

# Ask Andrew Anything

## Transcript of Podcast Episode 330

**Julie Walker:** Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, “IEW.” My name is Julie Walker, and I’m honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

So Andrew, it’s an Ask Andrew Anything.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Great! How exciting! I don’t have to think too hard ahead of time because you never tell me the questions.

**Julie Walker:** I don’t. I have a list of questions in front of me that our listeners have emailed to us at Podcast@IEW.com. So listener, if you have any questions for Andrew—any questions for Andrew—send them on.

And we’ll see if we can’t ask Andrew and stump him. We’ve stumped him before. But today I notice, Andrew, you have some papers in front of you. I don’t think these are questions but something that you got maybe from the mail?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, you know, occasionally I do get letters from kids who have suffered watching our videos.

**Julie Walker:** Because one of the assignments in the *Structure and Style for Students* videos is to write a letter.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Now we’re not encouraging anyone to do this because I can’t answer them all, but sometimes a wild and crazy, imaginative child captures my attention, especially when there’s a specific request.

**Julie Walker:** Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So I don’t have time to read all five paragraphs, but I will read you a little bit here. Dear Andrew Pudewa, although I enjoy your fabulous teaching, I sadly do not like writing because it is hard, and I would rather play or travel.

Totally relate.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Unlike your unique self I do not wish nor will become a writing, speech, or violin teacher. Naturally, I adore jokes when they are understandable. Only with jokes, which are hilarious, can I enjoy writing. So

**Julie Walker:** It's a good thing. You start your every lesson with a joke, then.

**Andrew Pudewa:** her three topics are I, play, and travel.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So she's got one paragraph. I am twelve years old, have braces because I have an overbite, and have red hair. Like my best friend, Ezra, my favorite color is blue, which is the color of my eyes. And she talks on a little bit more about herself. Then she says ... This is the what to play paragraph.

I hardly ever run out of things to do. Remarkably, I have two talking purple blankets, James and Skinkin and many stuffed animals. And then they ... She talks about this, and then she talks about traveling, and then she has the conclusion. I began writing this to you because of your writing videos. Although I may prefer playing or traveling, it is more important to honor God and my parents, which might mean writing.

**Julie Walker:** Okay. I like that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Hopefully, I might actually get to meet you and join one of your writing classes when obnoxious coronavirus is over if it will ever end. Now here's the part; she wrote, Love, Anna.

And then she wrote: P.S. Would you please mention me and my blankets in your podcast?

**Julie Walker:** Oh, so she listens to our podcast as well.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I guess. I mean, she knows there's a podcast. So now I have

**Julie Walker:** Well, there you go, Anna. There's a shout out to you and your blankets.

**Andrew Pudewa:** a letter that she wrote to, or somebody wrote to ... I think it's her friend Elizabeth,

**Julie Walker:** Oh, the one with the blue eyes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** who wrote a letter to Anna's blankets: Greetings and salutations, James Cookies Seemees. I've heard many atrocious stories about you. And I consider that it was time I should write. Across Catland cats shudder at your cruel ideas. Dastardly plans slowly congeal in your flat brain:

1) boiling kittens. As you are a brother to cats, that is exceptionally disgraceful.

2) insulting Yarden, because you believe it is a weird, weird baby game.

3) You won't pay your landlady who is very patient her due rent.

And that's the most understandable of the paragraphs. So it appears that these two friends have these imaginary blanket creatures. And they are writing letters about them to them.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and that actually reminds me of an assignment that you gave to the Level C students. It was,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, yeah. "Ode to the Grecian Urn"

**Julie Walker:** right, where the students had to write a letter to something. And you did a model of that where you wrote to your bookcase.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Bookshelf, yeah. Anyway, I did want to be sure and give a shout out to Anna from Lafayette, Oregon, so that she knows that we mentioned it in the podcast. And I will write back to her, although I'm a little intimidated about writing to such imaginative people because I am not, but I'll do my best.

**Julie Walker:** So there was no question there. So I guess we better just dive right into these questions, huh?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I have a question for you, but we can save it for later unless you're super curious.

**Julie Walker:** Of course, I'm super curious.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay. So I'm a little fuzzy, but evidently we've got this thing going, the "Flat Andrew" business. So what is that all about? Because I'm not really ... I mean, I'm thinner, but I'm not flat.

**Julie Walker:** No, you're not flat. And I love that Anna mentions travels, and I thought, of course, immediately: Anna, you need to get a copy of the Flat Andrew so that you can take him with you on your travels and take pictures. And so actually, a few episodes ago we did a podcast on ideas for keeping children engaged in writing so they don't have evaporation.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, right, yeah. Summer ideas.

**Julie Walker:** And this was one of the ideas that we came up with. And our marketing team, our design team totally got 100 percent on board with that. If you go to [IEW.com/flatandrew](http://IEW.com/flatandrew), you will find a little video explaining the product, a download, and instructions of how to print it out and cut it out and color it if you want to. Make sure that his eyes are blue and that you color his tie, and then you take him on your adventures. And my granddaughter got one of the first Flat Andrews.

And we took a picture of her after she colored it by a swimming pool shaped like the state of Texas because we were in Texas together. So and, of course, another picture that we got was your granddaughter and her coloring.

And she's two two and a half. And that was super cute. So we're assembling these, and then people are posting on ... We actually have a special Facebook page for our Flat Andrew. And you can find information about that on the [IEW.com/flatandrew](http://IEW.com/flatandrew) page.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I should color a flat Andrew and take it with me on my next trip.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, you've got a few travels that you're up to. So yeah, that'd be fun. That's like a meta Flat Andrew, right?

**Andrew Pudewa:** I'd rather get a Flat Julie.

**Julie Walker:** Not going to happen, Boss. Okay. On that, let me just jump right in and ask you some questions that some of our listeners have asked us. So starting with Sarah.

Sarah says, "I'm using the theme-based books. And if we go slower with the checklist than the book does, how do we teach the next dress-up? If we've skipped it earlier in the book, should we go back to where it was introduced, or should I teach it myself wherever we are?" That's one question.

Then also, "My 15-year-old is upset that IEW makes her change her story. I feel like this may be a sign that we moved too quickly through the checklist for her. Or is there another possible explanation of why she's suddenly hating it?" So I think this is a Unit 3 variation.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Hmm. Well, That's two questions. And the first answer to the first question, as you may guess, is that I would suggest that she teach the dress-up when the student is ready, and she could either snatch some of the practice exercises that were skipped earlier in the book or just make some practice exercises up on the spot.

You know, the practice exercises are probably the least important part of the whole lesson. So if you think about a lesson, it has a unit and then a source text that corresponds with the unit. So knowing the model you're working with, and that's clear as day. The second part would be the checklist.

And that's what ... And I'm very, very happy that this mom is adjusting the checklist for following the EZ + 1 rule. And then the third part is kind of the bonus stuff that a teacher could easily kind of come up with ad hoc, but we provide something.

And usually the practice exercises for the new style technique are connected thematically, at least, with the source text. So if you're four lessons down the line, it's a different source text. Now you're introducing the new dress-up. You could go back four lessons before, do those practice exercises. Nothing's lost.

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or you could just come up with some on the fly. And that's kind of what I would do, is I would just say, "Okay, here's the new dress-up. Here's some examples." Create a fill in the blank or a combine two things or whatever you need to do to give the student a feeling for how it's going to work and sound before you give them the checklist.

**Julie Walker:** And I have two best practices to add to that. One is we do anticipate that teachers and parents who are using the theme-based books have gone through our *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* teacher-training course.

And so they would know how to do these dress-ups; they would know how to teach them. And secondly each of our theme-based books have, as a part of our Premium Membership ... The Checklist Generator has a template for all of our theme-based books. And so if you're wanting to modify the checklist, so you don't have to cross it out or add things, you can do that in our Checklist Generator. Print it out, and then it feels like really professional. And you're not dumbing things down for a child.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But you can also just cross things off.

**Julie Walker:** Or you can just cross things off to make it super easy.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The second question – I don't know how to answer that because I don't really understand the question when she says my older student is being forced to change her stories.

**Julie Walker:** Well, making her change her story.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So all I can guess is that that is saying here's the story. Now what are some variations on that where you would change the characters and setting? And I don't know that that's ever been an absolute requirement. If a student is more comfortable just telling the story with the same characters and setting as were in the original source text, I have no problem with that.

But I would encourage Sarah to maybe call and talk to one of our team because there might be something else going on that is causing the student to dislike that process. And I don't know that I can get enough from her description here to solve that. But I think it is a solvable problem.

**Julie Walker:** Absolutely. Okay. I have a short question,

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's good. I like short.

**Julie Walker:** but it's not easy. Sorry. So Marni asks, "How do you help a natural writer advance?"

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, again, there's so many variables there. The first one that comes to my mind is age because a natural writer at nine years old, you would deal with a little differently than a natural writer at fifteen years old.

And so there's a spectrum there. We know that natural writers benefit as much from the Structure and Style approach, having the source text, the model, the checklist, all of that, because it equips them with tools that they might not otherwise just accidentally stumble upon or into it or find somewhere and think to imitate.

So it's like you go back to the music analogy. You can get two students. Some are naturally musical, and others are not as naturally musical. Everybody has musical potential. Do you teach them differently? Not really. You teach them the skills that allow them to improve whether they're kind of higher aptitude or less.

So you know, I would say, especially if you're pushing on the younger zone, just use our system. And what you will find is that the imaginative high aptitude, natural writer type of kid is doing better and having more fun because they've got more tools in their toolbox. They've got more toys in their toy box.

They've got more they can work with to be creative. With older students, then, (This would be assuming they've had three or four years of Structure and Style.) now how do you move them to the next level for themselves? Often, I think taking a class from someone else, who isn't necessarily familiar with all of the structural models and stylistic techniques and checklist and doesn't use source texts ...

It's kind of a blind test, so to speak. This could be an online college or university class or a class from someone in the community. They're going to be giving maybe different assignments, and then that student can use what they've got—their natural aptitude and talent combined with years of Structure and Style experience—and work that to meet the needs of some other type of instructor in their assignment. And what we find out is that almost always, they do very, very well in that kind of, I would call it, a blind situation. You sign up for a writing class at a university. You don't know what you're gonna get. The teachers are all different.

They all have different philosophy. They may use different books. And so you don't, you can't really prepare; you kind of have to respond to that teacher's instruction style, their priorities. You will have to maybe adjust yourself. And of course, we've, I think, had whole discussions on when you go to college, you don't try to write well. Try to figure out what the teacher thinks is good, and imitate that.

So I think that's the range. And then the only thing I would add is to say, I think it's very valid for a parent or teacher to have kind of a free opportunity for a highly motivated, natural writer to just write freely. And at the same time, have assignments with models and checklists to strengthen. And you can make a lot of comparisons.

One is just because you're musically talented doesn't mean you don't continue to practice fundamentals, be they exercises, scales, arpeggios, a particular repertoire. But at the same time,

that kid can go off and do improvise and try to learn pieces that you weren't trying to teach them or take up a different genre of playing like fiddling or something. And so those can run in tandem. So it's not a either/or but a both/and that makes for the best opportunity.

**Julie Walker:** Right. And you just described my son, who we did give him guitar lessons, piano lessons, all the lessons, saxophone lessons. I know you're very excited that we gave him saxophone lessons. But yeah, he had the technical instruction. But yet he loved to compose, and his composition skills were much higher initially than his actual playing the notes on the page of work. But then eventually they kind of caught up and merged, and he now is the guitar that you hear on the *Structure and Style for Students* video. So we're very proud of him and glad that we had that opportunity for a talented musician to both learn the technical side of it as well as being free to ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** And I think it's always good for people who have a question about teaching of writing to consider: Well, what do you do in teaching music? What do you do in teaching art? What do you do in teaching a sport? Because it's one of those things. It's a skill, and there's foundational skill development exercises that then allow for that higher level of creativity, expression, mastery, et cetera.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Good. So Greta has a question for you, Andrew. She says, "I work in a school setting, and at times we receive new students who haven't used IEW in the past. What is the best way for me to integrate new students into the program while avoiding too much repetition for experienced students?"

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. That's a tough one. Well, I'll look at that in two ways. One would be, let's say that you are a grade 5 teacher, and you're getting new students in at the beginning of the year who didn't have any experience in grade 4 or grade 3 similar to that that most of your grade 5 students would have. In that case I think it would really behoove the school—

and you could probably only do this in a private school, maybe a charter—but kind of a boot camp, kind of a week where you just do a couple hours of writing every day for a week to get them kind of familiar at least. You can't replace a whole year or two or three of experience, but you can get them familiar with the terminology and the techniques and the way that it's going.

But if you can't have that kind of week before school starts, then you're going to have to do it when school starts. The good news is that a lot of students forget a lot over the summer. So when we teach ... And what I have found is at the beginning of the school year, it's always good to assume everybody forgot everything than to assume that they remember stuff and then discover they don't.

So it's better to assume everybody forgot everything and go back to the very beginning. Teach it through, and then have kids go, "Yeah, we remember that." And so then you're teaching everything that you would as if everyone were new to it, but there's gonna be a much faster acquisition, right? The EZ +1 idea is going to go a lot faster. But there is this interesting phenomenon when you have a large majority of kids who do kind of get it, and then there's new ones. They pick up on the conversation, the feedback, and the things that are happening in the

classroom much more easily than a large group of people who were new to something would pick up on what just a couple kids had done. So you've got that kind of bulk of experience that's helpful.

Now if it's the middle of the year and a transfer-in situation, that is much, much more difficult. And again, it kind of would depend on the teaching situation. Ideally—we can always use that word—the parent would get involved, and you would, as a teacher, try to explain to the parent: This is the writing program that we use. And here are some resources that you could use outside the classroom to help your student get on this pathway and feel confident. And that might include a video course from us or at least a little bit of understanding on the parent side, of our system. And we've got various materials that can help with that.

**Julie Walker:** For example, the *Structure and Style Overview*, which we made specifically for parents of students who are enrolled in a school or a co-op center.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. And that can be accessed through our website in one way or another.

I know some teachers who are able to take the time and actually sit down with parents that are new to the class and show them a little bit about what's going on because the kids will probably be a little confused. In the classroom they may or may not ask clarifying questions, but if the parents know what you're trying to accomplish, and they can continue that conversation at home, it's going to make a lot of difference.

And then the third thing, of course, is kind of what we talked about with the first question, which is, can you customize the checklist? And yes. In fact, Dr. Webster, Mrs. Ingham – when they were teaching in classrooms, they had pretty large classrooms back in the day. It wasn't uncommon to have thirty, some forty kids, and they would always say, okay, so what you do, is you teach the whole thing to everyone.

And then when people understand it, let them go work on their own. And then you reteach the next lesson to everyone who's left. And then when the next group kind of has it, you let them go work on their own. And then you reteach the group that needs the third or fourth or fifth repetition of doing it together.

So this doing it together doesn't mean that the whole class has to be always doing everything together. It means that you're doing it together so that the students start kind of filtering off and becoming able to do the next assignment on their own. And one more idea for the classroom teacher:

It's a little hard for people to go here, but it really does work. And that is, not everybody has to do the same number of assignments. So if someone finishes an assignment, and they've got nothing to do, if the teacher has another source text handy, give that to those students, and say, "Fantastic, you finished. That's great. Here's another story. Same model, same checklist. Do this one on your own." And then they can go off and do that. And usually the ones who finish quickly are the ones who are more than happy to do it again. And that frees you up with a little



bit more time to work together with the group of students who are either new to it all or just haven't caught on as rapidly as some.

**Julie Walker:** Right. And we kind of demonstrate this a little bit in the *Structure and Style for Students*, especially the Level A classes where you tell the students, "If you don't need my help, go off and do this on your own." Only they're not going anywhere. They sitting in their same spot. They're just ignoring you. And you're working with that group of kids that need the extra help week after week. Super, super obvious that those kids are learning and are engaged and growing in their writing skills. So I love that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And you know, again, I would encourage Greta here, who's teaching in a school: Call and talk to one of our team because we ... I mean, everyone who works in our Schools [Division] has experience coaching teachers through situations exactly like this. And I love the questions, but there's always, "Wow. If I had a little more information, I could answer this question a little better, right?"

**Julie Walker:** Okay. So another question. I think we've got time for maybe one or two more.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I hope it's a softball.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, I think so. Rochelle asks, "How much do you help young students revise and edit before you take their writing for a grade? How do you take a rubric grade and use it for a percentage grade?" And I'm assuming when she says rubric grade, just basically our checklist.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. Our checklists, or maybe she's got another rubric that combines or adds to that or some other things.

So well, as some of our listeners know, my basic suggestion on grading is it's either *A* for accomplished, accepted, meaning 100%, or it's incomplete, meaning it's not 100%, and you need one more revision, one more attempt. Now when you're in a classroom, and you have a lot of kids, tracking where they all are is very, very hard.

And some kids just simply won't do it. So you give it back to them and say, "Here, do this again; make these changes. And then you get a *A*." They'll be like, "I don't care." So again, that's an ideal: this *A* or *I* world. You may not be able to reach that ideal, in which case, you just use a very simple, give everything a number of points. And then you come up with a percentage score. And I believe our Checklist Generator and some of our materials have points in parentheses.

**Julie Walker:** So the the option of points or not.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. To have points or not. And then it's just a math problem. So I think that can be done, and you could have a student who accomplishes 87 percent of the things on the checklist in terms of the points for each one. And then you could say, "Well, that's a B or B+" or whatever you want to. I would prefer obviously that you say to that student, "Wow, you're close, but you still need one more who/which clause in the second paragraph. And you need to be sure that your clincher actually reflects two to three key words here in the third paragraph. And just

get real specific and say, “Here’s what you need to get a 100%, and I’ll help you. I’ll give you suggestions, ideas. I’ll do almost everything that will allow you to get 100%.” And I think that is an ideal circumstance.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Well, our time is up, but I’m gonna squeeze one more in.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay. Squeeze on.

**Julie Walker:** From Carla – she says, “How do I encourage correct holding a pen when my high schoolers all have different ways that they hold their pens? Is it important to hold your pen in the correct way anymore?”

**Andrew Pudewa:** The answer is yes, the same way it is important how a professional basketball player puts on their socks. If you don’t put on ... This is Coach Wooden from UCLA.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, got it. Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So like the greatest basketball coach of all time—every year at the beginning of the season, even his seniors, even players he’d been coaching for years—he would have everybody have a little lesson: this is how you put on your socks.

And of course, these are adults who are headed for professional basketball, and he’s telling them this is how to put on your socks. But he says if you don’t put on your socks correctly, you get blisters. If you get blisters, you won’t be able to play as well. We want to win.

Therefore we start with socks. You know, this kind of idea. And I remember hearing that story, thinking there’s so many applications to that, and it takes a great kind of coach to be willing to say, sorry, we’re going to go back to kindergarten-level basics here if necessary.

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So with high school students, it’s tough because if you don’t get a little bit of buy-in from them, then it just becomes nagging and fighting, and it’s just, it’s not worth it. Hopefully, the lesson will be heard by people with younger children who are just establishing their habits, that yes, it is a physical handicap to be holding a utensil in a weird way. You will not be able to write as legibly or as quickly or as smoothly. Now can humans compensate? Sure. We can compensate for all sorts of handicaps.

But if we can avoid creating a handicap by doing something the right way in the beginning, we’re going to be better off. So I can’t really answer her question about whether she should pester high school age students about holding a pen or pencil correctly unless she can convince them that, yeah, you’ll be happier downline.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Maybe share, maybe ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** At least they're holding a pen! A lot of high school students just want to type everything.

**Julie Walker:** That's true. Well, Carla, share that sock story. Maybe that will inspire you and inspire your students to hold their pen correctly. Well, that's all that we have time for. So we will look forward to asking more questions in another ten episodes. So thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** All right. Thank you.

**Julie Walker:** Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Google podcasts, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at [IEW.com/podcast](http://IEW.com/podcast). Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: Would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.