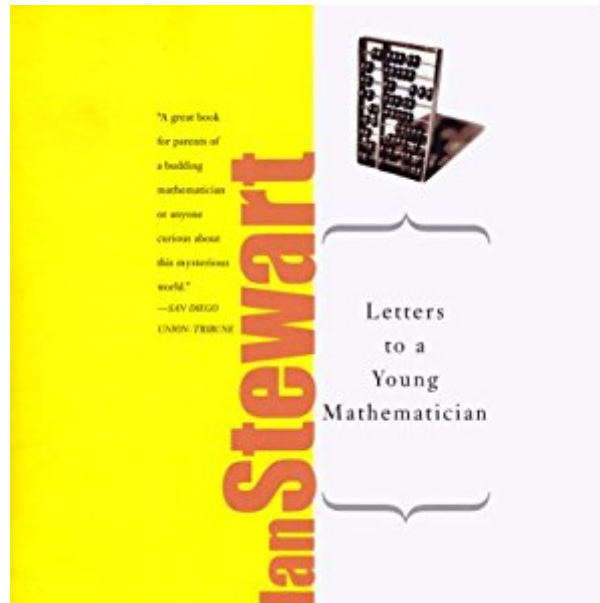


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# Letters To A Young Mathematician: Art Of Mentoring



## Synopsis

Mathematician Ian Stewart tells listeners what he wishes he had known when he was a student. He takes up subjects ranging from the philosophical to the practical-what mathematics is and why it's worth doing, the relationship between logic and proof, the role of beauty in mathematical thinking, the future of mathematics, how to deal with the peculiarities of the mathematical community, and many others.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Stewart writes a series of letters to a (probably) fictitious young person to inform each step of that student's journey along the path to becoming a mathematician - starting with grade school questions about "What's math good for?"- and going through advice on how to negotiate office politics in post-doctoral academia. Each of these chronological letters contain practical advice as well as interesting insights into scholarly subjects, not limited to the field of mathematics. For example, Stewart presents some of the crispest, most comprehensible definitions I've run across. He defines postmodernism as "the belief that everything is social convention." Other people have spent whole windy pages and chapters trying to define that term, and only succeeded in putting me in a greater fog than before I started. Stewart defines fractals as patterns that "exist in a fractional number of dimensions." And Godel's theorem gets intelligibly summarized as "the theory that there will be statements that can never be proved either true or false, but that can be used as axioms of equations either way - without creating inconsistency." Along the way, Stewart renders some wise advice on how to live life in general. He points out how often the theory that people struggle for

decades to prove or disprove (like Fermat's Last Theorem) is not important in and of itself. But the process of trying to prove it often opens whole new fields of mathematics. That's another take on the old truism - It's the journey not the destination. Stewart made only one remark that I didn't think was totally reliable in this neat little book of essays. He says that a primary pleasure to be found in the practice of mathematics is that there is only one correct answer.

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