

Ask Andrew Anything Transcript of Episode 390

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.

Julie Walker: You know, Andrew, these Ask Andrew Anything episodes, of which this is one of them, don't seem to come out often enough. It just seems like we just have increasingly higher numbers of questions. So I'm hoping we can get to most of these today.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I hope so. There are of course many people who have very similar questions, so that's why we do this. It isn't for the five or six people who actually sent in questions. We don't even know if they'll hear this episode. Other people may very likely have similar questions.

Julie Walker: It's true. Well, and I'm hesitant to start with this one because I fear we're going to run out of time just with this one question because it's such a big question. But I do want to be sure we address this and so well here it is.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, you could do it last and then we would run out of time. You wouldn't have a fear.

Julie Walker: This is true.

Okay, so this one's from Donna and I actually mentioned that we were going to ask this question, so I wanted to be sure we included it. I'll read the question, and then I'll tell you when we mentioned it. My question, “What are your thoughts, comments, concerns with the emerging AI chat technology as we can use it for writing almost anything.”

I introduced this question when we had a conversation with Drew Forsma and we did an episode on chatGPT, and what is this thing? And this was, as I mentioned, in another episode, I recently went to the NCFCA competition, and that was definitely a topic of conversation there for the National Christian Speech and Debate Tournament.

How can we help our students navigate this area? And actually two of the students gave speeches on AI and the implications of that, which was fascinating.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I don't want to burn up a bunch of time on this because I honestly don't know that much. It's new to everyone, but I will make a few comments and put a teaser out. I have an acquaintance who is a professor at Hillsdale, and he has been very seriously researching AI and its capabilities and the implications for that in the field of education.

So if we could have another podcast and interview him, I think we could get a better voice because I haven't spent much time. Quite honestly, I haven't even signed up for an OpenAI

chatGPT thing because I honestly just don't care that much. But there is that thought that, okay, if there's a tool that can be as good as a human and write stuff, that could destroy our business.

But on the other hand, can that thing actually be as good as a human? And if the answer is no, it can only give the appearance. It can only pretend. Well, then that could explode our business. It depends on where people's priorities are.

Now I've talked to a few of my peers in the world of writing instruction and classical education. And a few things—Most everyone I've talked to who has tried it says that it's not good. You can tell it's not written by a real person who has knowledge and discernment about the subject. It's a clever concoction of stuff you can pull from various places, but it's not something that I would use instead of myself. So I've had a few people basically say that to me. It's not good enough to make up to be a human yet.

Julie Walker: Well, and the thing that I think about Andrew, is so many of the college students back before this came out, they were paying people to write their essays for them.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. But that was like paying people.

Julie Walker: Here's my point though. It's now becoming more accepted to just, you're not paying ChatGPT. Well, yeah, there's a subscription fee, but the writing is probably better than that student could do. We know that students generally don't know how to write well, thus the existence of our company.

Andrew Pudewa: I talked to one person who is not solely in charge, but is in the administration of an online college, and he said, “When we get a paper and it is detected as created by AI, we rejected immediately give the student a failing grade and also extend to them the opportunity to redo that assignment. And promise not to try to sneak it by us again.” I said, “How do you know?” He said, “Well, it's pretty easy. You just upload the papers into an AI analysis, and with a high percentage the AI analytical program can determine whether it was written by an AI.” Now is this just going to be the war of artificial intelligence?

And where does that end? Also, I think everyone is nervous because this thing is in, its kind of infancy and if we generally look at technology, it gets better very, very quickly. So where will we be two or five years from now? I don't know.

One thing that we would hope is that the soul of a person comes through their writing to some degree. Obviously, really original, perceptive, imaginative, powerful writers that's happening, right? I mean, the soul of CS Lewis is in the writing, and no one other than CS Lewis could have written what CS Lewis wrote.

Julie Walker: yes.

Andrew Pudewa: But we're not all there yet.

Julie Walker: No.

Andrew Pudewa: So I guess the danger is, are so many people going to become dependent on letting a machine do their writing, that they never develop the craft to the point where they could see their soul coming through?

I'm sure there are many very effective uses in the business world for this type of mechanical transfer of information. It's drawing from very large databases of language, and it's learning continuously. That's the nature of it. So, I don't know, it should get better and better. And then you move into the whole debate—will AI be so disgusted with the imperfection of humans that it contrives the way to just kill us?

Julie Walker: That came up in one of the speeches that I heard.

Andrew Pudewa: That's kind of a separate subject then what do we do in education? So my thought would be we would benefit from continuing to teach writing and disallow the use of that for the purposes of helping students learn how to collect up, organize, refine, present, and distribute information. That's a skill.

And then, if they find themselves in a situation where AI could be helpful, they'll be able to use the AI tool.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: Rather than saying, well, since AI's going to do all that, why bother to teach it? Who's going to use the tool better? So, I guess that would be my bottom line on that particular question.

You tried, or I don't know. Your daughter-in-law tried an experiment, and it seemed like it was a cut and paste job from Wiki or something. Right?

Julie Walker: And she asked the question, how does IEW compare with other writing programs? And the answer wasn't accurate. It gave a different answer. One of the things that Drew said in our conversation, and we'll link to that podcast in our show notes, is when students are, like the students that you're describing, Andrew, if they skip the steps of learning to write themselves, they're cheating only themselves.

It's kinda like cheating on a diet. If you cheat on a diet, who are you cheating? You're cheating yourself. You're not going to be able to achieve your goals, which is thinking, right?

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, but a lot of people, Are probably not thinking the consequences of students not thinking better. And we have become so very dependent on technology in all ways. I only have two phone numbers memorized, and that's because both of these phone numbers existed before I had text and auto dial on the phone.

So, our memories are not what they used to be. Our attention spans are not what they used to be. Our calculation skills are not what they used to be. So it would make sense that we will at some point say, well, our writing skills aren't what they used to be. I'll depend on the technology to

what needs to be done, but we're never going to see students reach their full potential if we don't work hard to cultivate their memory, if we don't work hard to help them learn to think mathematically, if we don't help them to do this without the assistance of technology.

And if we do all that then I suspect they would be able to use the technology in a much more effective and hopefully qualitatively good way. But the human soul is sensitive to beauty. An AI cannot. It can only imitate what it sees other human beings saying what is beautiful, but it doesn't have a soul. The human's soul is sensitive to goodness.

The AI can only imitate what other people have said is good. The problem of truth is extraordinarily problematic right now because I, myself and many people I know, have reached a point where we really simply don't accept anything that we read anywhere.

And then with the deep fake, we can't really trust our eyes either. You see a video? How do you know that's the president? How do you know it isn't the president? So I think the deeper level problem here is we are just not trusting each other anymore. And where this ends, I don't know.

Anyway, we better move on and get to a different question.

Julie Walker: Thank you for that timely question, and I hope that answer at least can start more conversations. So here's another question. This one's from Annie. She says that she is new to IEW and recently purchased the *Structure and Style for Students: Year 1 Level B* and *Introduction to Public Speaking* for her eighth grader. He is attending a local public school five days a week. We've started one B, and so far so good. However, should I start *Introduction to Public Speaking* simultaneously? You're holding a speech contest and I want to enter the speech contest.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, well, that last statement changes the answer because if it weren't a case of wanting to enter a speech contest, I would say no. Just do the one thing and then when you've finished, if you're still alive, do the next.

But if you have a need, then yes, I would say suspend the one, be writing stuff. You're not going to get it done in one year anyway if you're busy sitting in a school most of the day, five days a week for nine months. You're going to basically have to go on slow motion. So just slow that down a little more. Do the *Introduction to Public Speaking*. Ideally, if he had a few friends and you could do it together, or maybe a couple siblings or somebody, that would be a little more enjoyable and effective than just doing it all alone.

But you could get a good result from doing it all alone.

Julie Walker: There's another part to this question that I think you'll appreciate. We are Japanese living in Japan, and most of the communication is done in Japanese. Do you have any advice on how to make full use of your program? Namely *Structure and Style for Students: Year 1 Level B*, *Introduction to Public Speaking* and the poetry memorization for English learners in non-English speaking countries.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I don't know that there's any advice that's different than what you would give to anyone, which is do it. Just do it, but do it at a speed at which it is not overwhelming and have resources that will help you so that you define unfamiliar words or idioms, that you maybe have access to a native speaker who could help you with something that comes up that you don't understand and can't figure out.

But of course, our system works very, very well with anyone who needs a more step-by-step approach to learning a very complex thing, whether that's composition and grammar or public speaking. I would suspect that people who are living in Japan are studying English in school in Japan, and probably have a decent knowledge of English grammar.

The challenge, of course, is going to be on using the language more fluently and easily and naturally. So I would hope that this family has some friends who could give them maybe some editing feedback on the writing of the students. Then maybe some editing feedback on the speeches so that they could just get that extra little edge of refinement that would be helpful to get the most out of the program.

I remember that when I was living in Japan, I did get this idea that if I could practice writing, that would help solidify my vocabulary and grammar and everything else. So I tried to write some letters to various people because I didn't really want to write stories or reports. I really didn't have anything else that I could think of to write, but I did write some letters.

Julie Walker: This was before IEW existed.

Andrew Pudewa: And I remember that I had one friend who was really good in English because he had spent a couple years in school here in the States. And so I would give him these things and ask him to edit them for me. And then I would copy over with his edits, and then I would notice, oh, he used a different word, or I didn't have the right ending.

Or he put a different article or preposition because those are the tricky things. Prepositions are insanely tricky in most languages. And so, I think I picked up a lot of assistance from him just by seeing how he was editing my meager attempts to write letters. I'm sure he did it generously with not fixing every possible goofy thing I did.

And that's the way I would think if they had some friend, and it wouldn't even have to be someone in Japan. If you had an online friend and said, would you be willing to edit or give suggestions about my son's written compositions? That would be probably the most valuable thing I could think of to help with the courses.

Julie Walker: All right, super. Hope that helps, Annie. Great question. Okay, so I have a easier question now. I think you'll be able to answer this one. This is from Lisa. She wants to know "What should I do if my student turns in a final draft? That is not neat because she made some mistakes and wrote over the top of the mistakes. Should I have her redo it and make it a neat final copy or let it be?"

Andrew Pudewa: In general, I would say no. Let it go. What's the point of making the student redo it? If the process was basically “okay, I saw what I need to change. I changed it.” We could get into this conversation about pencil versus, and how a lot of us in school were told rough draft in pencil, final in pen.

And how I think that should be exactly the opposite. Rough draft in pen, so you don't waste any time erasing. Just cross out, keep going, keep the flow and then the final in pencil so that if you make a transcription error or find one more little thing that you want to fix or improve, you can then erase and make it neater.

A big question might be, how old is this child? And we don't necessarily know. I am guessing the child is on the younger side, like 10 or under. In which case, I would just say basically, if everything's good and it's legible, let it go. There's no benefit in saying recopy this again, unless it was something you really wanted to hang on the wall or put in a book or send to Grandma. Unless you were going to showcase the thing in some way.

The most common question and even more important is the question. “My 10 year old wants to type his first draft and then just edit on the screen and then just print out the final. And doing that, I think you're losing some of the benefits. So, up to a certain age, and that may vary from home to home, kid to kid, writing on paper, composing the rough draft on paper, and then having that edited is hugely valuable.

Then type it up. Try to get the edits into the typed up version. Print it out, do one more proofread, see if there's anything else needs to be changed. Mark it on the paper. Go back and implement those changes so that the editing experience is really happening on paper rather than on screen. And that creates an objectivity. It gets you away from the screen, which is inherently distracting, allows you to look at it in that sense. And I think you'd pick up a lot more in terms of potential grammar stuff or potential usage that you would like to improve. So I think kind of anything is good, but I very much don't like this idea of kids typing the first thing, trying to edit it all on the screen. And then trying to print it out and be done with it.

Even I do that. I write something, I print it out, and then I try to mark it up a little bit.

Julie Walker: Right. Unless you're doing an in-class essay, we don't ascribe to a first and only draft here at IEW, and it would be easy to think that that's what you're doing when you do it on the screen like that. I. So good. Alright. Oh, and that, actually, let's go back to the AI question. You had mentioned this before.

It's likely that professors are going to go start going back to Blue Books.

Andrew Pudewa: I've already talked to a few that have said, yeah, I'm starting to give in-class essay. And the comment was, and it's so bad, I don't know if I can keep doing it.

Julie Walker: Okay, last question, or at least, I mean, it's not the last question because I have another one, but we just don't have time for it.

Andrew Pudewa: I'll give you a one word answer and then you'll have plenty of time.

Julie Walker: Okay, this one's from Rachel. She has a 10 year old daughter and she's working her way through Structure and Style: Year 1 Level A. "After I've edited her rough draft, she goes on to rewrite a final draft.

Good job, mama. But she still makes mistakes such as not capitalizing words at the beginning of sentence, transposing letters, and sometimes forgetting to underline her ly adverbs. Should I have her rewrite it again? I look forward to your answer."

Andrew Pudewa: Well choose your battles. If it's not overwhelmingly difficult, there would be value in her rewriting it, but it also depends on how many things are problematic and whether you can use a pencil to fix it in the second draft. I'm assuming you can still buy whiteout. I wouldn't recommend it, but.

Julie Walker: Yeah, if they're writing on paper, it is a lot of work to have them rewrite that whole thing again with their pen and their young motor skills. And it might be just like you said, it might be just a battle they don't want to fight.

Andrew Pudewa: And I think the question is a little different. If you miss a capital when you're transcribing from an edited rough draft, okay, fine. Just write over the letter and make it a capital or erase it if you can. If you miss an underline, that's a, sorry you're not finished yet problem.

Then you'd kick back and say, "Well, you have five dress ups on your checklist, but I only see three underlines in this."

Julie Walker: So that's easy to fix.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, that's an easy one and that's worth spending the extra minutes on. In terms of the spelling and mechanics stuff, they're just kids. It'll get better and easier. Just keep at it, but don't have this obsession with doing something so many times to perfection that pretty soon the child just dreads it.

Julie Walker: Very good advice, Andrew. Well thank you again for all your sage advice, and we look forward to the next episode. We're going to do something really special. We're going to do a call in show where listeners can call in. And we'll record that and launch that as our 400th episode. Very exciting.

Thank you, Andrew.

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. 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.