

Thoughts for Young Composers, by David Vayo

- Write for as many kinds of instruments as you can, as well as the voice (solo vocal and choral).
- Write for various sizes of ensemble, from solo instrument to large ensembles such as orchestra or choir.
- Become familiar with electroacoustic media.
- Consult with performers while composing in order to make your music as practical as possible without losing its original spark.
- Become familiar with software for music notation, sequencing, and audio recording.
- Think of music theory as a way to improve your musical sensitivity and understanding, not as indoctrination into rigid systems with which your music must comply.
- Explore other art forms: theater, visual arts, dance, literature, etc., certainly as a spectator but whenever possible as a participant as well.
- Listen to as many different kinds of music as you can, especially those which are utterly unfamiliar to you (ethnic, early Western and unusual twentieth-century styles can be especially useful in this regard).
- Whenever possible, look at scores when you listen to music.
- Make a point of having all of your compositions performed in public, or at the very least rehearsed until they approach performance level.
- Take the time to revise your compositions after they've been performed.
- Get used to speaking to others about your own music and/or other contemporary music.
- Attend as many concerts as you can, making a special effort to hear performances of contemporary music.
- Join composition/new music organizations and keep abreast of the profession.
- Past a certain point, agonizing over every detail when composing is counterproductive. You'll learn more by writing more music.
- Don't feel it's necessary to theoretically analyze or intellectually defend your music, to yourself or to others.
- Do the best work you can, but don't put pressure on yourself to write masterpieces.
- Write what you want to write, not what you think your teacher, your peers or posterity thinks you should write. If you're a college student, be especially careful not to pigeonhole yourself as a "classical" composer just because you're enrolled in a university composition program.
- Read regularly for your own pleasure and enrichment, exploring subjects of interest to you.
- Exercise regularly and eat well. The mind and its creative faculties are not divorced from the body.
- Find ways to strengthen contact with the quiet, purely aware part of yourself through meditation, prayer, walking, contemplating nature or whatever else works for you. It doesn't matter whether you think of it in religious, philosophical or neurological terms- that part of us is at our core and is an important gateway to our inner creative self.