

Institute of Children's Literature and Long Ridge Writers Group

I was in high school when I decided I wanted to be a writer. I saw an advertisement in one of my mom's magazines that said, "Do you want to write for children?" I cut it out, and sent for more information. When the packet of information arrived from the Institute of Children's Literature (ICL), I read through it and completed the aptitude test. I don't remember what was on the aptitude test, but do remember thinking it was simple.

I loved receiving the "Congratulations" letter, along with the bio of my instructor. ICL gives you two choices: pay in full, or make monthly payments. I chose the latter, and sent in my first check. In return, I received the first part of the course. I devoured the information and wrote my first lesson. This was back when everything was done on the typewriter and sent through the mail, so it wasn't a quick process. I loved the personal feedback, and the handouts that came along with the edits to give me pointers on grammar, punctuation, style, editing, and everything in between.

The biggest problem? I was in high school and had so many other things going on, that I wasn't as focused and dedicated as I would be now. I was also lazy and didn't want to do market research, and was scared to send anything out to magazines. If I had taken a chance on myself and got something published early on, I might be farther along in my writing career than I am now.

I learned a lot, and upon completion of the first course, I enrolled in the novel writing course. This was daunting, and I had a new instructor. I didn't feel the same connection to her as I did my first instructor, and I didn't give it everything I had. Otherwise, it may have been another great experience.

After that, I let college get in the way. I did enroll in one more course with ICL, hoping it would spark the desire, but it didn't. What I discovered is that I had a hard time writing for children.

That's when I found Long Ridge Writers Group (LRWG). My husband encouraged me to take their aptitude test, so I did. The response I got was fantastic, and I was back into writing—this time for adults. I sailed through the short story course with a wonderful instructor. She pushed me to send my stories out, and the first story I sent was accepted. I caught the bug, and it hasn't left.

LRWG also offers a novel writing course, so I enrolled. Another great instructor and a mostly complete novel. One day I will pull it back out and see whether or not I want to finish it.

What I like so much about ICL and LRWG is that I'm on a deadline. I know there is someone waiting for my assignment, and I know he or she is eager to help. All the proprietary course materials as well as the books used in the courses are helpful in learning the craft of writing.

Based on the information you provide, ICL and LRWG match you with an instructor that writes in the same genre. Having a personal mentor that you get to know over the course of a year or so is probably

the most valuable part. Taking online classes, or classes with several students is also beneficial, but I enjoyed my one-on-one relationship with another published writer.

Both courses also teach fiction and nonfiction, whichever you want to focus on. Most instructors will allow you to email your assignments, so there isn't as much of a delay as sending the assignments back and forth through the mail. The courses are affordable, and they still offer a payment plan, as well as a money back guarantee.

The coursework does take time, and it does take effort. If you're short on both, I would wait before taking the aptitude test and jumping in. I think the courses are great for 1)those who want to write but aren't sure if they're good enough, 2) those who want personalized feedback, 3) those who want to master the art of writing, 4) those who are intimidated by a writing class, and 5)those who want and need flexibility.