

## Back to the Beginning with Units 1 and 2

### Transcript of Episode 384

**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.

Well, Andrew, it has been another really hot Oklahoma summer.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And you're using that in the past tense—has been—because we're coming to the end of it. Which means something I'm sure.

**Julie Walker:** Well, we're getting ready for school to start again

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, as everyone is so excited.

**Julie Walker:** Maybe.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, it's part of the routine of life.

**Julie Walker:** I remember seeing one of my favorite movies, *You've Got Mail*, and that's the Tom Hanks, Meg Ryan version, where she talks about freshly sharpened pencils, which of course, we don't use pencils in our system, but I love the start of the school year, and actually being early August, it's a couple weeks until most schools start, at least in the upper hemisphere, right?

Because anybody that's below the equator, they're in the thick of things.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right, but it's moved earlier and earlier it seems. When I was a kid, it was after Labor Day. And now, like especially here in Oklahoma, it's the first week of August.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, yes. And you're out doing teacher training.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I’m not going to ask why, but it is what it is. And the start of the school year for IEW teachers and parents and classrooms that use IEW means back to the beginning.

**Julie Walker:** Back to the beginning, and that, of course, for us means Unit 1 and 2. So we get this question occasionally. Why are we starting over again? I mean, do students who are learning math start back over again with adding one plus one when they're going into calculus?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, I mean, that's kind of an extreme example, but you do see the phenomena, especially in math, where the first several chapters of the math book are review of the last year's last few chapters for most grade levels. And that's because most everyone in

education knows that children can forget a number of things over a long vacation because they're not using that.

And if it's something you're using every day, you won't forget it. But, how often in daily life do we divide fractions? So we need that review. But in our system, we're doing the same units, but we're not using the same source texts, and we can flex the checklist based on previous experience. So it isn't so much a case of doing what we did before but pulling out some tools and refreshing ourselves on the use of those tools.

I think that's the better comparison.

**Julie Walker:** Right. When I think about the conversations we've had with students who have gone through the *Structure and Style for Students*, it's now been many years since we recorded that video series. I just love to hear them say what was their biggest takeaway. And a lot of students say making that key word outline.

And of course, that's right where we start.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We have to be careful too, because people think, oh, key word outline. That's Unit 1 and 2. No. We use key word outlines in every single unit. We never stop using key word outlines. What differs is where those key words come from and how do they get onto the paper? But an outline for Unit 2 could look very similar to an outline for Unit 6.

**Julie Walker:** Right. It's just where do you get the words from in Unit 2 versus Unit 6? And I'm saying Units 1 and 2. This episode is Units 1 and 2. Perhaps it will become obvious why we tend to lump those two together. But why don't you just explain Unit 1 and then Unit 2.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, anyone who's done our course, they could explain it probably just as well as I could, but maybe a few small, little distinctions. In Unit 1 we are teaching children to have a short source text at or below their reading level hopefully. Read it. Be sure you kind of understand it, get the gist of it.

It can be anything from an Aesop fable to some hopefully interesting information about a person, place, animal, thing, event, and to then read the first sentence and choose three key words from that first sentence and then underline them on the source text paper if you wish. You don't have to, but helps some kids. And then copy those three words onto a piece of paper, putting commas in between the words, and then reading the next sentence of the source text, choosing up to three key words, copy those key words, putting commas, hopefully. And continue that process until you've finished. And I would say most Unit 1 and 2 source texts should be relatively short—so somewhere in the range of four to ten sentences, depending on the age and experience and reading level of the student.

So it's a relatively short thing.

**Julie Walker:** So one paragraph, two paragraphs?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Either one. I mean, depends on your source text and how long that is. But, as we've said many times, more frequent, shorter assignments generally makes for better learning. So, and in all our materials, we target that range.

Then the next step very simply kind of put aside or ignore the source text. Look at the key word outline. Try to remember, okay, why did I write those words? And just go through it one line at a time, articulating verbally a sentence that approximates the meaning of the original and going through that outline until you've kind of reconstructed verbally the original. And that's Unit 1.

That's it. I mean, I don't know why we have to spend a whole hour teaching people how to do this in a video when I can explain it so concisely in four minutes.

**Julie Walker:** I love this idea, though, of telling it back and so many other writing programs, they talk about creating a rough draft or a

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, it's the writing process.

**Julie Walker:** Sure. Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So the writing process as you see it on the wall is they'll use some term like *brainstorming* or *mind mapping*, or sometimes you'll see *outlining*. But basically the figuring out what to write. And then the next process would be *drafting*. Or sometimes they'll put something like *sloppy copy*.

And then they'll put *revise*, and then they'll put *final copy* or maybe *publish*, something like that. But it's profoundly vague.

**Julie Walker:** Yes, yes, exactly. I've seen one that's POWER: *Pre-write*,

**Andrew Pudewa:** Oh, *pre-write*. Yes.

**Julie Walker:** *Organize, Write, Edit, Rewrite*, and I'm thinking, where's the pre-write in our system? It's the key word

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, yeah, usually that kind of, I like that POWER. I mean, it's a nice acronym, but it's, they're starting with pre-write means you find something in your brain that you remember or imagine, and that's where you start. And of course we don't. Because we know that can cause a lot of kids to just get stuck and never go anywhere and get frustrated and overwhelmed very easily.

And then what does the teacher do? And you get into that problem of, well, I can't tell him what to write. That's helping too much. And so we just, everybody, regardless if you are high talent and been doing this for many years or if you're brand new, we start back at Unit 1.

Here's the source text. Here's the process. If you've done it before, great. It'll be easy. If you haven't done it before, great. It's gonna be easier than what you have done before.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly, and I love that we give those students confidence so that they can become competent communicators and thinkers. And I say that every time at the beginning of every podcast. That's our goal.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Don't you get tired of saying that? Well, and the other thing to point out is that, and we do this all along because our tagline is listen, speak, read, write, think! And so using that Unit 1 as an opportunity to introduce some very basic idea of standing in front of peers or other people and speaking in complete sentences from a key word outline as the first step in a public speaking pathway.

**Julie Walker:** Not looking at your paper. Looking at the audience.

**Andrew Pudewa:** We start that right at Unit 1 as well. And I mean, if someone wants to see this, any student class I've ever taught, especially the Unit 1 2 classes with the TWSS course, you can watch me do this with students. And it's not tough; it's not complex, so anybody can get going right away.

**Julie Walker:** And often in a class, in fact, most of the time in a class, you'll have the students do it in pairs and then maybe pick one or two to do it in front of the whole class.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right. It just depends on how much time and are we gonna get back or is this a one shot thing? But if you're, if you're teaching in a classroom, you've got built-in audience and time.

And so you should be able to give maybe two, possibly three children a chance each day to do a little bit of public speaking.

And then everyone in the class gets a chance, every two weeks, maybe twice a month, which is great. And over the course of say eight-, nine-month school year, people can have fifteen to twenty opportunities to stand in front of their peers.

**Julie Walker:** Which is so awesome, which is a great opportunity. Because this, same as what you said earlier about the key word outline, this telling it back isn't something that we end in Unit 1. It carries through the units because that's a great way to rehearse what you're going to say when you actually start writing on paper.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yep. It's just Unit 1 is a super easy way to get started because no one ever has a problem of I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I can't think of anything.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly. Exactly. And I think that's one of the beauties of our system is knowing what to write. So Unit 2, what's, what's the difference between Unit 1 and 2?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, Unit 2 is just that process and then adding the next step. So it's the same, same type of source text, short one paragraph, maybe two, at or below reading level. Make the key word outline, tell it back, and then say, "Okay, now take out a fresh sheet of paper and write sentences that correspond with the key words."

If you're in the habit of telling it back, then you're in the habit of kind of hearing what you want to write, and then you can hold that in your mind more successfully. And then write the sentence you heard yourself say to yourself. You know, for a lot of kids, especially young ones or kids who you know have various challenges with language and writing and reading and memory and all that, they might get an idea, but they'll write a few words and then kind of forget what they were gonna say and then to go back and wrestle that idea up again.

And with a key word outline, that's not likely to happen. And if it does happen, you say, "I can't remember why I wrote these key words." Fine. Go back, read the original again. There's no rule against that. We're not asking people to have perfect memories, but the good news is that most all kids can do this very easily, and then you can get about the business of forming habits.

And I think I'm more acutely aware of this than I was maybe a decade or more ago. That when you start Unit 2, whether you've got kids who did this in the past and took a little break and they're revisiting, or as many people have, particularly in schools or co-ops or things, kids for whom it's the first time, Unit 2 is the time when you really want to focus on establishing certain habits.

One of those, and I would say probably the most important, is skipping lines. And when you're writing on paper, skipping lines is so valuable for everyone. Number one, it makes it visually easier for the child themselves to read what they wrote and kind of proofread or double check or whatever, and so it's just visually easier.

Number two, it gives them space to change something. So if they missed a word and they have a space above, they can put in the word they missed. Whereas if you're not skipping lines, it becomes very visually chaotic very quickly and therefore frustrating to a lot of kids, especially if they're on that, maybe a slight bit of visual confusion, dyslexic, dysgraphic, whatever.

**Julie Walker:** So, rule number one, skip a line.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So skipping lines and just absolute, there, you just always do this. And if you start right there in Unit 2 and you, and actually you can start in Unit 1. You can skip lines on the key word outline, but it's when you're writing in 2, sentences and paragraphs, that skipping lines so, so important. The second kind of goes along with that is no erasing.

And people can refer to my article I wrote long time ago, "Convert to Pens," and there's even research that has been done to show that pens give children a smoother writing experience, darker line, less smudging, and it eliminates a possibility of erasing that would most hurt the kid who has the kind of extreme perfectionist tendency.

And I know we talked a while ago about kind of the gifted, talented zone of kids and how perfectionism can be something that actually inhibits their smooth progress in something so that no erasing. You set that up from the very beginning, so there's no such thing as a first and only draft. And the earlier you establish that as the standard, the less anyone's going to whine or complain or argue about that down line.

**Julie Walker:** Right. Yep.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Other thing about double spacing is it does allow the teacher or the editor to make edits that are then easier for the child to see when that child is typing it up or copying it over again. So those would be the two habits that I think are most important along with other things that are sometimes important to some people, like putting your name on the paper.

**Julie Walker:** Oh yes. Yes, exactly, exactly. You mentioned just now the teacher or editor. Is this a good time to talk about the difference between the two?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, in my talk, the *Four Deadly Errors of Teaching Writing*, which I would put right up there as probably the most useful thing that I can teach anyone in addition to the TWSS seminar. So if there's anyone who hasn't heard that *Four Deadly Errors* talk, please do.

**Julie Walker:** Link in the show notes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But I do point out that there's kind of an emotional aspect to correcting that isn't quite as burdensome as editing. So if a student is being corrected, it implies wrongness, I didn't know what I'm doing, I'm stupid and I hate this. Where any writer, any writer, you could be the highest paid writer in the world. You could be John Grisham. You still have an editor, and so we all need editors. And so your editor is a friend that it's a shift in relationship.

And if a teacher has the time to do that, to edit everything and give the papers back to kids and say, "Here. I've edited your papers. Implement these changes, final copy, then you're done." I don't know that all teachers have the time, which is why I have encouraged the idea of putting the responsibility on the student to hire an editor, who is someone else. And it could be an older sibling or a friend who hopefully is smarter than you are.

It could be a relative. It could be a mom although moms tend to want to kind of give you lectures. So you sometimes have to train the mom, just fix it up, hand it back, don't need the lecture.

And then the guidance for the editor is don't try to make it good. Don't try to make it something it isn't. Just try to make it legal so that you can teach the mechanical aspects, and then the student in seeing "Okay. Oh. I had a missing word; put it in, or, oh, that should have been a period and a capital rather than a comma or nothing at all."

"Uh oh, that wasn't a great word. This is a better one." All of those little bits of information that make that writing closer to legal, I guess is the best word I can use from a grammatical point of view. Those are all stored as bits of information that help to build the database of how do you write? from a mechanical perspective. And then if you need to, okay, you've got a grammar program or a *Fix It!* program or an opportunity to teach some grammar stuff, but you're not doing it on the paper *ex post facto*, trying to explain everything.

So my goal for editors is just fix it with as little as you can. Like take a minimalist approach. Make it legal, hand it back with a smile. Copy this over, implement these changes. Type this up, double check that you got all of the edits in there.

**Julie Walker:** Check what you do.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And do what you check. And then you're done. And then we move on, have another, have another source text and another key word outline and another summary.

And then as we move on, we start to introduce style techniques.

**Julie Walker:** Style. So before we go there, because I do want to touch on that before we wrap things up. I have heard you talk about possibly doing several Unit 1 exercises and then picking one of those to do a Unit 2. Can you speak to that?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. I think this works especially well if you are teaching in a classroom.

You have different subject matter to deal with, and you've got the kids pretty much all day every day. You can use the Unit 1 key word outline, tell it back actually as a way to improve reading comprehension, improve memory of content. So if you can use some source texts that are connected with your history or social studies, some source texts connected with maybe your, your science or natural study, maybe some source texts connected somehow with authors or literature or stories, something you know, Aesop fables, and I've even heard of people doing it with composers for music.

Or artists for art appreciation. You know, it takes a little more work, but that way you're actually writing and talking about the things you want to learn anyway. And this really was Webster's ideal from the very beginning. So if you look at the time investment, if you've got a paragraph or two, you've got four to ten sentences, you can make a key word outline, put the kids in pairs, and tell it back. You can get that done in fifteen, twenty minutes, half an hour max. If you can't do it in half an hour, you've got either too long of source text or other problems going on. So it's a relatively short investment of time.

Whereas then writing that out, especially in the primary and elementary grades, that can add an hour, two onto the whole process. So the idea might be you could do one or two, or who knows, maybe even three key word outlines from source texts in a day, and then have 5, 6, 7, 8, or more. And then maybe choose one of those to take to completion. But even if you just did one in science and one in social studies and then you picked out of four to six one of those to rewrite, that would be a really good balance.

One of the things, and I don't know if I have told this before, I don't know if I put it in the TWSS, but I was many years ago, invited to be on a committee of reading experts helping to design a reading program for the state of Alaska. The state superintendent of public instruction invited me to join this committee and contribute to this project, and I said to him, "I'm not like these people. I don't have advanced degrees. I'm not a reading expert. I really don't think I should be here."

And he said, “No, we know from the schools you've worked with in Alaska, this key word outline and telling it back, this is the missing piece for comprehension.”

It makes sense. I mean, how often do we read something and then we kind of forget about it? Whereas if we read something and then we tell someone about what we just read, we're much more likely to remember more of what we read, and so kind of creating a more formalized context for doing that is just immensely valuable.

**Julie Walker:** Okay, so now I want to turn the page to our style. Just briefly, at what point do we introduce our stylistic techniques? Because of course, our teacher training course is, you referred to it many times, *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*. So Units 1 and 2, those are structural models. When and how does style get introduced?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, so in the demonstration classes that I teach, usually I will just do the key word outline, introduce a style technique or two, and have 'em rewrite, and that's the first lesson. Now the younger children are the less you would probably want to do all that. Plus very few teachers are gonna have a two-hour period in one day just to do writing as I would in a demonstration class.

But I think you can fairly quickly, maybe after the first or second time that you are writing sentences from the key word outline, establishing the good habits, helping them understand the process of being edited and rewriting, then you can say, “Alright. We're going to show you some dress-up techniques, and Webster came up with this idea a long, long, long, long time ago, and it sounds a little juvenile, but on the other hand, even as adults we say, “Well, should I dress up for that?”

**Julie Walker:** Exactly.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Why? Because just like we can adjust our clothing and jewelry and appearances for different situations, then we also can adjust our writing for different audiences.

And much like you have to teach children, especially boys, how to put on a tie and wear a coat and show up at wherever, a wedding or church.

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Culturally, there's not too many opportunities for women to wear ties and coats.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Right, but it's the same thing. You know, which dress do you choose and how do you fix your hair and all that. You do have to teach children. This is how you put something in your writing to make it a little bit more whatever you want to say: dressed up, fancy, formal, sophisticated, engaging, interesting.

You know, whatever words you use because kids left on their own, they'll wear their cutoff jeans and a ripped t-shirt and go around barefoot all day every day. But you don't want them showing up at Aunt Sally's wedding like that. So, same thing. If we just let kids write whatever they would write, they'll sound kind of like they talk.



And that level of sophistication would be hard. How do you cheerlead someone into sounding better? You know, it reminds me of the six traits writing assessment model, which then was the six traits plus one. And they would lecture the teachers: encourage the kids to have better word choice, try to inspire them to have better sentence fluency, try to help them find their voice.

All this stuff and it's so abstract. What, what do you do with a ten-year-old? Use better words. So with our dress-ups, we start with that -ly adverb, and we give them a nice long list of -ly adverbs that are likely to fit into whatever source text you're working with so that hopefully they don't just pick one randomly off the list and sounds kind of goofy although that can happen, and it's not the end of the world if it does happen. But we present the word list. We introduce a grammatical construction, the *who/which* or the adjective clause, which sounds a bit more sophisticated, a bit more literary than what we use in our normal day-to-day speaking.

So we go through that list of dress-ups, and we follow the principle of EZ+1. So with young children, you start with one, and you do that in each of your little one- or two-paragraph assignments until it is easy, meaning they can do it without much help and it doesn't sound too goofy most of the time.

Then you can add in the next dress-up technique. You don't stop doing the first one. You build cumulatively. Then over a period of weeks or months or years, depending on the age and aptitude, you have a nice long list of word usages and grammatical constructions and specific things to do to make the writing be a little bit, I would say, more sophisticated than you're likely to get in day-to-day usage.

And that's good because that also presses them to use the more literary part of their language area, and that of course is also dependent—we've talked about so many times—on the language they've heard through being read to and reading, the language they've memorized through poetry and other things they may have memorized.

And so you're just kind of upping the level of sophistication gradually over a long period of time. So I would think most people would start by introducing the first or maybe the first two dress-up techniques in the Unit 2 timeframe of approximately the first month of the school year.

**Julie Walker:** Right. And we have a saying in business that says what gets measured is what gets done. And that's the checklist. If you require it on the checklist, the kids will do it because you're measuring it. They're not gonna do it if they are not being held accountable. So this idea when you were sharing about the six traits, just use great vocabulary.

Well, we've got that figured out.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, and you know I don't say this often anymore, but twenty years ago I used to kind of joke a little bit and say we take the Ten Commandments approach to teaching writing rather than ten good suggestions because you could make ten good suggestions. Who uses those? The high aptitude kids.

Who says, “Well, that looks like too a hassle”? You know, everyone else. Whereas if you say, “No, you do this and this and this, and you don't do that,” and everything works better as a result. And I've been contemplating kind of in a bigger, philosophical way. I saw a quote, and I don't know where this quote came from. I wish I could remember, but it said, “If you will not be subject to law, you will surely end a slave.”

You will end up as a slave.

It's law that actually gives us freedom from tyranny. And I see that in our writing program when we say, “Here's the things you must do and here's the things you must not do.” It gives those boundaries for a much higher level of creativity than if you just said, “Here's paper. Do whatever you want.”

I see this again and again and again. So people should not be afraid. And I think that we could finish up by saying there's two things that new teachers when they start Unit 1 and 2, the beginning of the year, they will, if they're not actually afraid, they're just nervous or subconsciously worried.

Number one, this is too easy. This is not real writing. This is not kids expressing themselves, so we're not doing what we should be doing in terms of teaching that. And, and that's a lot of them, that's their concept of what writing is: it has to be you expressing your thoughts on paper. Well, we get there, but we do know it doesn't work for a lot of people to start there.

**Julie Walker:** Right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So trust the system.

So they kind of have this feeling like, well it's not real writing. The other thing that people in that same sense think it's too easy. This isn't challenging enough. It seems like there's nothing hard enough to warrant what I should be teaching in nth grade or whatever. And I think if a teacher goes through our, even the first few units of our TWSS, they get to that “Infrasound and Elephants,” and they very quickly realize this is not as easy as it looks.

It's a different kind of challenge. But it is a challenge that is exercising the mind and the memory and the necessary components of language in an appropriate and yet way that everyone can succeed.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. So it's not real writing. Yes, it is. It's scaffolding. We're building a ladder for the students to be able to easily climb up to. Any type of writing that they're going to be called upon to do as they get older. And it's too easy? Well, I would rather start off if I'm nine years old or if I'm nineteen years old.

I would rather start off with something easy, and then as I gradually grow in my ability, then it just becomes EZ+1.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah, well, and really every single skill you want to be able to draw a straight line and make a curve before you have to draw a face. You want to be able to kick the ball and run before you have to be in a soccer game. You know, everything requires a starting point, and it's always okay to revisit those basic starting points.

**Julie Walker:** Yep, yep. Very good. Well, thank you, Andrew, for taking us back to Unit 1 and 2.

**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.