

Podcast 453: Structure and Style Tips, part 1

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: So that's where I think our telling back the ideas from the key word outline is so powerful. It allows them to hear what they were thinking.

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: So Andrew, before we get too much into this episode, which dear listener, I'm super excited about sharing this with you because this is one of those that I have not told Andrew anything about what we're talking about.

Andrew Pudewa: I just don't think that's fair. Like I haven't even had one minute to allow my subconscious to stir around thoughts.

Julie Walker: Well, I did assure him though, just so you don't think I'm really that cruel, that he knows this topic really well. But before we introduce a topic, I do want to say, if you have been with IEW for several years, maybe you've used our *Structure and Style for Students*, maybe you've gone through several theme based books, hopefully you've gone through the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, our teacher training course...

If you've done that for several years, maybe you are ready to think about creating your own lessons for your own students. And that is what this episode and the next one is about. How can we give you some tips and tricks to help you muddle through these nine units? And Andrew, that's what we're talking about today: getting through the nine units, just some tips and tricks.

And let me just, Listener, I'll tell you a little bit of backstory and remind Andrew why I think this is an exciting topic. When I was first hired over 17 years ago, Andrew, we had the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, technically it was the second edition, but we called it the first edition. And there were some things in that second edition, which we called the first edition

Andrew Pudewa: Now you're really confusing people,

Julie Walker: Well, it's a light blue cover and we'll show a picture of it in the show notes and everybody will go, Oh yeah, that one. I used to have that one, especially if this podcast, this podcast is for you if you had the light blue cover and you've been with IEW for a long time, or, that was a long time ago that we had that light blue cover and now we have the darker blue cover with you and a teacher and a student, three different pictures. But before we redid it and made the second edition, we created a DVD, a single DVD, called *Tips and Tricks for Teaching Through the Nine Units*. Because you wanted to, now you've learned some things,

and you wanted to bring to light these things that they've learned for everybody that has a *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*. And the reason I still think that this is a topic that's relevant for today is because we have so many curricular options. We've got some excellent video courses. We've got some exceptional theme-based books. We've actually even partnered with Hillsdale college to create some of these materials, but perhaps there are some teachers who would like to be able to do this on their own without our guaranteed-to-be-effective and help-you-through-your-lessons material.

Maybe you want to do this on your own. And I thought, Andrew, it would be helpful for our listeners to hear from you some of the challenges that might be in the different units and how not to, how to overcome. These challenges, some tips and tricks for getting through the nine units. And so that's our topic for today.

What do you think?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I think it's fine. Is this Tips and Tricks DVD still available?

Julie Walker: It is not. No.

Andrew Pudewa: This is going to replace that.

Julie Walker: Yes, it is. Yes, it is.

Andrew Pudewa: So everyone's going to say, where can I get it?

Julie Walker: You can listen to this podcast part one and part two and get those tips and tricks. But there is a handout that...I'm not sure when you created this handout. I think it was in 2004. So this handout is 20 years old.

Andrew Pudewa: Well some things change, and other things are stable.

Julie Walker: Exactly. And we will make this handout available to you in our show notes so that you can know how not to, well, I'll give you the first tip, don't get stuck. So go ahead, Andrew, tell us about Units 1 and 2.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, that's the easy part, right? You learn how to get a short little source text, take key words from each sentence of that short little source text and then retell and then write from those key words, the information, the story, whatever, in the short little source text. And that's pretty easy, I mean, most people get it, they come to the TWSS, they watch it on a video, and they say, oh, I get it, book lice, yes, infrasound in elephants, okay, and then they go and teach that.

And what I used to experience was people who would then contact me there, three, four months into the year, and they would generally say, "Well, it was going really well. We were having a great time, and the kids were doing it, and everything was good. And then everything wasn't as good, and it didn't work as well."

And my question of course is, “Well, what unit are you on?” And then they would say, “What do you mean?” And then I would know the problem. They got stuck at Unit 2.

So a lot of our work has been, how do we help people not get stuck at Unit 2? Because the shift to Unit 3 is a big one. It's a different way of creating key word outlines. So although they look very similar, three words max per line, separated by commas, symbols, numbers, abbreviations [are] free. Where do those words come from?

Are we picking them off the page? Or what if the story is three pages long? Now what? So that problem of getting stuck at Unit 2 is understandable. It happened to me the first time I came back from Canada and started teaching and I had all those little Tip stories, the little monkey that Webster had when he lived in Africa, and he wrote all those little stories. And I taught them through. And then I just didn't remember really well, what do you do after this?

Julie Walker: Because you didn't have curriculum that IEW had produced at that time.

Andrew Pudewa: So, and that's when I started trying to put together the articles and stories. for teaching the Structure and Style program. And that was really one of our very first supplemental products.

Julie Walker: And we still make that available to our Premium members. We have a collection of source texts called,

Andrew Pudewa: Stories and Articles for Summaries and Notetaking.

Julie Walker: And that's for the Unit 1, but we have the whole product is called *Writing Source Packet*.

Andrew Pudewa: *Writing Source Packet*

Julie Walker: Yeah, and so we've collected those all in there. So if you're a Premium member, you have that available to you. The Tip...

Andrew Pudewa: The Tip stories aren't in there. You'd have to go to Webster's book. And I don't even recommend that, honestly. But that's what we had back in the day.

Julie Walker: And so some of the things that you suggested in the Tips and Tricks video was where to find source texts, and we just shared, we have some available for you if you're a premium member, but where else can you get stories and what do you have to look for?

Andrew Pudewa: I used to recommend things like the Usborne books, which had short little paragraphs and encyclopedic-style articles about a wide variety of facts from, animals to space and everything in between. I also used myself for many years, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* children's edition online, which had pretty simply written source text that could be used. And then you could search. You're reading about something in history or science and you say, oh, I'd like to have a nice little bit of information about John Adams or a little bit of information about the Battle of Gettysburg or a little bit of information about Japan. So you could get that kind of thing, simply written, aimed at children, encyclopedias.

Julie Walker: Do you know? I heard you talk about encyclopedias recently at a talk that you gave, the value of having a hard copy, and you know what I did?

Andrew Pudewa: You went and bought an old, multivolume, bookshelf-filling set of World Books, or what?

Julie Walker: 1988 *Children's World Book*. They're for my grandson. Someday he will be able to be that encyclopedia look up things. Because if he's anything like his dad, he will get lost in going from page to page and book to book.

Andrew Pudewa: I think the only way you could get kids to look at paper encyclopedias is lock them in a room, make them super bored, with nothing else to do except explore the encyclopedia, which was what I did when I was super bored back in 1971.

Julie Walker: And I will say here at IEW, we, of course, we write our own source texts, we're not lifting articles from encyclopedias.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, well we have copyright to deal with and we have a great team of editors who research very thoroughly, fact check everything as best as possible. But yeah, there are, of course, a lot more resources available.

Julie Walker: So don't get stuck in Units 1 and 2. The thing that I'd like you to speak on is the power of just Unit 1, the key word outline and telling it back. Why is it so important for students to have that experience of telling back from Unit 1?

Andrew Pudewa: If we kind of go back to: how do you write anything? If someone says, write something now, how do you do that? Well, first you have to find an idea. If there's no idea, there's nothing to write. So you have to find an idea. Those ideas can pre-exist in memory or imagination. Or they can be more immediate.

So, if I said, well, write about the last trip you took with your family, I'm asking you to rely on your memory and imagination and visit those sensory impressions of what you saw, what you heard, what you felt, what you smelled, tasted, wherever you were. Whereas, if I said, write about this room that we're in

Andrew Pudewa: which we have a lot of history with this

Julie Walker: we do.

Julie Walker: He doesn't love this room.

Andrew Pudewa: you could just, I love this room.

Julie Walker: Oh, you do?

Andrew Pudewa: I'd live here if I had no place else to be.

Julie Walker: It's very quiet in here, but there's not a lot of decorations.

Andrew Pudewa: There's always something to say about something immediate. And so that's actually easier for children. It's easier for them to have something right here, right now. I can look at it, read it, see it, think about it, as opposed to trying to go back and access things in memory.

The second possibility is that ideas can pre-exist in sensory impressions. And maybe some general knowledge and memory, or they can pre-exist in words. So another example, if I said, write about your dog, I'm asking you to muster up some experience you've had with your dog and then translate that into words that you could then wrestle onto a page that would somehow recreate a portion of the experience of your dog for someone else, for a reader. Whereas if I said, well, tell me your favorite Bible story or Aesop fable or a fairy tale, that would be different because those things pre existed in words, they came to you initially in words, and then those words would construct images in your mind, which is easier for children. Words, because if it's in words and it goes to words, that's less of a stretch if it's mostly not in words and you have to find the words to put it in words.

So for teaching children writing and getting past the initial problem of, "I don't know what to say. I don't know what to write. I can't think of anything." The best place to start is something that is immediate, right here, right now, and pre-exists in words, which is why we've had such great success with the source texts. And how Webster discovered this once upon a time, I don't know, but we certainly see an almost instant transformation in some kids who've just been frustrated with writing to now, "hey, I can do this." Okay, so you have to find an idea. Once you find an idea, and it may be, immediate, on the page, whatever,

Julie Walker: Like it is for Units 1 and 2,

Andrew Pudewa: You then have to move that into your words into words that you can access and use easily. And so to do that, you have to kind of speak the idea into existence. And we do this all the time, right? When my grandchildren want to tell me experiences they've had, they are translating that into words and then making that concrete by telling it to someone.

And what's interesting is it's always easier to tell something to someone else than to sit there and quietly tell it to yourself. Right? That idea of thinking on your own is much harder than thinking with people, which is why in business, we find collaboration is such an important part of doing things well and making progress and making them concrete.

So children have to find the idea, speak it into existence, and then they have to hear what they heard themselves say to themselves. This is easier if it's done verbally rather than just mentally, right? So if you internally audiate the idea, that's one level of hearing. But if you say it out loud, that comes to a much higher, more effective level of hearing.

And we see this, all over the place, even kids go off to college and what are they supposed to do? Collaborate, get in discussion groups, have chats, work in small conversational networks to clarify and organize and then be able to use those ideas. So that's where I think our telling back the ideas from the key word outline is so powerful. It allows them to hear what they

were thinking. The next thing is they have to remember what they heard themselves say to themselves and hold that in memory long enough to then go wrestle all the technical information. What's the exact word and how do you put it into a sentence and how do you spell those words and which ones need capitalization or punctuation elements?

And that's really almost not a language function per se. But we have to attach that technical, mechanical type of written language info to our thought. And then we can start to write it down. And as soon as we've got that one idea written, we have to go back, get the next idea in the sequence, speak it into existence, hear what we heard ourself say to ourself, hold it in memory, wrestle the technical information, and proceed until we have all the ideas that we're trying to do. And that's one reason why the key word outline, whether it's Unit 2 or whether it's Unit 7, is so important because that memory part is where some kids—they have a little bit of attention issue or they're hungry or distracted or they don't want to be sitting in the chair holding a pen on a paper. And the key word outline then helps them hold the idea in the memory or reconstruct it very quickly. And that's why, writing from notes, writing from outlines is always going to be easier and give a better end product.

Julie Walker: And I think this is one of those IEW distinctives. We teach the key word outline, and we teach telling it back so that you have that opportunity to essentially rehearse what you're going to write down before you write it

Andrew Pudewa: And in the early days, especially working with schools or people who had been kind of using a school-ish approach, they had all sorts of what are called graphic organizers, ways to help you “brainstorm” and then help you put that into prose. But a lot of those graphic organizers were kind of a shotgun onto paper, just whatever. And then there's that added step of all that stuff, what should go first? what should go next? what should go next, what should go next? So, while I'm not really opposed to the idea of graphic organizer ways of doing that, for children who are beginning, young children or children who have a hard time with it all, that can be overwhelmed itself. And so going back, kind of bypassing that and going to a sequential-based listing of the ideas you want to articulate is so much more helpful.

Julie Walker: Agreed. Okay. So.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I forgot. There's one more step.

Julie Walker: Oh, yes.

Andrew Pudewa: After you wrote it into prose, then the unpleasant task of reading what you wrote to be sure that it makes sense, that it accurately or close to accurately represents what you were trying to say. And I think every day those of us who have to write stuff very often will crank out an email, read it and say, no, that's not the right word, or oh my, that's kind of a run-on sentence or that's not very clear. Or well, if I put in a comma, that would make it clearer. Or if I took out a comma, that would make it clearer. And all of that stuff that we're practicing in the grammar world, we have to apply in essentially proofreading what we wrote. And then we put our final stamp of it's good enough.

Julie Walker: And then we send it to an editor because we probably missed something.

Andrew Pudewa: We do. Your average person doesn't have an editor.

Julie Walker: When I write an email, I don't send it to the editors.

Andrew Pudewa: No. But if we write an article, printed and sent out to thousands of people, then we would very much want to have another pair of eyes or many pairs of eyes to kind of confirm our idea about the accuracy and the clarity.

So, it's a phenomenally complex process, and I think a lot of times people when they face a child who doesn't like writing, it's because of the overwhelm, and so breaking it down into the smaller, manageable, doable. And sometimes in multiple short sessions is easier as well.

Julie Walker: Breaking it down. Okay, so tips and tricks for Unit 3. I'm going to read from the handout, if that's okay, and then you can just unpack this a little bit. "Number one, make a poster of the story sequence chart, which how handy we have those also in our Premium membership. Maybe this is an advertisement for Premium membership or not.

Andrew Pudewa: Everything, all the posters are in the TWSS, and in the old days, people would make their own posters...

Julie Walker: 20 years ago counts as the old days

Andrew Pudewa: ...on large poster board and some felt markers and maybe a yardstick. And you can still do that, but a lot of people find the value of having something that's kind of predone. And we've worked these things, I mean, we've refined them several times over the years to be sure that these posters are both clear, visually attractive and complete, but not so complicated that they're not useful.

Julie Walker: Exactly. So, another tip was using stories of various lengths because the story sequence chart works with any story. One thing that you have always admonished us to do when we're writing source text for our theme-based books and for even the SSS was don't have a three-paragraph source text because we don't want students to transfer the skills they learned in Units 1 and 2 into Unit 3.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, there is some transfer, but the main big difference is that you're not looking on the paper for the keywords. You put the story into your mind and memory, talk about it, be sure you understand it, and then you pull it out by using the story sequence chart and putting into the three parts, three paragraphs, three mini chapters, whatever you want to call it. And that is why I have encouraged us to use stories of various lengths because you can write a three-paragraph version of a eight-sentence Aesop fable, right?

Julie Walker: It's true; you've done it and we've done it

Andrew Pudewa: You can also write a three-paragraph version of a five-page fairy tale or even longer, although the longer it gets, often the more challenging it is.

But that story sequence chart is such a helpful tool to help students zero in on what are the key elements of the story. So that's the big shift. Unit 2, what are the key words in each sentence? Unit 3, what are the key elements of the story? The characters, setting, setup, the conflict, the...what do they think, say, or do.

And then the third part is, how is that problem, that conflict, that dissonance, how is it resolved? And what's the end of it all? And so there are lots of great stories that work in this way. And I was always recommending that people consider fairy tales, fables, myths, legends. One source that I enjoyed using were the James Baldwin stories, which are kind of a simple, not too long, usually a couple pages retelling of these legends of maybe famous people. We don't necessarily know all the facts, but there's stories: things like Robin Hood or Robert the Bruce. Things like that. And so there's abundant stories available. You just have to kind of get brave as a teacher and say, "I'm just going to use this story. We're going to read it, talk about it, and make a key word outline together based on the story sequence chart." And then it's all downhill once you've got that part done. But there is that, ooh, but this is different.

Julie Walker: I love one of the tips that's on this page that you say, "Don't be afraid. Trust the system." And you say that often about all the units, but especially three. Three seems to be the big leap, and you just don't know what you're going to come up with. But if you trust the system, it will work. And some stories do work better than others.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and if you're working with a group of students who have maybe a particular historical or cultural orientation, it's really good, I think, to use stories that are connected with what's kind of in their consciousness. I often have told the story about teaching in Alaska. And here I am, out in the tundra, where there isn't a tree anywhere, and what story's good for these Native Alaskan kids? And I was there thinking, oh, what story, what story, what story?

Well, I could use that, the fox and the crow. I mean, I've done that a million times.

Julie Walker: Where the crow sits in a tree?

Andrew Pudewa: Not a million. Yeah, the crow sits in a tree. And it's a good Aesop fable, and it's good for everyone to know. But I was thinking, is there a story that is more connected with their cultural heritage and their fable-ology or mythology? And so I searched around for some Native Alaskan stories. And I found one, and I read it, and I thought, this just doesn't make sense to me. And, it was basically this story where there's these two groups, and there's the fish eaters and the bird eaters. And they decide to have a race up to the top of the mountain because they're going goat hunting.

And so the bird eaters take off and they get up the mountain, no, the fish eaters, sorry. The fish eaters take off, they get up the mountain first and the bird eaters are still getting up the hill, which I don't know, there's not even any hills or mountains where I was at that time out on the tundra, but the fish eaters then kill all the goats and then they hide, and then the bird eaters get there.

And they see all these dead goats and then the fish eaters come out and say, ha ha, we beat you. And then they have a big feast and they eat goats. And I just thought, I don't get it. This doesn't really make sense to me, but it is their story. So I thought, well, when I wake up in the morning, if I'm brave, I'll try this one. And if I'm not feeling brave, I'll just do this.

Julie Walker: Fox and the crow, right?

Andrew Pudewa: I woke up brave, so I tried this story. And what was interesting is that they understood it from their context. I don't know they'd heard it before, but they got it. And it essentially was kind of a hare and the tortoise deal.

The fish eaters were kind of a lower class people, and the bird eaters were more, I don't know, higher class, whatever. And so the fact that the fish eaters made it up and killed the goats was kind of like oh, there's the tortoise plodding along and reaching the destination. And then the happy ending was they all decided to celebrate together. And so nobody was feeling bad, I guess, at the end. So that was, for me personally an example of: I can use any story you throw at me, whether I understand it or not, and trust the system.

Julie Walker: So we're going to try to fit in one more unit before we have to end, but we'll pick this up again next week, and that is unit four. The danger of this is this is one of your favorite units and is the linchpin of our system.

Andrew Pudewa: It is because it introduces this skill of limiting and particularly in today's world. It's just always, too much information, too much information. And how do you summarize? And that was the label that Webster gave it, summarizing references. And I remember in the beginning thinking, I don't even like the word summarize. In fact, I don't know anyone who does like the word summarize.

Why? It's fuzzy in its meaning. And then you'd say to the kids, well, you just kind of tell the gist of it, you kind of give the salient points, you kind of, I don't know, retell it without everything. It's hard to define. And then I realized that the word itself is spelled badly. Summarize S U M M A R I Z E Well, if you know any math talk, which most kids will have heard this word by, third, fourth, fifth grade for sure, sum. The sum in math means what? The total. All of it. So you walk into this process of summarizing and semi-consciously, you're thinking, well, I have to tell all of that in this much space, less space. Nobody can do that. You can't tell all of it, you can only tell some of it. Which is why I decided, correctly spelled, the word would be S O M E, hyphen A, hyphen R I Z E, because that's what you're doing. [some-a-rize] You're telling some of it, but not all of it, and then the question becomes, which "some of it." And the more you have, the harder it is. So it's that funnel, that, that, that filter idea. You've got ten facts, and you want to write a paragraph with seven facts. Eh, it's not so hard. Just figure out the three you don't like, or you don't care, or the least important, or the least significant, least interesting.

But then you get twenty facts, and you have to summarize. Well, that's going to be harder. You get thirty, or forty, or fifty facts, Now, it's getting pretty tough. So that skill of choosing what of all the available facts should you transfer into your outline. And I really do enjoy

teaching this. And I also feel that it's valuable for teachers to communicate that you should choose what you think is interesting or important or relevant, if they understand the word relevant, related to what you're trying to do. But start with that interesting. Like, of all that's there, what's interesting? Because that will engage the children more.

And I have told the story of being in school and having to write reports. You remember writing reports. And, the way I would write a report is get the encyclopedia, since we had no internet in my day, read till you find a pretty good sentence, then copy that sentence, Change a few words if you can. Read till you find another pretty good sentence. Copy that sentence. Change a few words if you can. Read, copy, change, read, copy, change until you have Enough, whatever you were supposed to do, a page, two pages, five hundred words, whatever.

And I remember two distinct thoughts. Number one, this is really stupid. If anyone actually wanted to know about this thing, Japan, whatever, they should read the darn encyclopedia. How am I going to do better than it? The other thing I thought is, what's, what's the point? Why, why make me copy it? But if the teacher had said, well, I'd like to know what you think is the most interesting stuff about Japan. Well, that would have had a purpose to it. Oh, the teacher cares what I think. So, it's a small contextual shift. But it makes a world of difference.

Julie Walker: Right. Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: And this is also where I realized the importance of Webster's edict: hands on structure and style, hands off content.

So, follow the model, follow the rules. Unit 4, we introduce the topic clincher rule. We divide a big thing into topics, and we define a paragraph by having a topic. And then you have a goal. You know what's your target length? And you can choose and you can then select and retell. But what you choose isn't as important as that you make the choice. And I often will point out to teachers and parents who are doing this, don't try to push the kid to figure out what's the most important stuff, because little kids, they don't necessarily know.

They don't have the life experience and the general knowledge to know what's more important than something else. But they do have an opinion about what's more interesting than something else. And that by making choice they learn to, to choose better, whereas if you try to influence them and say, well, do you think this is quite as important as this other thing that looks really important? Maybe you should choose this one. Well then, what you end up with is a kid who's going to say, Well, I better just wait around for, the teacher to tell me what to pick,

Julie Walker: Right.

Andrew Pudewa: Webster, I think, hit on a really brilliant idea here: teach the structural models, teach the stylistic techniques, teach the mechanics. But don't worry so much about the content. That can come later, when they're mature and have life experience and general knowledge and can start to judge themselves better.

Julie Walker: We actually devoted a whole podcast to Webster's edict called "The Mighty Pen." So we will link to that in our show notes.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I'm glad you remember all the podcasts we've done, but so that unit 4, it does teach so much. And what we've tried to do, I think, is in the progression of Unit 4 lessons, and let's say there's three or four lessons in Unit 4, because it's one a month if you're doing it that way. Start with fewer facts, the next one, a few more facts, the next one, lots of facts that maybe you have to divide into topics, and that prepares them for then going and getting a source from an encyclopedia, a library book, a website, whatever.

Julie Walker: There is another key part of unit that we're going to mention at the beginning of our next episode. So

Andrew Pudewa: Oh well,

Julie Walker: until then,

Andrew Pudewa: keep all the listeners in suspense.

Julie Walker: Absolutely. Cliff hanger. See you next week.

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, 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.