



## Letter to My Younger Self

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Stephen Mollett

**D**EAR STEPHEN,

You are leaving university and wondering what to do. You've imagined working in the theatre and often spent more time acting in and directing plays than on your own studies. But suddenly you find yourself in a smoky pub telling a couple of friends that you'd like to write. Where has this come from? Deep within you, I suspect, but the idea has been hiding away, not daring to raise its head while you've written essays on the literary canon.

I'd like to give you some random pieces of advice. You're right to be wary of advice. What's true for one person, may well not suit *you*. But since I *am* you, please listen.

Try not to compare yourself to other writers. Certainly, a small dose of competition can spur you on when you are drifting. Seeing how your peers write and what they produce *is* inspiring. But harbouring envy of any kind is a waste of time, more likely to curb you than spur you. Celebrating the work of fellow artists is a greater fuel.

Don't be shy of calling yourself a writer, though I fondly remember the words of comedy writer Jim Hitchmough. He used to tell strangers at parties that he was a waiter – to avoid tedious enquiry – and because he had to wait so long to hear about a script he'd sent off. Plug yourself into the writing community: we're all preparing meals for a feast we can share



together. And we can cheer each other up too. Look for a good workshop to join.

You baulk at the term ‘networking’ and think it’s somehow shabby. It’s only all about getting to know people. If you were a producer or director, wouldn’t you want to work with someone you’ve already met and hopefully liked? Collaboration and trust are key.

Ditch your nervousness about approaching people to interview them for research purposes. Usually people are pleased to share their knowledge and experiences. Dramatist James Graham certainly found this when talking to politicians. Kick out that daft notion that what interviewees might say could spoil your plot. Visit places that you are writing about if you can — you’ll be hit by insights, find fresh detail, catch sight of your characters.

Jot down that amazing idea when it comes — whether in the aisles of a cathedral or Tesco. Don’t trust *oh-I’ll-remember-it-later*. The subconscious only offers these gifts occasionally.

Ask yourself, *have I chosen the most exciting way to tell my story? Or the right vehicle to carry it? And what is my own personal connection to it?*

Don’t follow my example of keeping many drafts of a project. Identify one, take a risk and chuck away the others. You’ll find new energy by *clearing out*. Seek to establish a routine for writing — your creative mind will thank you for it.

You are naturally interested in people and their stories. So give people time. Don’t rush on. Keep up with friends too, as a top priority. And, frankly, some of your best ideas will come from recasting stories they tell you.

Finally, Stephen, trust your instincts.