites can crash when **demand** for tickets gets high, especially when resellers are involved.

Resellers buy tickets in order to sell them to someone else for as high a price as possible. They use computer programs called bots to help them do it. These bots swarm a website the moment tickets go on sale and can scoop up hundreds of tickets in seconds.

Let's say you beat the bots and manage to score a ticket. Wonderful! But yikes—the service and delivery fees are *steep*. These fees can increase the final ticket price by as much as 32 percent. That means a \$100 ticket could actually cost \$132. What's more, the ticket company might not **disclose** the additional charges until you're checking out.

Outraged Fans

Many Americans are outraged by how difficult and expensive it has become to buy concert tickets—and they say Ticketmaster is largely to blame. They point out that much of the time, Ticketmaster is the only option for tickets. They say the company is too powerful.

Does Ticketmaster have too much power? The U.S. government is now looking into that question.

When a company is the only one selling a product or service, the government can make that company break into several smaller companies. Those companies then have to compete with each other, which is good for customers. Think about it: If you had a choice about where to buy concert tickets, Ticketmaster would have to work harder to get your business. It might improve its website or lower its service fees, for example.

Ticketmaster has insisted that it already competes with other ticket sellers. (It's true that companies like Eventbrite sell tickets, though not nearly as many and typically not for the most popular performers and **venues**.) According to Ticketmaster, bots and high demand are the reasons tickets have become so hard to get. And demand *is* high:



In the mid-1960s, the Beatles were the biggest band in the world. Beatles tickets usually cost no more than \$6 (\$58 in today's money). Fans often camped out in front of the box office to get a good spot in line.

The day pre-sale tickets to Swift's tour became available last November, a whopping 14 million people tried to purchase tickets on the Ticketmaster site.

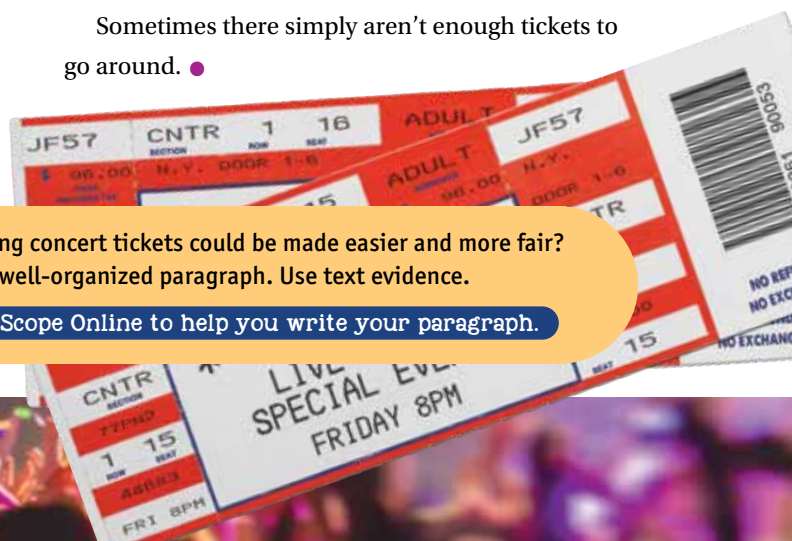
Fixing the Problem

Can anything be done to make ticket sales more fair? In June, Ticketmaster and other companies pledged to offer customers all-in pricing, meaning they will make the total cost of a ticket, including all fees, clear from the start. Eric Budish, a professor of economics at the University of Chicago, supports this change. In addition, says Budish, artists could ban the resale of their cheapest tickets so there would always be affordable options.

Computer programs could also be developed to detect bots and block them. There could be stricter rules about when tickets can be resold and for how much.

Yet even a perfect system might not have helped Kaya. After all, Taylor Swift is a superstar with millions of adoring fans. For every person who wanted a ticket to get one, Swift would have had to play more than 900 stadium shows. That's a concert every night for two-and-a-half years!

Sometimes there simply aren't enough tickets to go around. ●



SHORT WRITE

What's one way the process of buying concert tickets could be made easier and more fair? Answer this question in a well-organized paragraph. Use text evidence.



Use the Short Write Kit at Scope Online to help you write your paragraph.