

Chapter 2:

The 10,000-Hour Rule



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THESIS:

Gladwell's argument is that to acquire true mastering of a skill a person needs, not only talent and brilliance, but also at least 10,000 hours of practice, and to achieve this, a series of unique opportunities are needed.

FUN FACT:

This is the most famous thesis that Gladwell presented in Outliers, and it is what he is renowned for worldwide.



CLAIM 1: True expertise can only be acquired after one has had 10,000 hours of practice.

The Success of Mozart: gifted since he was 8?

NO, his first pieces were merely a compilation of many works by **other composers**. It is a common fallacy to say that he wrote *Symphony Number 1* **by himself** when he was eight years old.

After he was 20 and had already **practiced** for more than **10,000** hours, Mozart composed an original concerto that is now regarded as a **masterwork** (No.9 K. 271).



Mozart's First Symphony



Mozart's Symphony Number 9

CLAIM 1: True expertise can only be acquired after one has had 10,000 hours of practice.

Does it apply to everyone?

Daniel Levitin (neurologist) writes that “In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice-skaters, concert pianists[...] **this number** comes up again and again. [...] But no one has yet found a case in which true **world-class expertise** was accomplished in **less time** “ (Gladwell 2008, p. 40).

“It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all it needs to know to achieve true mastery” (Gladwell 2008, p. 40).

CLAIM 2:

What distinguishes one person from another in the world of success is practice, and extra practice is acquired through a series of extraordinary opportunities.

K. Anders Ericsson's Study in Berlin's Music Academy

A violin class was divided into 3 groups based on “talent” and “potential”

By the age of 20, the ones from the first group had totaled 10,000 hours, the second group totaled about 8,000 hours and the third group totaled about 4,000 hours of practice.



Bill Gates

He was given extraordinary opportunities that gave him

a huge advantage

over other people in the 1970s because by then, he had already reached 10,000 hours of practice.



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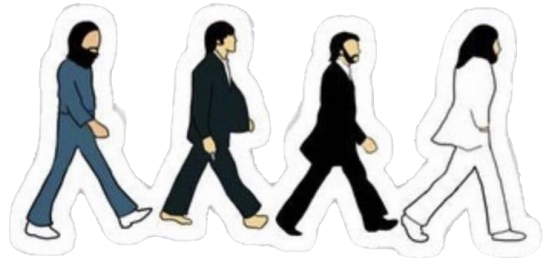
The Beatles

In the strip clubs of Hamburg, they had to play nonstop **eight hours a day**, seven nights a week, and they had to make **all types** of covers and interpretations. This gave them a **unique opportunity** to gain confidence and experience to become one of the **best** bands of all times.

"They were no good onstage when they went there" (Norman, *The Beatles bibliography Shout!*)



"Some Other Guy" The Beatles at the Cavern, Hamburg (1960)



All You Need Is Love

CLAIM 2:

What distinguishes one person from another in the world of success is practice, and extra practice is acquired through a series of extraordinary opportunities.

Bill Joy

Talent: he was **brilliant**, wanted to learn, and had a gift for programming

Luck and Opportunities:

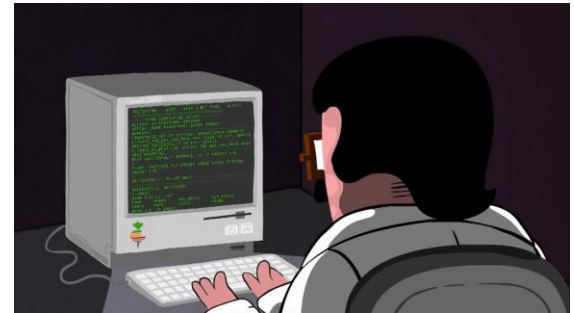
- he had access to **unlimited programming time** in an updated computer
- he did not pay **excessive cost**

(he spent about **eight to ten hours** a day programming)

"Before a person could become an expert, someone had to give that person the opportunity to learn how to become an expert" (Gladwell 2008, p. 46).



IBM computer 1970



CLAIM 3: The moment in time in which a person was born greatly influences their success.

75 Richest People of All Time

14 people on the list shared a characteristic: their **birth years**. They were all born between 1830 and 1840, which made them the perfect age when America faced one of its biggest economic revolutions in the 1860s and 1870s.



Hockey Players

Separated at a young age, and the biggest and best (which were the oldest), were given the opportunity to **practice more**. Thanks to this, they gained a lot of extra experience compared to other players born later in the year.



CLAIM 3: The moment in time in which a person was born greatly influences their success:

Silicon Valley Software Tycoons

Gladwell mentions 9 and shows the relationship between their **birth years** and their **success**. They were all born within 2 years of 1955, which made them the perfect age when the world of computers was revolutionized in 1975.

"Their success was not just of their own making. It was a product of the world in which they grew up." (Gladwell 2008, p. 75)



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EVIDENCE

The use of REAL LIFE EXAMPLES...

- illustrates what he is talking about by listing and explaining the experiences of each example, specifying the opportunities that allowed for such a level of expertise to be acquired
- gives his argument credibility
- allows the audience to better picture his argument

The use of SCIENTIFIC STUDIES...

- gives his argument credibility
- shows the audience that what he is saying is widely supported by science and statistics



Can the *10,000-Rule* be broken?

Gladwell stated that "no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time (than 10,000 hours)" (Gladwell 2008, p. 40), but studies in recent years have in fact shown that his theory of success is not always true.

- although practice is important, "it is just less important than has been argued, once you get to the highly skilled groups, practice stops accounting for the difference" and other factors like genetics and talent play a part in the equation
- the importance of practice varies depending on the domain, so it would be incorrect to extrapolate findings from a study about musicians to other areas

PRACTICE DOES NOT ALWAYS MAKE PERFECT

The Author's Perspective

Gladwell views the idea of the 10,000-hour rule as a way to **debunk** the myth that successful people are self-made. He maintains a very **objective perspective** throughout the whole chapter and gives examples of well-known groups or people as evidence, which gives a lot of credibility to his argument.

A bias present in his perspective of the subject is that he bases his argument on his **belief that the examples that he uses are of successful people**, a subjective assumption.



Featured Perspectives



- Social and Cultural
 - The Beatles
 - musicians
- Economic
 - richest people of all time
- Historical
 - the history of computers (Bill Gates, Bill Joy, Silicon Valley software tycoons)

"All the outliers we've looked at so far were the beneficiaries of some kind of unusual opportunity. Lucky breaks don't seem like the exception with software billionaires and rock bands and star athletes. They seem like the rule."

– Gladwell 2008, p. 63

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