

Analysis of an Issue

Directions:

Read the statement and the instructions that follow it and then make any notes that will help you plan your response.

“People often complain that products are not made to last. They feel that making products that wear out fairly quickly wastes both natural and human resources. What they fail to see, however, is that such manufacturing practices keep costs down for the consumer and stimulate demand.”

Which do you find more compelling: the complaint about products that do not last or the response to it? Explain your positions using relevant reasons and/or examples from your own experience, observations, or reading.

Response Score 6

Many people feel that products are not made to last, and correspondingly, many natural and human resources are wasted. On the other hand, it can be noted that such manufacturing practices keep costs down and hence stimulate demand. In this discussion, I shall present arguments favoring the former statement and refuting the latter statement.

Products that are not made to last waste a great deal of natural and human resources. The exact amount of wasted natural resources depends on the specific product. For example in the automobile industry, the Yugo is the classic example of an underpriced vehicle that was not made to last. Considering that the average Yugo had (not “has” since they are no longer produced!) a life expectancy of two years and 25,000 miles, it was a terrible waste. Automobile industry standards today create vehicles that are warrantied for about five years and 50,000 miles. By producing cheap Yugo’s that last less than half as long as most cars are warrantied, the Yugo producer is wasting valuable natural resources. These same resources could be used by Ford or Toyota to produce an Escort or Tercel that will last twice as long, thereby reducing the usage of natural resources by a factor of two.

Human resources in this example are also wasteful. On the production side, manufacturers of a poor quality automobile, like the Yugo, get no personal or profession satisfaction from the fact that their product is the worst automobile in the United States. This knowledge adversely affects the productivity of the Yugo workers. Conversely, the workers at the Saturn plants constantly receive positive feedback on their successful products. Saturn prides itself with its reputation for quality and innovation—as is seen in its recent massive recall to fix a defect. This recall was handled so well that Saturn’s image was actually bolstered. Had a recall occurred at a Yugo plant, the bad situation would have become even worse. Another factor in the human resources area is the reaction by the consumer. A great deal of human resources has been wasted by Yugo owners waiting for the dreaded tow truck to show up to haul away the Yugo carcass. Any vehicle owner who is uncertain of his/her vehicle’s performance at 7 a.m. as he/she is about to drive to work, senses a great deal of despair. This is a great waste of human resources for the consumer.

While the consumer senses the waste of natural and human resources in a poor quality product, so does the manufacturer. People who argue that low quality manufacturing processes keep costs low for the consumer and hence stimulate demand should look at the Yugo example. In the mid-1980s the Yugo was by far the cheapest car in the United States at \$3,995. By 1991, the Yugo was no longer sold here and was synonymous with the word “lemon.”

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Explanation of Score 6

The response above is ambitious and somewhat unusual in its focusing on just one example, the lesson of the now defunct Yugo. Responses, especially outstanding ones; typically discuss several different examples that build support for the writer's position on the issue. This sample response, then, should not be taken as necessarily endorsing a one-example writing strategy. What it does serve to underscore is how much is to be gained by developing, not just listing, examples. The strength of the response lies in the organized and thorough way in which it explores the related aspects of the example it cites. The clear organizational scheme (two major points, with the second point subdivided) is readily apparent: Yugo's substandard cars (1) waste natural resources and (2) waste human resources by (a) destroying worker morale and productivity and (b) inconveniencing and upsetting customers. The persuasiveness of the writer's thinking is especially evident in the discussion of the second major point, the waste of human resources. Here the writer not only considers customers as well as workers, but also introduces the matter of the Saturn recall in order to show, by contrast with the case of Yugo, how a superior product, satisfied workers, and a company image good for marketing are interrelated.

The response complements its outstanding organizational clarity and thorough development with some syntactic variety and an occasional rhetorical flair (e.g., the image of the despairing Yugo owner waiting for "the dreaded tow truck ... to haul away the Yugo carcass" in paragraph 6). It is important to point out, however, that the writing is not perfect. For one thing, the opening paragraph is essentially a repeat of the question. In addition, the writing is not—and is not expected to be—entirely free from minor flaws (e.g., "profession satisfaction" [paragraph 4] should obviously be "professional satisfaction," and "Saturn prides itself with" [paragraph 5] should be "Saturn prides itself on"). Nevertheless, these occasional flaws are not serious enough to detract from the general impression that this is an excellent response to the question.