

## **ADHD – Strategies for Success**

### **Transcript of Podcast Episode 362**

**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.

In preparing for what we’re going to talk about today, Andrew, which is attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), I realized I had an aha moment. I realized that the reason our podcasts are short are for me because I have a little bit of ADHD. And although I’m not officially diagnosed, I have two sons that were diagnosed ADHD.

One was very young, and one was not diagnosed until he was an adult. So the one that was young – probably on the spectrum of mild to severe. His was more severe, which is why we caught it at an early age, so to speak. The other one was like: “Oh. Huh, that explains a lot of things,” when he got his diagnosis. So I thought it would be good for us to talk about this.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, my two youngest children are now convinced that they have this. And they are also convinced that I do too although, you know, when I was a kid, nobody ... This didn’t even exist. So it has been interesting to see as people have learned more and more and more, that like anything, it’s a double-edged sword. It’s got some challenges, but it’s also got some advantages.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Well, and if you and I have ADHD for real, we are in good company. Let me give you a short list of people that I found were actually diagnosed or maybe posthumorously diagnosed.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Posthumorously? Posthumously.

**Julie Walker:** Posthumously.

**Andrew Pudewa:** They died ...

**Julie Walker:** Yes, yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... and then maybe they figured out their situation.

**Julie Walker:** Or maybe we can look back and laugh at them. Okay, so let me list a few names: Michael Phelps, swimmer; Terry Bradshaw, football player; Michael Jordan, classic. He was a basketball player. And then he said, I want to go play baseball. And then he went back to basketball. And now he’s the owner of the Charlotte Hornets, which is a professional NBA team. So he’s definitely varying his interests.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, okay.

**Julie Walker:** JFK.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You mean John Fitzgerald Kennedy?

**Julie Walker:** Yes. Not an athlete, but certainly one that has ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** I mean, but how would anybody know? I mean, how would they decide that JFK had ADHD?

**Julie Walker:** Looking at all of his varying interests. But we're not going to go into that because some of it may be a little bit (unintelligible). Walt Disney.

**Andrew Pudewa:** That's no surprise.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, right. Jules Verne.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, again, how would you know?

**Julie Walker:** Mozart.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Hmm.

**Julie Walker:** Albert Einstein.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, that's not a surprise.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And so all of these men, and I'm sure there's women on that list too, exhibited some of these characteristics.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Do you have a list of people who don't have ADHD?

**Julie Walker:** No, I don't. Well, according to ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think I've known some women who think they caught it from their kids.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, that could be it. That could be it. Well, according to the little bit of research that I did ... And of course, you and I are not experts on this. But the research that I did ... Eleven percent of schoolchildren have ADHD.

**Andrew Pudewa:** A diagnosis.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Maybe not a diagnosis, but maybe exhibit ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I think until today when you just told me before we started this, I thought that ADD and ADHD were actually two separate things. But clarify that for us.

**Julie Walker:** Sure. So ADHD and ADD. It used to be two different terms. But what they did is they actually, and this is according to the DSM-5 ... Do you know what the DSM-5 is?

**Andrew Pudewa:** *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual?*

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. When I was in college, we were only on DSM-4. But now we've grown up, and now we're on DSM-5. But they are the ones that said ADHD is actually one thing. And ADHD – the first form of it is predominantly in inattentive presentation. So you're not paying attention; you don't give close attention to details. You make careless mistakes. You have a difficulty sustaining attention. You appear not to be listening. You struggle to follow through with instructions. A few other things that ... We can put a link in the show notes that share that.

The ADHD that's predominantly hyperactivity with impulsive presentations: Fidgets with their hands or their feet. They squirm. They have difficulty remaining seated. I'm laughing at this because one of the things, one of the mistakes I made ... This is where I admit, dear listener, that I am not a perfect parent or teacher. But you already knew that. I actually took a belt to my son, but not in the way that you're thinking. I took a belt and put it around him ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** You tied him to the chair?

**Julie Walker:** ... to try and remind him. It wasn't tight, but it reminded him to stay in his chair. But this is ... Has difficulty remaining seated. Well, we finally just gave up on that and let him have a stand-up desk.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Maybe that's why so many people, you know – they think they're doing homeschooling, but they're actually doing carschooling ...

**Julie Walker:** That's true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... because they have to stay in the belt legally.

**Julie Walker:** Oh, that's true. That's true. Another thing with the predominantly hyperactive, impulsive presentation is they run about or climb excessively. And that's, you know, in children or extreme restlessness in adults. So that's one, two. And then the third thing is a combination of both. So I would say that in my case, looking back, my sons displayed both of those characteristics. They had a hard time sustaining their attention unless it was screens, which ... Go back to our conversation about screens and how that's not a good solution either. But there we go. That's kind of the idea of what ADHD is. But why would we be talking about this here on the Arts of Language Podcast?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I'm assuming that you believe there's some way that our work at IEW helps parents and teachers who have kids that would fall into this category, which the way you've described it would probably include just a majority of boys.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and that's true. But there is a qualifier here. In all of these symptoms that I just described, one of the things that you're looking at is, this crosses over home, school, any environment that you're in. And it's prevalent most of the time. So you know, if you've got a kid that needs more sleep or is not eating well or is acting up at church or something, that doesn't mean they're ADHD.

But if they're doing it across the board, and you're seeing it everywhere ... I'm just going to jump in right now and just let you know some of the compensations that I made. For my one son in particular, we just shortened his assignments. His times were twenty minutes, and then we'd skip to the next thing, twenty minutes and sometimes even less. And that helped him because he knew it was going to end, and so he would exert his will over his fidgetiness, knowing "if I just stay at my desk five more minutes, then I'll be free to move on to something."

**Andrew Pudewa:** Then this will be over, and something else will happen.

**Julie Walker:** And that something else oftentimes was a running break. Like, okay, go outside and run and run. You know, "Run, Forrest, run!" Definitely gave him a stand-up desk. One thing that we also gave, I mentioned, was letting him see just kind of a timer. Like he would know when the time was ended. But oftentimes, like when we were in public ... He did musical theater. And wow, you know, when your kid's on stage, and he's got ADHD, this can be actually really embarrassing, right?

But I, during the rehearsals, was right there with him, not on stage but, you know, nearby. And just basically I called it "mommy control" because he didn't have the self-control. He wasn't able to, at least initially, exercise his own will to overcome his hyperactivity.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, before we get too far into it, I'd be curious to know what are some of the advantages when, you know, a person with some degree of ADHD ... I think we could argue almost everybody has some degree. But when that is ... You know, that can be a challenge or a burden or an impediment in some ways when you're young. How does that become an advantage in life as by these famous people – obviously successful, contributed a lot to our world? So what is it about ADHD that's the other side of the sword, so to speak?

**Julie Walker:** Sure. Well, we know there's no such thing truly as multitasking. You cannot do two things at once. You can't have in mind thinking about one thing and thinking about something else successfully. But a person who has ADHD is able to do a lot of plate spinning.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Because they can switch back and forth ...

**Julie Walker:** Very easily.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... more facilely than someone who's not got that neurological advantage. Okay, well that makes sense.

**Julie Walker:** And so I would say that that's the biggest advantage right there.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think there's also a high percentage of entrepreneurs – had either dyslexia and/or ADHD.

**Julie Walker:** Right. And I think, you know, ADHD, it can even be like a severe form of it. You can't even ignore your clothing rubbing against your skin. ADHD ultimately is, you can't not pay attention to your environment around you. You're hearing; you're seeing; you're feeling; you're smelling; you're tasting; you're touching things that most people have trained themselves to ignore it. It's like overstimulation.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So you live in a more sensory rich experience in a way.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Which explains ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** For better or worse.

**Julie Walker:** Right. So that explains the entrepreneur thing because, wow, you see the need for something that doesn't exist, and so you work to create that.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or you have some clothing that's terribly uncomfortable, so you invent something that's less uncomfortable.

**Julie Walker:** Perhaps so. Well, you know, Einstein didn't wear socks ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** Okay.

**Julie Walker:** ... because they bothered his feet. He wore baggy clothing because he was more comfortable. So there you go: Einstein, ADHD. Okay. Back to the Arts of Language and how does ... And of course, speaking about my own son – the one in particular, of course, he grew up learning Structure and Style more so than the other ones because he was the youngest. And so he had it at an earlier age. And I actually attended class with him: a *Student Writing Intensive* that you taught live. And you didn't even know me then. But you said to me (because you welcomed parents to attend the class with their students) ... You said to me, wow, he didn't get much down on paper, did he yet? No, but he got a lot more down on paper than he ever had before.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Hmm. Well of course, I am always suggesting to parents: hey, sit with your children if you need to. And you know, that's one of the advantages of a class like that homeschool, co-op, flexible situation because most children in schools – well, mom can't sit next to them the whole time. But there is that, you know, "Hey, come on in. Come back here. We're doing this right now."

So, that's ... You know, the other thing that I think you probably did to accommodate ... And I think we did, maybe not intentionally because we thought, oh, there's an attention challenge here, is just reading aloud a lot because the kids themselves couldn't sustain the independent reading. They could read for a little bit. But then the world is calling, whereas with reading aloud, well, you know, they could play with blocks or Legos or draw pictures or ...

**Julie Walker:** Jigsaw puzzles. That's what he did. Yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... or practice standing on the head. So I think, you know, we see that parents who do take the time to read out loud to their kids who are not likely to be easily able to read a lot on their own – that's going to make a huge difference in their language aptitude forever.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. But you mentioned a key thing, though, is allowing them to do something else with their hands and so that they can have that sustained attention with their ears and their imagination. Okay, so I keep asking the question, and I keep getting distracted. How ironic. How does *Structure and Style* help students who struggle with attention deficit and hyperactivity?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well you know, we talked about this with the dyslexia podcast we recorded recently, addressing the fact, the problem, the challenge, that writing is extremely complicated: the process of finding an idea, speaking it into existence, holding that idea in your memory while you go and wrestle the mechanical information to record the first word of that sentence, and holding it long enough to go get the second word, and holding it long enough to go get the third word.

That's a level of sustained concentration which some children are more apt for. And I think because the dyslexic student can get visually overwhelmed, it starts to break down. Well, the same thing's going to happen with the process being so long and so complex. Attending to it for a long enough time to get progress is hard for the ADHD. So our strategy is the same. Take the big, long, complex process called writing. And break it into smaller, more manageable, and in this case even potentially isolated chunks of activity.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. So that key word outline that you do on Monday maybe takes fifteen, twenty minutes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Or less. Depending on ... You know, if you're following our guidelines, which is "source text should be at or below the reading level of a student," you read the source text out loud if necessary, sometimes a few times, which is, as I mentioned, for the dyslexic student particularly helpful in terms of they often have good auditory memories. So you just be sure that it's clear. The words are understood. The ideas are visualized in the brain there.

**Julie Walker:** And even to ... And I know you recommend this for all students. And I know that for the *Structure and Style for Students* Year 1, Level A (actually all of them), you're having the students, at least for Units 1 and 2, underline the key words and then transfer them to the page. And I think even that step – that's bringing it down even further.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It is, and it's creating interactivity, whereas if you're just reading something, it's a bit more passive. But if you're reading and marking something ... And you know, we continue that into Unit 4 and 6 as well.

And you know, even Mortimer Adler, who, I don't know if he was ADHD or what. But you know, Mortimer Adler in his book *How to Read a Book* strongly promoted interacting with the book as you're reading it: underlining, putting words in the margin. And I think that helps sustain

attentiveness for everyone, but particularly critical for the person who is more easily distracted by additional sensory input.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** One thing I found interesting is I never liked to hear music while I was reading. I found it really hard to read and listen to music at the same time. I still do. In fact, I don't really like music unless I'm doing nothing except listening to the music.

But I had one daughter in particular, and I think she would fall in this category though we didn't really banter these words about too strongly when she was that young. She needed to have headphones on, listening to music, in order to do anything for more than a few minutes whether it was reading or doing math or writing. And I guess it was part of that "helped me insulate myself from more chaotic sensory input by putting in controlled sensory input."

So you know, I thought that was very interesting. But you know, with our Structure and Style we find that students who you described ... the son who was in my class, and I said he didn't write much, and you said, well, it's more than he ever did before ... You know, we hear that quite often ... is because we are able to create a process and finish in a short time, add to that process, finish, add to that process, and finish.

And they'll ... My classes, you know – generally I try to run them about an hour and a half or so, just so we can get enough done. In the home or the full-time classroom, that whole process can be broken into very small pieces. And of course, we do that in the SSS. We give people an option: you don't have to watch this whole thing in one setting.

And so that's very helpful. And then one thing I always like to point out to parents is ... I will say something like "more frequent, shorter assignments are better." Why? Well, what do kids love the most about schoolwork?

**Julie Walker:** Being done.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. Being finished. That's what's satisfying. That's that sense of completion. Like, I did this. And now I'm done, and I can go do something else.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. And you talk about the endorphins that you get when you finish something. And that's just like, there's a drug right there.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And even with older kids in really longer assignments, the trick is to break it into smaller chunks, smaller pieces. But that's a life skill too, isn't it? I mean, you work a lot. I will tell our listeners: You are one of the most hardworking, skilled managers and writers and accomplishees that I personally know. But I also know how you like to chunk your time.

**Julie Walker:** I do.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And you like to say, I'm going to do this for this amount of time and then stop and then go do this other thing for this amount of time. And you get a lot more done that way.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. You know what phrase comes in my head, Andrew? It's from your "Nurturing Competent Communicator" talk where you "died in Mordor." That's how I feel when I'm going down a path, and I've been in it too long. Like I'm doing budgets or something, and it's like, I've got to stop. I'm dying in Mordor. It's just long and boring and tedious.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, we'll just qualify that by pointing out that your MBA was in marketing ...

**Julie Walker:** It's true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... not budgets. But nevertheless ...

**Julie Walker:** I have to do it all.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... you know, it is that case where if we can be sensitive to our students and adjust accordingly ... But I also believe there's an argument to be made for cultivating longer attention spans.

**Julie Walker:** Agreed.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I mean, we don't want these labels that we give to kids or people to become really an excuse for not challenging improvement. You know, it'd be like if I said, well you know, I'm not strong. So I shouldn't exercise. Well, I mean, that's like stupid, right?

If you're not strong, that's even a bigger reason to exercise. And if you are strong, and you want to maintain strength or get stronger ... So I think we can look at attention in a similar way. Some people maybe have a better aptitude for extended periods of attention than other people, but that doesn't mean that people can't expand or improve their span of attention.

**Julie Walker:** Agreed. Yep.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But it kind of has to be done in the right way, right? I mean, again, back to the exercise analogy. If I just said to myself, well, I'm not strong. And I want to be stronger. So I'm just going to do whatever for as long as I want. Well, that wouldn't really be a program; that wouldn't be a method. It would have no structure. It would not even have style, and it would be ineffective at helping to solve my problem of not being strong. Right? So what do I need? I need a plan. And this is what I think we see: curriculums that are effective are not only effective because the student has a particular challenge, but they are effective because they help to improve the weak side of that neurological circumstance.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. And you've done some research on, even learning cursive can be something that can help a student with ADHD.



**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, that almost blew my mind. I don't have the details here, and I don't know that it's available anymore, but it was for decades if I recall: a program called *Train Your Brain*. And it was this argument that you could actually improve, or I guess alleviate, the symptoms of ADD or ADHD by increasing attention span through—get this—cursive writing practice combined with rhythmic music. And she had a lot of documentation on this, more than I would even want to begin to look at.

But the thing that struck me as being interesting here is, you know, if you have a very, very short attention span, and you are printing words on paper, right? You write a letter; you're done. What's next, right? But in cursive you are forced by the nature of the activity to connect your letters. And so you can't just write one letter and be done. You have to write one letter and then the next and the next and the next. And then you can be done.

And then I'm wondering if that rhythmic music that she used in her program wasn't similar to what my daughter experienced (whereas if I hear music, I won't hear somebody talking about this over there or this little sound or the door slamming over there): that it creates almost a focus, a tunnel of sound that is insulative against other distracting sounds, I suppose. Which for people like that, your traditional "go study in the library," where it's supposed to be quiet, but the quietness actually amplifies every other little sound that happens ...

**Julie Walker:** Turning pages, the librarian shushing people, click. Oh, yeah.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But you know, I think our approach to teaching writing does that too, because we tend to ... In Unit 1 and 2, we start with very short things. In fact, I've even had some parents who look at it and say, "But, but, but what about when this kid has to write a real paper?" as if one paragraph wasn't real.

And then what we, of course, like to help everyone understand: that even a great huge, long thing, you know, a senior thesis or even a master's level thesis, is really a collection of paragraphs.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** A great, huge, long thing is really a collection of shorter things. And yet it seems a lot of people just never learned how to take a big, long thing and break it into those smaller pieces, especially when it comes to writing. So you meet a lot of people who, you know, kind of procrastinated to the last minute. It was due tomorrow, so they pulled an all nighter and hammered it out. And okay, you know, it worked. They passed, but was it of the quality, right, that would be as good as that person could do had they the strategy to break it into smaller parts?

So you know, I love Webster's approach. Yeah, start with really short things. And then we move in Unit 3 to three paragraphs. For some kids that's a big jump. And of course, you don't have to do all three paragraphs in one setting. You know, you can do one a day or one every other day or however long it takes. But the end product is three. And you see how you got there. And then we get into Unit 8, right, 7, 8, 9, toward the end of our system. And those are generally five or more paragraph compositions. Well, that seems like a whole lot to a child. But if they have come along

our pathway, oh, so you write one paragraph, and then you write another, and then you write another, and then you write a conclusion. Then you write ...

And “Boy, I never wrote five paragraphs before!” And we see that a lot with these, you know, ten-year-old kids who get into one of the theme-based books. And at the beginning of the year, the mom’s like, he’s never going to be able to do it. And by the end of the year, it’s like, that was so much easier than I thought.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. One of the things that was very important to me when raising my son was that he didn’t make excuses for his disability, so to speak. I knew he had to stand in line at the DMV just like everyone else. And somehow this needed to be trained; this needed to be ... This idea of just making excuses for his bad behavior; that was not okay. What we wanted to do was stretch him and help him grow while at the same time, you know, capitalizing on his strength. I mean, right? Isn’t that ideally ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** The creativity ... You know, you were talking about that idea of the mind moves very fast in this multitasking. And there are students who – they can be interested in a whole lot of things all at once. But then we’ve talked about this many times before: Creativity isn’t some completely new thing; it is the combination and permutation of previously existing information.

And so you look at some of the people on your list: Walt Disney, Edison, Einstein. Part of their innovative ability was that they had that expansive interest, experience, database of stuff to put together. And this parallels, you know, very closely with our approach to teaching writing – is the using of source texts and stories and information so that when they do hit this “now write about something,” well, they’ve got more in there to attach stuff to and pull out and then use that law of combination and permutation to demonstrate a level of creativity far beyond what they might not have. So you know, I think, yeah, I would say our Structure and Style approach is perfect for people with ADHD.

**Julie Walker:** Agreed. So listener, if you have a student that is a future Einstein, Michael Jordan, Walt Disney ...

**Andrew Pudewa:** ... or Julie Walker ...

**Julie Walker:** ... we’re here to help. Thank you, Andrew.

**Andrew Pudewa:** 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.