

1. **Your friends will be your colleagues in the future.** Make good connections now.
2. **Make friends with conductors** – they may become champions of your music and are key to getting your music played.
3. **Attend summer programs** (if it is cost effective). You will make great connections with composers, performers, and teachers from a wide range of places. There are more and more summer composition opportunities sprouting up every year. Research opportunities – whether you want to stay close to home or travel somewhere, there are opportunities all over the country.
4. **Enter competitions** (preferably ones with no entry fees). Even if you don't win, you are getting your music into the hands of people who might be able to help you. I recently had a piece performed as a result of NOT winning a competition, but the judges liked my piece and wanted to perform it. (Of course winning has some good benefits too! Resume builders, performances, recordings, etc.)
5. **Build a website**, or get a friend to help you. Even if it is very simple, a website will be crucial to performers, conductors, and others who want to contact you, program your music, etc.
6. **Stay up on the news.** It's good to stay informed on what is happening in the music world. Find news sites and blogs you like and glance at them regularly. I visit ArtsJournal.com just about every day.
7. **Attend conferences.** Often times travel, time, and money prevent us from going to conferences. But if you can make it work, try to attend conferences. You will be surrounded by people interested in similar things as you. You will get ideas and make great connections.
8. **Do what you say you will do**, when you said you would do it. Believe it or not, this will separate you from many people in the professional world.
9. **Strive for excellence** in everything you do. If you aim to be your best all the time, excellence will become an unconscious habit. Hold yourself accountable, and set high standards for yourself.
10. **Perform music.** As composers, sometimes we tend to perform less or not at all. Try to perform in some capacity – a church group, community ensemble, local recitals, forming your own ensemble, etc. This keeps you connected to the act of making music and can have great benefits for composing.
11. **There are/can be musical opportunities no matter where you live.** You don't have to be in a major city to be a part of great musical experiences. Think of ways you can make music happen in your community, and get your music performed. Research state and local grants from cultural councils, organize a concert, connect with local music organizations, etc.
12. **The look of your music is important.** Take care in how your music looks – from how it is formatted, how large and easy to read things are, to how the music is bound and presented. This makes an impact

on the conductor and the musicians who are playing your music. Look at published scores and parts to see examples of “good looking” music, appropriate sizes, papers, etc.

13. Be true to yourself, musically. Write music that you are excited about, that resonates with you. If your music is authentic, people will recognize that. Don’t feel like you need to write a particular kind of music to fit in or be successful. Write the music that you want to write. At the same time, don’t discount an opportunity to try something unfamiliar, or write in a new genre, new instrumentation, etc. You will learn a lot from new experiences – just remain true to yourself throughout.

14. Find motivation and time for composing. Think about pieces you would like to write in the future, instrumentations you want to try, texts you want to set, ideas you want to explore. Even when someone (friends, ensembles) aren’t asking you for a new piece, you should be working on a new piece, always learning and pushing yourself as a writer.

15. Have a good attitude. If you are easy to work with and a nice person to be around, people will want to work with you.

16. Approach everything as a learning experience. Sometimes things don’t work out exactly as we would like, but we can always learn something from our experiences and they often end up being important in the future. Steve Jobs dropped out of college (I’m not condoning that!) and went back to audit classes he was really interested in. He took calligraphy, not knowing if or how he would ever use those skills in his life, but just found calligraphy fascinating. Years later when he was designing the first Mac computer, his knowledge of calligraphy helped make the Mac the first computer with beautiful fonts. This seemingly random experience earlier in his life proved to be hugely beneficial to his work in the future.

17. If you are thinking about graduate school, separate yourself from others. First, think about whether you should take time off to gain work experience, write more music, get recordings, connect with possible teachers, research programs, etc. I took 2 years off between my undergraduate degree and starting my masters, and it was one of the best decisions I have made. Think about your application to a graduate program, and what will separate you from others. Do you have a bunch of great recordings of your pieces? Have you started your own ensemble to help promote your music and contemporary music in your community? Have you started/helped organize a small concert series? Have you taught composition to younger students? Think about what you have done (and what you could do before applying) that will separate you from the others that are vying for a spot in the program.

18. Attend as many concerts as possible. Listening to and studying music is likely how most composers learn best. Composers are often inspired and get new ideas from listening to music (especially live performances). Every new piece we hear and experience adds to our musical knowledge and awareness, helping to make us better, more informed musicians. Sometimes a particular work will have a profound impact on a composer, and sometimes it is a genre or type of music we least expect. Therefore, attend a variety of concerts, and soak it all up.