

The Right to Repair

“If you can’t repair it, do you really own it?”

Warm up

- What is the last thing you had to repair or replace because it broke?
- What products do you think are intentionally difficult to fix?
- Do you repair things yourself, ask someone for help, or just buy a new one?
- Should companies be allowed to control how you repair a product you paid for?
- Which items from your life *should* last longer? (phones, clothes, laptops, furniture...)
- Do you think manufacturers sometimes make things “weaker on purpose”?



1. Which items are difficult to repair? Look at the images and answer the questions.

- How easy or difficult is it to repair each item? (cheap, expensive, impossible?)
- What makes the repair difficult? (design, software, materials, cost, skills, etc.)
- Who controls the repair, you, an independent shop, or the manufacturer?



Smartphones



Home Appliances



Furniture



Cars



Clothes



Watches & Jewellery



2. Work in pairs or a group of three. Each student reads one story, retells it in their own words, and answers follow-up questions.

Story 1 – HP “Ink DRM”: Printers That Blocked All Non-HP Cartridges (2023)

In 2023, thousands of HP printer owners woke up to find their printers suddenly refusing to print. Overnight, a software update added something called ‘ink DRM’, a system that blocks all non-HP cartridges.

If someone inserted a cheaper third-party ink cartridge, even one that had worked perfectly the day before, the printer displayed: “Cartridge Error: Protected Cartridge Installed.”



People were furious because HP’s own ink is extremely expensive; some consumer groups pointed out that HP ink costs more per millilitre than luxury perfume or vintage champagne. Customers posted videos smashing their printers, and several lawsuits were filed in the US and Europe.

Under pressure, HP offered compensation, but only in the US and insisted the update was “for security reasons.” Consumer groups called it a “forced monopoly,” and the case became one of the strongest arguments for the global Right to Repair movement.

Story 2 – Nintendo Joy-Con Drift: A Global Hardware Failure (2017–present)

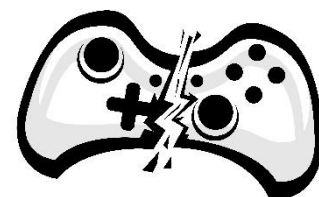
Since 2017, millions of Nintendo Switch users have experienced a problem known as “Joy-Con drift”, where the controller moves characters even when nobody touches it.

Engineers later discovered the problem came from cheap joystick components that wore out quickly, sometimes after only a few months.

For years, Nintendo refused to admit it was a design flaw. They charged €40–€60 per repair, which made families with multiple controllers extremely frustrated.

The issue became so widespread that:

- over 10,000 complaints were filed in Europe
- France opened an official consumer-protection investigation
- law firms in the US and UK launched lawsuits
- YouTube filled with DIY tutorials showing how to fix the joystick for €3



Only after years of negative press did Nintendo quietly start offering free repairs but even today, not all countries are included.

The case raised major questions about whether companies should be forced to use durable parts, especially when millions of children rely on the product.

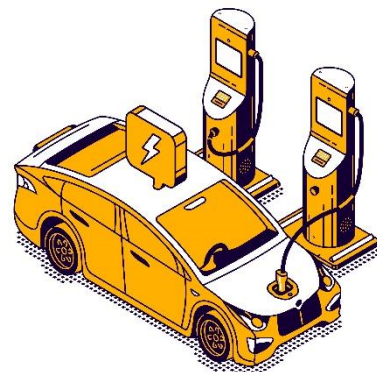
Story 3 – Tesla Removes Features From a Car After It Was Sold (2020)

In 2020, a man bought a used Tesla Model S from a respected dealership.

The car came with expensive software features — Enhanced Autopilot and Full Self-Driving — which were clearly listed in the sales documents.

But one week later, Tesla remotely connected to the vehicle and disabled both features, claiming that the new owner had not “purchased software transfer rights.”

The buyer was shocked. As he put it: “I bought the car legally. How can the company reach inside it and take things away?”



Tesla argued that software belongs to the company, not the owner, and that upgrades don't automatically transfer when the car is resold.

After intense media coverage and online backlash, Tesla eventually restored the features.

But the incident sparked a huge debate about digital ownership:

- If a company can remove features remotely, do you really “own” a product?
- Should software be treated like a physical part of the car?
- What prevents a company from disabling other features in the future?

The story became a key example used by Right-to-Repair activists worldwide.



3. In your pairs/groups discuss the questions below about exercise 2.

What do these cases show about how customers react to company decisions?

Who had more power in these stories, the user or the manufacturer, and is that balance fair?

Which case sets the most dangerous precedent if it becomes normal, and why?

Should people have the legal right to repair and modify products they own? Why or why not?

Is it ever acceptable for a company to remotely disable features someone paid for?

Do these cases affect your trust in the brand?



5. Match these words to their definitions. You will hear them at the end of the lesson in a short video.

- | | | |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| a. interchangeable parts | 3 | 1. To confirm something is official or approved |
| b. parts pairing | 5 | 2. When a product is designed to stop working earlier than necessary |
| c. schematics | 4 | 3. Different components that can be swapped without problems |
| d. to disable | 6 | 4. Technical drawings that show how a device is built |
| e. obsolescence | 2 | 5. A system that links a part to one specific device |
| f. to authenticate | 1 | 6. To stop something from functioning normally |



6. Fill in the gaps with the correct vocab from exercise 5.

- a. Some manufacturers use **parts pairing** so a device won't accept unofficial components, even if they work perfectly.
- b. Before modern electronics, many household machines used **interchangeable parts** so replacing a broken piece took only a few minutes.
- c. Independent repair shops often struggle because companies refuse to release official **schematics** showing how the device is built.
- d. A company can remotely **disable** a product if it detects software changes or unapproved repairs.
- e. Software **obsolescence** makes older devices slow, glitchy, and eventually unusable over time.
- f. You need your password to **authenticate** your identity.



7. Watch the TED Talk [Why Don't Companies Want You to Repair Your Stuff?](#)¹ and answer the questions below.

- a. Who invented the precise metal lathe in the 1790s? **Henry Maudslay**
- b. What major historical change did standardized parts help create? **The Industrial Revolution**
- c. How much e-waste did the world produce in 2022?
62 million tons
- d. What type of information do companies block to prevent repairs?
Product information and schematics
- e. What stops working on an iPhone if you swap the screens?
Automatic brightness adjustment (auto-brightness / True Tone)
- f. What must a John Deere technician do before a repaired tractor works again?
Authenticate the new part using authorized software
- g. What do manufacturers use to make devices stop receiving updates?
Software that gives devices predetermined end-of-life dates
- h. Which two U.S. states have banned parts pairing?
Colorado and Oregon
- i. How many cities worldwide have repair cafés?
Over 2,500 cities



8. Should the customer repair it or replace it? Who should pay?

Use: *The problem is that... / It doesn't make sense that... / I would request...*

- a. A 4-year-old laptop suddenly becomes extremely slow after a major software update.
The hardware still works, but the company no longer supports older models unless customers buy a newer version.
- b. A dishwasher breaks after 3 years. The machine cost €300, and the repair technician says it needs a €180 part plus labour.
The warranty has expired, but the customer feels the lifespan is too short.
- c. A coffee table is damaged after a small amount of water gets under the surface. The top layer begins to bubble and peel, even though the product was advertised as water-resistant.
The store says this is “normal wear and tear,” but the table is in the living room and the damage is very visible.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46RDkiy5h3U>