

THE TICKET PRICE PROBLEM

Getting concert tickets has become nearly impossible for many young fans. Who's to blame—and what can be done to fix the ticket sale system? BY MARY KATE FRANK

Kaya Roy couldn't believe her luck. Her favorite singer, Taylor Swift, was going to be performing in a nearby city. The show would be the night before Kaya's 15th birthday. Kaya's family planned to give her tickets as a gift.

The day tickets went on sale, Kaya was in school. Her mom went online to buy seats. The website kept crashing. Four hours went by. Kaya's mom *still* had no tickets. The concert sold out.

Later, Kaya searched for tickets on ticket

resale sites. The cheapest seats were \$800 each. "I just gave up at that point," she says.

Kaya is not alone. Many young music fans say getting concert tickets has become almost impossible. Websites crash before you can check out. Tickets to top shows are more expensive than ever. And if cheap seats *are* available, ticket resellers often scoop them up. Then they resell the tickets, usually at higher prices.

Who's to blame for this broken system? And can it be fixed?

VOCABULARY

exclusive: available to only a few people

guarantee: to make something certain

demand: people's need or desire to buy a certain product or service

exorbitant: far beyond what is fair, reasonable, or expected

competition: other businesses that sell the same goods and services



PAUSE AND THINK: Why couldn't Kaya's mom buy concert tickets online?

Then and Now

Buying concert tickets wasn't always so tricky. In 1964, the Beatles were the biggest band in the world. Screaming fans followed them everywhere they went. Tickets to their shows usually cost no more than \$6. (That's about \$58 in today's money.)



KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES FOR TAS RIGHTS MANAGEMENT (TAYLOR SWIFT); SHUTTERSTOCK.COM (TICKET)



\$215

That was the average ticket price for Taylor Swift's most recent tour.

To get tickets, you lined up at the ticket office. Sometimes people camped out overnight to get a good spot. Waiting with other fans was part of the fun.

Today the way we buy concert tickets is very different. Most tickets are sold online by a company called Ticketmaster. It's the country's biggest ticket seller.

Many events have **exclusive** presales, or early sales. To get into a presale, you might need a certain credit card. Other times you might have to buy the musician's newest album first.

Getting into a presale doesn't **guarantee** a seat either. Websites might crash when **demand** gets high.

Plus many tickets are bought by ticket resellers. They use bots—computer programs that can buy hundreds of tickets in seconds. The

resellers then sell the tickets again—often at **exorbitant** prices.

PAUSE AND THINK: How has the way we buy concert tickets changed?

Too Powerful?

Let's say you *did* score a Taylor Swift ticket. At checkout, you might have noticed that the final price was higher. Why? For years, ticket companies have added service charges and other fees. These fees could add as much as 32 percent to the final cost.

Many fans are angry about ticket prices. They blame Ticketmaster. They say the company doesn't have enough **competition**. Fans don't have much choice about where they buy tickets. So Ticketmaster can charge high fees.

Does Ticketmaster have too much power? The U.S. government is looking into that question. Ticketmaster says no. The company says it still faces competition. It blames bots and high ticket demand for fans' troubles.

PAUSE AND THINK: Why do fans blame Ticketmaster for high prices?

Fixing the Problem

Can anything be done to make buying tickets fairer? In June, Ticketmaster said it would start showing a ticket's total cost from the start. That means no more surprise fees at checkout.

Eric Budish teaches business at the University of Chicago. He also studies ticket sales. Budish thinks showing a ticket's full price is a good idea. He says musicians could also ban the resale of their cheapest tickets. Then ticket resellers won't be able to resell \$49 seats for \$500.

BEYONCÉ
LIVE IN
CONCERT

\$1,200

That's how much a floor seat cost for a recent Beyoncé concert.

But even a perfect ticket sale system might not have helped Kaya. Too many people wanted Taylor Swift tickets. The singer would have had to play more than 900 stadium shows to make every fan happy.

Sometimes there just aren't enough tickets to go around. •

PAUSE AND THINK: How can musicians help solve the ticket price problem?

DRAKE
LIVE IN
CONCERT

\$69.50

That was the lowest ticket price for Drake's summer tour. (Many of those tickets were resold for hundreds of dollars.)



5 Questions About Concert Tickets

WHAT TO DO: Answer the questions below. Use full sentences.

GO FURTHER!
Find more activities online.

WHO?

1. Who is Kaya Roy?

WHAT?

2. What was Kaya supposed to get as a gift for her 15th birthday?

WHEN?

3. When did Kaya realize she wasn't going to get that gift?

WHERE?

4. Where do most people buy concert tickets?

HOW?

5. How do ticket resellers buy hundreds of tickets in seconds?

Answers are in the Answer Key at Action Digital.

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/TAS23/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.

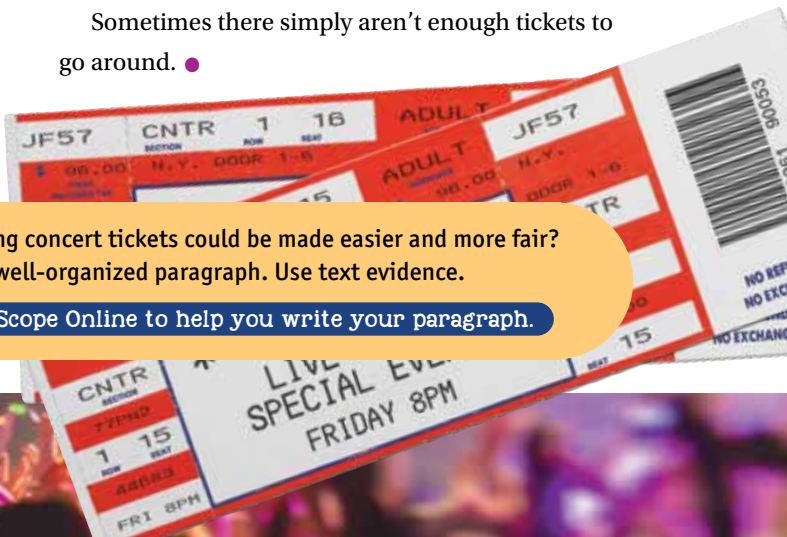
Fixing the Problem

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.