

Malcolm Gladwell

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Malcolm Timothy Gladwell, CM (born September 3, 1963) is a Canadian journalist, bestselling author, and speaker.^[1] He has been a staff writer for *The New Yorker* since 1996. He has written five books, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference* (2000), *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* (2005), *Outliers: The Story of Success* (2008), *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures* (2009), a collection of his journalism, and *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants* (2013). All five books were on *The New York Times* Best Seller list.

Gladwell's books and articles often deal with the unexpected implications of research in the social sciences and make frequent and extended use of academic work, particularly in the areas of sociology, psychology, and social psychology. Gladwell was appointed to the Order of Canada on June 30, 2011.^[2]



Gladwell at PEN 2014 Literary Gala

Born	Malcolm Timothy Gladwell September 3, 1963 Fareham, Hampshire, United Kingdom
Occupation	Non-fiction writer, journalist
Period	1987–present
Notable works	<i>The Tipping Point</i> (2000) <i>Blink</i> (2005) <i>Outliers</i> (2008) <i>What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures</i> (2009) <i>David and Goliath</i> (2013)

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Early life

Gladwell was born in Fareham, Hampshire, England. His mother is Joyce (Nation) Gladwell, a Jamaican-born psychotherapist. His father, Graham Gladwell, is a mathematics professor from Kent, England.^{[3][4][5]} Gladwell has said that his mother is his role model as a writer.^[6] When he was six his family moved from Southampton to Elmira, Ontario, Canada.^[3]

Gladwell's father noted that Malcolm was an unusually single-minded and ambitious boy.^[7] When Malcolm was 11, his father, who was a Professor^[8] of Mathematics and Engineering at the University of Waterloo, allowed him to wander around the offices at his university, which stoked the boy's interest in reading and libraries.^[9] During his high school years, Gladwell was a middle-distance runner and won the 1,500 meter title at the 1978 Ontario High School Championships in Kingston, Ontario, with a time of 4:05.2 seconds. In the spring of 1982, Gladwell interned with the National Journalism Center in Washington, D.C.^[10] He graduated with a degree in History from Trinity College, University of Toronto, in 1984.^[11]

Career

Gladwell's grades were not good enough for graduate school (as Gladwell puts it, "college was not an... intellectually fruitful time for me"), so he decided to go into advertising.^{[9][12]} After being rejected by every advertising agency he applied to, he accepted a journalism position at *The American Spectator* and moved to Indiana.^[13] He subsequently wrote for *Insight on the News*, a conservative magazine owned by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.^[14] In 1987, Gladwell began covering business and science for *The Washington Post*, where he worked until 1996.^[15] In a personal elucidation of the 10,000 hour rule he popularized in *Outliers*, Gladwell notes, "I was a basket case at the beginning, and I felt like an expert at the end. It took 10 years—exactly that long."^[9]

When Gladwell started at *The New Yorker* in 1996 he wanted to "mine current academic research for insights, theories, direction, or inspiration."^[7] His first assignment was to write a piece about fashion. Instead of writing about high-class fashion, Gladwell opted to write a piece about a man who manufactured T-shirts, saying "it was much more interesting to write a piece about someone who made a T-shirt for \$8 than it was to write about a dress that costs \$100,000. I mean, you or I could make a dress for \$100,000, but to make a T-shirt for \$8 – that's much tougher."^[7] Gladwell gained popularity with two *New Yorker* articles, both written in 1996: "The Tipping Point"^[16] and "The Coolhunt"^{[17][18]} These two pieces would become the basis for Gladwell's first book, *The Tipping Point*, for which he received a \$1 million advance.^{[12][19]} He continues to write for *The New Yorker*. In July 2015 he was the subject of a reprise of several of his articles in a New Yorker newsletter by Henry Finder.^[20] He also served as a contributing editor for *Grantland*, a sports journalism website founded by ESPN's Bill Simmons.

In a July 2002 article in the *The New Yorker* Gladwell introduced the concept of "The Talent Myth" that companies and organizations, supposedly, incorrectly follow.^[21] This work examines different managerial and administrative techniques that companies, both winners and losers, have used. He states that the misconception seems to be that management and executives are all too ready to classify employees without ample performance records and thus makes hasty decisions. Many companies believe in disproportionately rewarding "stars" over other employees with bonuses and promotions. However with the quick rise of inexperienced workers with little in-depth performance review, promotions are often incorrectly made, putting employees into positions they should not have and keeping other more experienced employees from rising. He also points out that under this system, narcissistic personality types are more likely to climb the ladder, since they are more likely to take more credit for achievements and take less blame for failure.^[21] He states both that narcissists make the worst managers and that the system of rewarding "stars" eventually worsens a company's position. Gladwell states that the most successful long-term companies are those who reward experience above all else and require greater time for promotions.^[21]

Works

Gladwell has written five books. When asked for the process behind his writing, he said "I have two parallel things I'm interested in. One is, I'm interested in collecting interesting stories, and the other is I'm interested in collecting interesting research. What I'm looking for is cases where they overlap".^[22]

The Tipping Point

The initial inspiration for his first book, *The Tipping Point*, which was published in 2000, came from the sudden drop of crime in New York City.^[23] He wanted the book to have a broader appeal than just crime, however, and sought to explain similar phenomena through the lens of epidemiology. While Gladwell was a reporter for *The Washington Post*, he covered the AIDS epidemic. He began to take note of "how strange epidemics were," saying that epidemiologists have a "strikingly different way of looking at the world."^[24] The term "tipping point" comes from the moment in an epidemic when the virus reaches critical mass and begins to spread at a much higher rate.^[24]

Gladwell's theories of crime were heavily influenced by the "broken windows theory" of policing, and Gladwell is credited for packaging and popularizing the theory in a way that was implementable in New York City. Gladwell's theoretical implementation bears a striking resemblance to the "stop-and-frisk" policies of the NYPD.^[25] However, in the decade and a half since its publication, *The Tipping Point* and Gladwell have both come under fire for the tenuous link between "broken windows" and New York City's drop in violent crime. During a 2013 interview with BBC journalist Jon Ronson for *The Culture Show*, Gladwell admitted that he was "too in love with the broken-windows notion." He went on to say that he was "so enamored by the metaphorical simplicity of that idea that I overstated its importance."^[26]

Blink

After *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell published *Blink* in 2005. The book explains how the human unconscious interprets events or cues and how past experiences can lead people to make informed decisions very rapidly, using examples like the Getty kouros and psychologist John Gottman's research on the likelihood of divorce in married couples. Gladwell's hair was the inspiration for *Blink*.^[27] He stated that he started to get speeding tickets all the time, an oddity considering that he had never gotten one before, and that he started getting pulled out of airport security lines for special attention.^[28] In a particular incident, he was accosted by three police officers while walking in downtown Manhattan, because his curly hair matched the profile of a rapist, despite the fact that the suspect looked nothing like him otherwise.^[29]

Gladwell's books *The Tipping Point* (2000) and *Blink* (2005), were international bestsellers. *The Tipping Point* sold over two million copies in the United States. *Blink* sold equally well.^{[12][30]} As of November 2008, the two books had sold a combined 4.5 million copies.^[31]

Outliers

Gladwell's third book, *Outliers*, published in 2008, examines how a person's environment, in conjunction with personal drive and motivation, affects his or her possibility and opportunity for success. Gladwell's original question revolved around lawyers: "We take it for granted that there's this guy in New York who's the corporate lawyer, right? I just was curious: Why is it all the same guy?", in reference to the comparable family histories of many early corporate lawyers.^[9] In another example given in the book, Gladwell noticed that people ascribe Bill Gates's success to being "really smart" or "really ambitious." He noted that he knew a lot of people who are really smart and really ambitious, but not worth 60 billion dollars. "It struck me that our understanding of success was really crude—and there was an opportunity to dig down and come up with a better set of explanations."^[32] Gladwell's main point deals with how essential opportunity is to success. Success, he argues, is never self-made.

What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures

Gladwell's fourth book, *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures*, was published on October 20, 2009.^[33] *What the Dog Saw* bundles together Gladwell's favorite articles from *The New Yorker* since he joined the magazine as a staff writer in 1996.^[34] The stories share a common theme, namely that Gladwell tries to show us the world through the eyes of others, even if that other happens to be a dog.^{[35][36]}

David and Goliath

Gladwell's fifth book, *David and Goliath*, was released in October 2013 and it examines the struggle of underdogs versus favorites. The book is partially inspired by an article Gladwell wrote for *The New Yorker* in 2009 entitled "How David Beats Goliath".^[37] The book was a bestseller but not well received.^[38]

Reception

The Tipping Point was named as one of the best books of the decade by Amazon.com customers, *The A.V. Club*, *The Guardian*, and *The Times*.^{[39][40][41][42]} It was also Barnes and Nobles's fifth bestselling nonfiction book of the decade.^[43] *Blink* was named to *Fast Company*'s list of the best business books of 2005.^[44] It was also number 5 on Amazon customers' favorite books of 2005, named to *The Christian Science Monitor*'s best nonfiction books of 2005, and in the top 50 of Amazon customers' favorite books of the decade.^{[39][45][46]} *Outliers* was a number 1 *The New York Times* bestseller for 11 straight weeks, and was *Time*'s number 10 nonfiction book of 2008, as well as named to the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s list of the 50 best nonfiction books of 2008.^{[47][48][49]}

Fortune described *The Tipping Point* as "a fascinating book that makes you see the world in a different way."^{[50][51]} The *Daily Telegraph* called it "a wonderfully offbeat study of that little-understood phenomenon, the social epidemic."^[52] Reviewing *Blink*, *The Baltimore Sun* dubbed Gladwell "the most original American [sic] journalist since the

young Tom Wolfe."^[53] Farhad Manjoo at *Salon* described the book as "a real pleasure. As in the best of Gladwell's work, *Blink* brims with surprising insights about our world and ourselves."^[54] *The Economist* called *Outliers* "a compelling read with an important message."^[55] David Leonhardt wrote in *The New York Times Book Review*: "In the vast world of nonfiction writing, Malcolm Gladwell is as close to a singular talent as exists today" and that *Outliers* "leaves you mulling over its inventive theories for days afterward."^[56] Ian Sample wrote in *The Guardian*: "Brought together, the pieces form a dazzling record of Gladwell's art. There is depth to his research and clarity in his arguments, but it is the breadth of subjects he applies himself to that is truly impressive."^{[57][58]}

Critics of Gladwell have described him as prone to oversimplification. *The New Republic* called the final chapter of *Outliers*, "impervious to all forms of critical thinking" and said that Gladwell believes "a perfect anecdote proves a fatuous rule."^[59] Gladwell has also been criticized for his emphasis on anecdotal evidence over research to support his conclusions.^[60] Maureen Tkacik and Steven Pinker have challenged the integrity of Gladwell's approach.^{[61][62]} Even while praising Gladwell's attractive writing style and content, Pinker sums up Gladwell as "a minor genius who unwittingly demonstrates the hazards of statistical reasoning," while accusing him of "cherry-picked anecdotes, post-hoc sophistry and false dichotomies" in his book *Outliers*. Referencing a Gladwell reporting mistake in which Gladwell refers to "eigenvalue" as "Igon Value", Pinker criticizes his lack of expertise: "I will call this the Igon Value Problem: when a writer's education on a topic consists in interviewing an expert, he is apt to offer generalizations that are banal, obtuse or flat wrong."^{[62][n 1]} A writer in *The Independent* accused Gladwell of posing "obvious" insights.^[63] *The Register* has accused Gladwell of making arguments by weak analogy and commented that Gladwell has an "aversion for fact", adding that, "Gladwell has made a career out of handing simple, vacuous truths to people and dressing them up with flowery language and an impressionistic take on the scientific method."^[64] In that regard, *The New Republic* has called him "America's Best-Paid Fairy-Tale Writer."^[65] Gladwell's approach was satirized by the online site "The Malcolm Gladwell Book Generator".^[66]

In 2005, Gladwell commanded a \$45,000 speaking fee.^[67] In 2008, he was making "about 30 speeches a year—most for tens of thousands of dollars, some for free," according to a profile in *New York* magazine.^[68] In 2011, he gave three talks to groups of small businessmen as part of a three-city speaking tour put on by Bank of America. The program was titled, "Bank of America Small Business Speaker Series: A Conversation with Malcolm Gladwell."^[69] Paul Starobin, writing in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, said that the engagement's "entire point seemed to be to forge a public link between a tarnished brand (the bank), and a winning one (a journalist often described in profiles as the epitome of cool)."^[70] An article by Melissa Bell of *The Washington Post* posed the question: "Malcolm Gladwell: Bank of America's new spokesman?"^[71] *Mother Jones* editor Clara Jeffrey said that Gladwell's job for Bank of America had "terrible ethical optics." However, Gladwell says he was unaware that Bank of America was "bragging about his speaking engagements" until the *Atlantic Wire* emailed him. Gladwell explained: "I did a talk about innovation for a group of entrepreneurs in Los Angeles a while back, sponsored by Bank of America. They liked the talk, and asked me to give the

same talk at two more small business events—in Dallas and yesterday in D.C. That's the extent of it. No different from any other speaking gig. I haven't been asked to do anything else and imagine that's it."^[72]

In 2012, CBS's *60 Minutes* attributed the recent trend of American parents "redshirting" their five-year-olds (postponing entrance) to give them an advantage in kindergarten to a section in Gladwell's *Outliers*.^[73]

Sociology professor Shayne Lee referenced *Outliers* in a CNN editorial commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Lee discussed the strategic timing of King's ascent from a "Gladwellian perspective".^[74] Gladwell gives credit to Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross for "invent[ing the Gladwellian] genre".^[75]

Personal life

Gladwell describes himself as a Christian.^[76] Raised in the Mennonite tradition, Gladwell wandered away from his Christian roots when he moved to New York, only to rediscover his faith during the writing of *David and Goliath* and his encounter with Wilma Derksen regarding the death of her child.^[77] Gladwell is unmarried and has no children.^[78]

Awards and honors

- 2005 *Time* named Gladwell one of its 100 most influential people.^[79]
- 2007 American Sociological Association's first Award for Excellence in the Reporting of Social Issues.^[80]
- 2007 honorary degree from University of Waterloo.^{[81][82]}
- 2011 honorary degree from University of Toronto

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(https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Malcolm_Gladwell&action=edit).

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Book reviews

Date	Review article	Work(s) reviewed
May 18, 2015	"Mirror stage : a memoir of working undercover for the Drug Enforcement Administration". The Critics. Books. <i>The New Yorker</i> 91 (13): 93–96. May 18, 2015. Retrieved 2015-08-05.	Follis, Edward; Century, Douglas (2014). <i>The dark art : my undercover life in global narco-terrorism</i> . New York: Gotham Books.

Filmography

- *The Missionary* (2013)

Other appearances

Gladwell is a featured storyteller for the Moth Podcast. He tells a funny yet unfortunate story about how "a well-intentioned wedding toast goes horribly awry for a young man and his friends."^[84]

Notes

1. Pinker is referring to eigenvalues.

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External links

- Gladwell's personal website (<http://www.gladwell.com/>)
- Biography and list of articles at *The New Yorker* (<http://www.newyorker.com/contributors/malcolm-gladwell>)
- Malcolm Gladwell (http://www.ted.com/speakers/malcolm_gladwell) at TED
- Appearances (<http://www.c-span.org/person/?malcolmgladwell>) on C-SPAN
- Malcolm Gladwell (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm321656/>) at the Internet Movie Database
- Works by or about Malcolm Gladwell (<http://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-n99-276127>) in libraries (WorldCat catalog)
- Malcolm Gladwell (<http://www.theguardian.com/books/malcolm-gladwell>) collected news and commentary at *The Guardian*
- Book Review in *The New York Times* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/15/books/review/Pinker-t.html?pagewanted=all>)
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- Malcolm Gladwell Interview *New Statesman* May 2010 (<http://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2010/05/interview-yorker-long-damage>)

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