

**USIP II 2014
CATW PRACTICE 4**

Excerpted from: "Lost in the Crowd"
By David Brooks

Most successful people begin with two beliefs: the future can be better than the present, and I have the power to make it so. They were often showered by good fortune, but relied at crucial moments upon achievements of individual will. Most successful people also have a phenomenal ability to consciously focus their attention. We know from experiments with subjects as diverse as obsessive-compulsive disorder sufferers and Buddhist monks that people who can self-consciously focus attention have the power to rewire their brains.

Control of attention is the ultimate individual power. People who can do that are not prisoners of the stimuli around them. They can choose from the patterns in the world and lengthen their time horizons. This individual power leads to others. It leads to self-control, the ability to formulate strategies in order to resist impulses. If forced to choose, we would all rather our children be poor with self-control than rich without it.

Control of attention leads to resilience, the ability to persevere with an idea even when all the influences in the world say it can't be done. A common story among entrepreneurs is that people told them they were too stupid to do something, and they set out to prove the jerks wrong. It leads to creativity. Individuals who can focus attention have the ability to hold a subject or problem in their mind long enough to see it anew.

In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell's social determinism is a useful corrective to the Homo economicus view of human nature. It's also pleasantly egalitarian. The less successful are not less worthy, they're just less lucky. But it slights the centrality of individual character and individual creativity. And it doesn't fully explain the genuine greatness of humanity's outliers. As the classical philosophers understood, examples of individual greatness inspire achievement more reliably than any other form of education. If Gladwell can reduce William Shakespeare to a mere product of social forces, I'll buy 25 more copies of "Outliers" and give them away in Times Square.

David Brooks' critique on Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* appeared in *The New York Times* on December 15, 2008.

Read the passage above and write an essay responding to the ideas it presents. In your essay, be sure to summarize the passage in your own words, stating the author's most important ideas. Develop your essay by indentifying one idea in the passage that you feel is especially significant and explain its significance. Support your claims with evidence or examples drawn from what you have read, learned in school, and/or personally experienced. Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that will help your reader follow your thinking. *You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.*

Prewriting Notes:

What is the topic? _____

What is Brooks' argument? _____

Do you agree with this argument? _____

Identify three of Brooks' ideas that hold your attention :

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Does this essay remind you of anyone in your own life? _____

What change could others make in their life to gain more success or "control of attention"? _____
