**CWA Success Unit: Excerpts from Outliers by Malcolm Gladwell**

“The emerging picture from such studies is that ten thousand hours of practice is required to achieve the level of mastery associated with being a world-class expert–in anything,” writes the neurologist Daniel Levitin. “In study after study, of composers, basketball players, fiction writers, ice skaters, concert pianists, chess players, master criminals, and what have you, this number comes up again and again. Of course, this doesn’t address why some people get more out of their practice sessions than others do, but no one has yet found a case in which true world-class expertise was accomplished in less time. It seems that it takes the brain this long to assimilate all that it needs to know to achieve true mastery.”

This is true even of people we think of as prodigies. Mozart, for example, famously started writing music at six. But, writes the psychologist Michael Howe in his book Genius Explained by the standards of mature composers, Mozart’s early works are not outstanding. The earliest pieces were all probably written down by his father, and perhaps improved in the process. Many of Wolfgang’s childhood compositions, such as the first seven of his concertos for piano and orchestra, are largely arrangements of works by other composers. Of those concertos that only contain music original to Mozart, the earliest that is now regarded as a masterwork (No. 9, K. 271) was not composed until he was twenty-one; by that time Mozart had already been composing concertos for ten years.” – p. 40

 “The other interesting thing about that ten thousand hours, of course, is that ten thousand hours is an enormous amount of time. It is all but impossible to reach that number all by yourself by the time you’re a young adult. You have to have parents who encourage and support you. You can’t be poor, because if you have to hold down a part-time job on the side to help make ends meet, there won’t be time left in the day to practice enough. In fact, most people can reach that number only if they get into some kind of special program–like a hockey all-star squad–of if they get some kind of extraordinary opportunity that gives them a chance to put in those hours.” –p. 42

 “’It was my obsession’ Gates says of his early high school years. ‘I skipped athletics. I went up there at night. We were programming on weekends. iI would be a rare week that we wouldn’t get twenty or thirty hours in. There was a period where Paul Allen and I got in trouble for stealing a bunch of passwords and crashing the system. We got kicked out. I didn’t get to use the computer the whole summer. This is when I was fifteen and sixteen. Then I found out Paul had found a computer that was free at the University of Washington. They had these machines in the medical center and the physics department. They were on a twenty-four-hour schedule, but with this big slack period, so that between three and six in the morning they never scheduled anything.” Gates laughed. “I’d leave at night, after my bedtime. I could walk up to the University of Washington from my house. or I’d take the bus. That’s why I’m always so generous to the University of Washington, because they let me steal so much computer time.” (Years later, Gates’s mother said, ‘We always wondered why it was so hard for him to get up in the morning.’) –p. 53

**Questions to answer:**

1. Based on this excerpt, what are Gladwell’s two main points?
2. How does this apply to you and your future?