

## Podcast 458: How to Think

### Episode Transcript

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think there's going to be basically two kinds of people in the world twenty years from now. People who can think, and people who've outsourced it entirely. I, for one, would like to remain in the former category, and I would like my children and grandchildren to be in the former category.

**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:** Happy New Year, Andrew Pudewa.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Is it really a new year?

**Julie Walker:** Well, and you know what's really interesting? This podcast actually launches on January 1st. We'll have it scheduled. We're obviously recording it on a day other than January 1st, but this is a really great opportunity to just wish all of our listeners a Happy New Year.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It’s as close as we get to real time travel, huh?

**Julie Walker:** Something like that.

So what I love about us releasing a podcast today, January 1st, it's truly the beginning of the year and we can announce our theme for the year. We've done this now for a couple of years. And so a couple of years ago we did a special needs theme. Last year we did a Furnishing the Mind theme. I love that. So you came up with this idea of How to Think. Theme. So this year's theme is Learn to Think.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Learning to think. Well, it seems timely.

**Julie Walker:** Yes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Pretty much everyone bumps into non thinking.

**Julie Walker:** Absolutely. And I have to point our listeners to an excellent article you wrote for our 2025 Magalog called “Writing Maketh an Exact Man.”

**Andrew Pudewa:** Which, of course, is a direct excerpt allusion to Francis Bacon's rather famous quote, “Reading maketh a full man, speaking maketh a ready man, and writing

maketh an exact man.” And, of course, that includes all of the girls and women out there as well. It's human.

**Julie Walker:** human, yeah, maketh an exact human.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So, with last year, *Furnishing the Mind*, we were talking a lot about reading aloud, and I'm just constantly still impressed when I see children who listen to a lot of audiobooks and how extraordinary use of language vocabulary and idiom and complex syntax comes out in their writing. Can't necessarily spell all those words, but they can try. And so that's, I think, interesting, that we did that. And then, of course, on the speaking and writing, it's on the output side.

And the writing, of course, gives you the benefit of being able to think before you write. I remember my father probably said to me a thousand times, maybe more, in my childhood, “Andy, think before you speak.”

**Julie Walker:** And of course, I've heard that before, and every time you say that, I, my mind and my heart just takes a little lurch because I don't think of you at all as “Andy.” I think of you as Andrew. Of course, you've always gone by Andrew in my world, but I can see as a child.

**Andrew Pudewa:** ...as a kid, and you're twelve years old, you say stupid things. And the adults around you just wonder, are you even hearing yourself? I'm experiencing that with a particular grandchild these days. Unpacking this whole way in which writing promotes, cultivates, requires almost, thinking that you don't necessarily do on a normal live your life, run through, everything you have to do everyday basis.

**Julie Walker:** So speaking of our *Magalog*, and the article, marketing, chief marketing officer, my obligatory statement which is check our show notes. You can get a link to our article. If you've ever ordered anything from us, if you are planning to take advantage of our day 12 of Twelve days of Christmas Giving, which is just a few days away, you will get our newest *magalog*. You will get this article.

But if you want to read it, we'll have a link in the show notes to this full article. So the opening lines to your article, “Recently, we at IEW began the process of acquiring a very high output and very expensive printer. During our initial conversations pertaining to the financing of this purchase, the manufacturer's national credit manager asked me a couple of very legitimate questions, which paraphrased were thus: “Given the push in schools toward a paperless classroom and the increase of screen based education, will there still be a demand for paper in schools?”

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's a fair question

Well, this new video that we just put out kind of addresses that a little bit and that we like putting paper in the hands of our customers because they can feel it, they can actually interact

with it. But here's the second question that I think this learn to think idea is really important right now in 2025: "Given the rapid development and availability of large language model AI applications, thinking of chat GPT in particular, as they apply to the task of writing, do you think people will still see grammar and composition as important things to teach?"

And this, your article that you wrote, gives a brilliant defense of why this is important. And of course, we acquired the printer. It's a beautiful machine that is now putting out a lot more product more quickly and serving so many more people today than we ever would have imagined thirty years ago.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I never would have imagined it.

It's interesting. I think the demand reflects the change that we're seeing in, if not the educational culture, at least in [the] educational subculture, where people are indeed reacting against this what we might call atrophy of a basic human skill. And what happens when that happens? And is that the future we want for our kids, for our country, for our world?

**Julie Walker:** Yes. We so eagerly adopted calculators, right? And I was in the ninth grade class at my science class. We were doing slide rule quizzes every week. And we stopped because calculators became ubiquitous. That's how old I am, everyone.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, my father was an aerospace engineer, and they were putting satellites in space with slide rules. And the interesting thing about a slide rule is you really have to pretty much know the answer you're expecting or you could be off by decimal places, multiple decimal places. That I think is interesting because it reflects the need to think mathematically in order to use the technology.

Now we see the technology replacing the thinking and so many kids who can't think mathematically. And it's a little frightening. It is a little frightening. I sometimes get caught watching these little YouTube or TikTok videos of people on the street who will go out and ask questions of random people. And I'm sure they pick the most hilarious, ridiculous answers, but the fact that anyone would give some of these answers is kind of frightening.

How many dimes in a dollar? I don't know. 22?

**Julie Walker:** Oh my.

**Andrew Pudewa:** The fact that anyone walking around the streets of New York could say that does indicate some really kind of serious deep level lack of concept,

**Julie Walker:** Let me ask my phone how many, what the right answer is. Wow.

**Andrew Pudewa:** But we don't do math. I mean, we do math every day running a business, but we don't teach math. We do, however, teach language. And in a way, that's even more important because it isn't just black and white, yes or no, right or wrong, there are degrees of effectiveness in writing. And we look through history, and we see people who could use

language well to convey thought in such a way as to accomplish great good in the world. We also see the opposite.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I've been kind of renewed in my zeal, I guess, for what we're doing as we see this kind of dark, ephemeral, indistinct cloud hovering over all of us and engulfing some of us.

**Julie Walker:** Says the pessimist of our company. So can we touch on? You gave two main points to answer his two questions. Can we touch on the paper versus screens? You of course have your talk, "Paper and Pen," which you reference that in this article, but go ahead and talk a little bit about that and some of the dangers of screen and learning to write solely on screens.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, the first one is quite obvious. If you don't do writing on paper, at least a little bit, you will never be able to write on paper. Right? I think every parent, every teacher, every school, every administrator, every school board should ask the question, are we okay if all of these students grow up and cannot write on paper?

Is that okay? And I think at gut level, most of us say that would be tragic. How would you write a note to your girlfriend? How would you write a beautiful birthday card to a relative? How would you quickly jot things down? Well, who needs to? Just tell it to your phone, it will remind you. There's a big difference there. And I think there's just an intuitive kind of gut level awareness that this writing on paper is a distinctly human skill. And we don't want to lose it.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and thinking about age appropriate, if you don't learn it when you're young, to try and fill in the gaps when you're older, it's going to be so much harder.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So much harder. And writing on paper also requires a certain ability to spell the language. And sometimes as I'm editing my grandchildren's papers now that they're in writing, I realize that when you know how to spell a word, it conveys a certain richness, a meaning, a tradition, a nuance of understanding that you don't ever get if you don't learn to spell. And so people argue, why learn to spell? Your machine will do it for you. That's one aspect.

The other one that I find most interesting because of my background in child brain development is how writing on paper activates parts of the brain that typing simply doesn't. And this is well documented. We've got all the research. Go back to that Paper and Pen talk and look at the primary sources that are cited. We're actually allowing for the failure to develop parts of the brain and the part of the brain is kind of that artistic, intuitive side. So you see more brain activity in that subdominant hemisphere when people are writing on paper, as opposed to when they're typing.

And so that's one little aspect, but there's a mechanical nature and efficiency, and we tend to worship efficiency in our modern world. Whereas to have grown up writing a story or a poem

on paper, having to stop and consider which word is the best word—that's an exercise, that's a development of the mental muscle, if you will, and you just don't get that if you just type it out, and you don't get any of that if you “engineer your prompt” to write the thing that you need to have written. I think that part is very important, and that whole idea of thinking before you commit something to paper. And when you write on paper, it's a greater investment of time and energy, right? So you're more careful. I know when I'm just typing something in the back of my mind is I can always change this. It doesn't matter. I'll just spew it out, and then I'll fix it up if I have time. Well, I don't want to live that way. I don't want to just spew things out and fix them if I have time. Mostly because I don't have that much time to fix stuff. Let's get it right the first time, and that's why learning to write on paper as a child is so formative to the intellect.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. And even, even as an adult, even just to jot that outline before you actually start writing something of note, that you want to preserve an artifact, so to speak, the results are so much better.

So can we quickly move over to this whole idea of AI. And isn't AI just going to be doing all the writing for us?

**Andrew Pudewa:** That is way too big of a subject, but in brief, there are a few problems. One is, we live in a society that is founded on trust. When you have someone do something for you, you trust they're going to do it. You trust that the food you get in a restaurant is,

**Julie Walker:** Healthy?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, at least not, not contaminated.

**Julie Walker:** Okay.

**Andrew Pudewa:** You ask someone to do something, or when someone asks you to do something, they're trusting that you will do your best.

And that's a distinctly human faculty. I don't have any evidence that we're going to be able to trust AI. In fact, I have a lot of evidence that we can't trust AI simply because of some of the ridiculous and absurd things that people have told me AI has written for them about me personally. Things I know for a fact are not true at all, but they come across in the AI dialogue as factual.

**Julie Walker:** Yes. You shared a little bit about that before we started—books you haven't written were attributed to you by AI.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yes. People I've never met, I supposedly was a student of them. And so it is a case where we're tending to trust the technology like we trust a calculator to give us the right answer assuming we put the right inputs. But now, we don't even necessarily have a way to check if what AI is telling us is indeed founded on reality, on truth. And it's a very dangerous area to move into. And so, I think we have to be very, very careful about how

students are using AI to do research, for one, and then the temptation, because it's so efficient and because nobody would ever know, to let it do our thinking for us. I mean, it's a huge subject. I'm sure we'll have more podcasts on this as AI capacity and functionality develops over time.

**Julie Walker:** Well, I want to quote something from your article speaking to this. This is the second reason why giving up on teaching and basically acquiescing, abdicating to AI, the second reason why it's so dangerous is “that students will be slowly duped into thinking that they created something they did not.” When a student is accused of plagiarism, but a student defends themselves because they found it on the internet and that's what you do, in a way, that's kind of what they're doing with AI.

Maybe they can't currently detect that they “plagiarized from chat GPT,” but it's still not their thinking. It's not their work. And they don't know it as well. In this short time that we have, I just certainly want to give this over to you. But I personally experienced this when I'm working on writing source text for some of our curriculum.

The ones that I love the best are the ones that I've researched the most and had to leave out so much of it, but I'm so much richer for having researched these topics about the Transcontinental Railroad and the *Mayflower* and the Amazon Rainforest. These are fascinating subjects that I know so much about, but I know this because I wrote these and AI did not.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. And children have that same experience. They learn what they wrestle with. They learn what they move from a source of information whether it's a human or a printed source or even an internet-based source. It comes into their mind and heart and then they have to filter. They have to judge. They have to have wisdom and discernment to know: of that what should I present? And, for children, we always say, choose what's interesting, important, relevant. It's Unit 4, Unit 6. It's a thinking skills thing. But, don't we do that every day? Don't we have to filter the information that comes to us and use our wisdom, use the knowledge base that we have, use our experience and use our intuition? And once we turn all of that over to a mechanical system that doesn't have the capacity for wisdom and intuition, well then where are we going and what is going to be the result of that?

**Julie Walker:** Yeah. Exactly. Absolutely.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I think there's going to be basically two kinds of people in the world twenty years from now: people who can think and people who've outsourced it entirely. And I, for one, would like to remain in the former category, and I would like my children and grandchildren to be in the former category. And I think that it's going to be the currency of the age: authenticity and human connection, two things that, at least at the moment, I perceive these large language models as being incapable of. They can give the appearance of authenticity. But, really, in the world of human to human relations, and in the world of sales and marketing, it's the authenticity that's going to make the difference.

**Julie Walker:** And we are, of course, here at IEW committed to those very things. And Andrew, I'm looking forward to spending more time exploring this through 2025 and helping all of us, you, me, all of our listeners grow to be better listeners, speakers, readers, writers, and thinkers.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, we should make a note, and you better write this down with a pen. One year from now, we should look and see. What's the difference between January 1st, '25 and where we are January 1st, '26, in terms of the technology and what it can do and how it has affected the people we know and love and teach.

**Julie Walker:** Will do. 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, 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.