

Fix It or Toss It? The Right to Repair



Built from *The Most Important Environmental Movement You've Never Heard Of: The Right to Repair* by Ethan Yang,
Editor-in-Chief

Grades 4–8 · About 45 minutes · ★ everyone · ★★ older readers

Name _____

Date _____

1. Before You Read

★ Think of something you own that broke. What happened to it? Was it fixed, or thrown away?

★ Who do you think should be allowed to fix your phone or tablet: only the company that made it, or anyone you choose? Why?

2. The Short Version

Read this first. Older readers: read the full article too.

When a phone battery dies or a laptop screen cracks, most people buy a new one. Fixing it is often too expensive, and small repair shops often can't get the parts, tools, or instructions from the company that made it.

The **Right to Repair** is a movement that wants to change that. Its idea is simple: if you buy something, you should be allowed to fix it yourself or take it to any repair shop you choose. Supporters want laws that make companies sell parts, tools, and repair manuals at a fair price.

This matters for the planet. The world throws away more than 50 million tons of electronics every year. Old gadgets contain harmful materials like lead and mercury, and valuable ones like gold and copper. When things last longer, there is less trash and less mining.

Companies say only their own workers should do repairs, to keep customers safe and protect their designs. Critics say the real reason is money: a phone that is hard to fix is more likely to be replaced.

Farmers, hospital technicians, and lawmakers in Europe and several U.S. states are now pushing for repair rights.

3. Word Bank

Word	What it means
repair	to fix something that is broken
e-waste	thrown-away electronics, like old phones and computers
manufacturer	the company that makes a product
hazardous	dangerous, especially to health
planned obsolescence	making a product so it wears out or becomes hard to fix, so people buy a new one

★ Use **e-waste** in a sentence of your own.

4. Check Your Understanding

★ 1. What is the Right to Repair? Answer in one sentence.

★ 2. Why can't some small repair shops fix a broken phone?

★ 3. About how much electronic waste does the world throw away each year?

☐ 5 thousand tons ☐ 500 thousand tons ☐ more than 50 million tons

★ 4. Name one harmful material and one valuable material found inside old electronics.

★★ 5. Companies give reasons for keeping repairs to themselves. Critics give a different reason. Write one reason from each side.

5. Ethan's Ledger

Ethan weighs every big idea with three questions: *What do we win? What does it cost? And what's the catch?* Fill in the ledger for the *Right to Repair*.

	Your answer
The win: What good things happen if people can fix their own stuff?	
The cost: Who might lose something, or what could go wrong?	
The catch: What makes this harder than it sounds?	

6. Think Deeper

★ Ethan writes that a truly "smart" device is one that is "designed to last." Do you agree? What makes something smart?

★★ Farmers want to fix their own tractors. Hospitals want to fix their own machines. Why might repair rights matter even more for a farmer or a hospital than for a kid with a tablet?

7. Write Your Report

- **My answer:**
- **Reason 1 (from the article):**
- **Reason 2 (from the article):**
- **One thing the other side would say:**
- **My conclusion:**

For Teachers and Parents: Answer Key

Word bank sentence: Answers vary; check that the student uses e-waste to mean thrown-away electronics.

1. The idea that if you buy a product, you should be allowed to fix it yourself or take it to any repair shop you choose.
2. They often can't get the parts, tools, or repair information from the company that made it.
3. More than 50 million tons.
4. Harmful: lead, mercury, or flame retardants. Valuable: gold, silver, copper, or rare earth elements.
5. Companies: safety, data security, or protecting their designs. Critics: profit, because hard-to-fix products get replaced and repairs can be expensive.

Ledger (sample answers): Win: less e-waste, less mining, lower costs, people keep things longer. Cost: companies may earn less from repairs and new sales; a bad repair could be unsafe. Catch: companies must agree to share parts and manuals, which usually takes new laws.

Think deeper: Open answers. Strong answers connect "smart" to lasting, being fixable, and creating less waste. For farmers and hospitals, a broken machine can stop a harvest or delay patient care, so waiting for an official repair costs much more.

Report: Look for a clear answer, two reasons taken from the article, a fair statement of the other side, and a conclusion that matches the answer.