

Henry Ford Describes the First Assembly Line—Essay

Many writers and thinkers have written **essays** to share their opinions. Essays are short pieces of writing in which authors express their point of view about something. In this April 1, 1913 article, Henry Ford describes how assembly lines were used to increase automobile production.

Primary Source

A Ford car contains about five thousand parts—that is counting screws, nuts, and all. Some of the parts are fairly bulky and others are almost the size of watch parts. In our first assembling we simply started to put a car together at a spot on the floor and workmen brought to it the parts as they were needed in exactly the same way that one builds a house. When we started to make parts it was natural to create a single department of the factory to make that part, but usually one workman performed all of the operations necessary on a small part. The rapid press of production made it necessary to devise plans of **production** that would avoid having the workers falling over one another....

The first step forward in assembly came when we began taking the work to the men instead of the men to the work. We now have two general **principles** in all **operations**—that a man shall never have to take more than one step, if possibly it can be avoided, and that no man need ever stoop over.

...In short, the result is this: by the aid of scientific study one man is now able to do somewhat more than four did only a comparatively few years ago. That line established the **efficiency** of the method and we now use it everywhere. The assembling of the motor, formerly done by one man, is now divided into eighty-four operations—those men do the work that three times their number formerly did.

Excerpt from “The First Assembly Line,” an essay by Henry Ford, 1913. Colbert, David, ed. **Eyewitness to America**. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997, pp. 383-384.