Success is not what most people think it is. Success is not achieved by one person doing everything for himself. There are opportunities presented to a successful person that he or she could not obtain alone. Malcolm Gladwell is out to prove that there are many factors that help lead to success in the first chapter of his book *Outliers*. In chapter one, deemed “The Matthew Effect,” Gladwell believes success is only limited to some people, and others are excluded because of variables they cannot control. Gladwell’s argument is effective because of the logical and ethical appeals he uses throughout the chapter.

Gladwell begins by discussing the believed to be meritocracy system that is Canadian hockey. He states his goal to disprove that individual merit is the only basis for success. Gladwell then introduces sociologist Roger Bamsley, who discovered that the majority of hockey players were born in January, February, or March. Next, he asserts this occurs because the cut-off date for each age classification is January 1st. He claims players born early in the year are bigger, so they are dubbed “better,” and they receive more opportunities through which they actually become better. Gladwell maintains this “self-fulfilling prophecy,” as named by Robert Merton, coupled with the “Matthew Effect” helps determine who is successful in other areas, including Czech soccer and children taking standardized tests. He describes the “Matthew Effect” as someone becoming successful from opportunities that were presented to them with no effort on their part. Finally, Gladwell’s solution is institutions should divide
children up by birthdates, so they can compete against children at the same maturity level.

Gladwell simplifies key points to make the argument understandable through his use of logical appeals. For example, instead of loading the reader down with a ton of information about the hockey players and their birthdays, he organizes it in a chart (21). Gladwell states how the majority of players in Canadian hockey leagues were born early in the year, and the chart is the means of making it easier for the reader to understand his point. As Roger Barnsley says, “You don’t even need to do any statistical analysis. You just look at it.” (23) Gladwell also clarifies his argument by replacing the names of the players in the play-by-play with their birthdates (23). If the chart was not enough, the reader can easily follow along the commentary of the hockey game and comprehend that Gladwell is correct. The presence of the birth dates dominate the play-by-play and make it blatantly clear that the majority were indeed born in the first part of the year. Furthermore, footnotes at the bottom of certain pages help explain certain key points. Gladwell uses his point on the hockey players’ birthdays to argue that time of birth helps determine success. Gladwell goes deeper into the “Matthew Effect” and the “self-fulfilling prophecy” through the footnotes. The footnotes permit him to rationalize with the reader and explain these theories at a deeper level by talking casually. Gladwell uses the footnotes as a tool to get the information across in a conversation-style. He informs the reader without sounding like a textbook full of facts.

Gladwell establishes authority and fairness through ethical appeals. He obtains authority on the subject of the “Matthew Effect” by quoting and using the research of notable sociologists like Robert Merton (30). His argument is immediately given more weight when it is supported by experts on the subject. Since Merton developed and named the “Matthew Effect,” he is exactly the foundation to build an argument on. Moreover, Gladwell establishes authority and fairness by giving multiple examples of
where the “Matthew Effect” occurs. Not only does it affect Canadian hockey, it plays a role in European soccer as well. He examines how Czech soccer is the same as hockey when it comes to the majority of players being born in the first part of the year. Gladwell provides more and more evidence to support his claims.

Gladwell does a good job of using rhetorical strategies to effectively strengthen his argument. He uses logical and ethical appeals to rationalize with the reader and gain the reader’s trust on the subject. Gladwell’s argument that success is not achieved by one person working by himself is well-presented. He wisely builds a solid argument that can convince a reader to accept his ideas. Success is not what most people think it is, but more people gained perspective on success by reading Gladwell’s argument.