

Podcast 518: The IEW Checklist Generator

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: We're letting the kid know, okay, each paragraph has to have this and this and this and this, and if you do that, it's gonna be better probably. Who cares if it's better? You're learning to do it by doing it, and over time it will get better.

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: Episode 518. This is in February, and we are talking about the checklist. Now, we did already do an episode about the checklist, so this is kind of a part two, but it's such a powerful tool, especially when we're talking about our theme of Back to the Basics.

Andrew Pudewa: It's one of the most remarkable, clear things that people respond to immediately, probably because so many teachers and parents were frustrated, before they found us, with the problem of evaluating the student writing. You have to mark, you have to grade it, you have to do something with it, and so many people got caught in that world of subjective feedback, like, I like this, I don't like that. That sounds good.

Julie Walker: Well, and I remember when I was teaching, we had a rubric, and this is different than a checklist, a rubric is, I think of the, the six.

Andrew Pudewa: Traits.

Julie Walker: Yes, the Six Traits, and there was this idea of, in this trait, you want your student to do this and this is what you're looking for, and it was just very gooey,

Andrew Pudewa: And you would score them, I don't know, I think it was one through five or something on things like word choice and sentence fluency, ideas and content, organization, voice, which are all important, but just saying your word choice is three or your sentence fluency is four. That doesn't really help any student know how to do that better.

And I remember I went to a training seminar for the Six Traits plus one because they got presentations stuck on the end there, and it was expensive. It was six hours—a full day. And I remember walking out of there thinking, I have learned nothing. Except that if people used our checklist, they would get all of those things.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Exactly. And you wrote an article about that?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. But most of the training was them showing children's books for the most part and saying, here's an example of good word choice. Here's an example of good sentence variety. Here's a good example of voice. And it wasn't anything I could see that I could take away and really improve the feedback I'm giving to students. So the rubric was there, but it wasn't being a good rubric.

Julie Walker: No, no. So our checklists are not rubrics. They're very clear.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. And when you look at them, they include all of those traits, but we're letting the kid know, okay, each paragraph has to have this and this and this and this, and if you do that, it's going to be better, probably. Who cares if it's better? You're learning to do it by doing it, and over time it will get better.

Julie Walker: Well, and speak to that just for a moment because I know you used the term about building linguistic marble, and that's part of what this checklist is doing.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. It's funny because there's kind of two extreme reactions to the checklist. One is, oh, adding all these things in makes my kids writing so much better. And the other extreme is—but the good writers don't use so many adjectives and adverbs, and it's tight and concise, and they follow Strunk and White, and this is the opposite of that. And as in most things, the wisdom is in the balance. And one of the things I like to teach, particularly in the TWSS when we get to introducing the idea of stylistic techniques, is that the goal here isn't for every paper to be a better paper, but for every writer to gradually become a better writer.

And any technique when you first start doing it may be a little bit awkward, which is why we always like to go to the comparison with music or maybe sports or a physical skill. The first time you try to do a new technique, it's awkward. That's normal, but by doing it again and again and again and, and getting a little bit of feedback and perspective, but mostly just through the repetition and modeling and imitation, and repetition and modeling and imitation, it gets better over time.

Julie Walker: Yep. Yep. I think of your music analogy. I was thinking of my favorite instruments, two favorite instruments that I love listening to. One is the oboe and one is the french horn. And both of these are difficult to learn to play because you've got that double reed in an oboe, that french horn that has the mouthpiece so tiny. But if you master that, oh, can you make beautiful music? But kids just learning that, oh boy, it's very painful.

Andrew Pudewa: It's like violin too. You gotta get your fingers in the right spot or it's really hard on the ears. So, I think we've been at this long enough, and we've had hundreds if not thousands of people tell us that when their kids grew up and went into higher education or did this or that, or entered an essay contest, all of the training that they were given when they were younger: elementary, middle school, whatever worked, and now they're really good compared to everybody else who didn't have that type of precise stylistic practice.

Julie Walker: Over and over and over again because once it's on the checklist, it never goes away.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. And we restart each year. That's one thing. We've set up the materials, whether it's the SSS courses or the curriculum-based writing lesson books to kind of assume that everybody forgot everything,

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: but go a little bit faster in building the checklist each year. And so it's more and more familiar, and after a couple years they see strong verb and they just immediately know what that is. They look for a verb. They look for one that maybe has a strong image or feeling. If they don't see it, they look for one that is kind of a weak limb, lousy verb, and then they go to their mental thesaurus, which is developed over time. Or they use a tool like the *Portable Walls* or

Julie Walker: And can I just give a little plug? I'm going to give a little plug for our new and improved IEW Writing Tools app, and now it's got a built in thesaurus. And if you are looking for an -ly adverb and you come up with *quickly* and there it is on the list and you're like, I've used *quickly* three times already. So you click on the word *quickly* and it comes up with a whole list of alternatives for the word quickly that are all ly adverbs. So this is much more robust than what we had in the past. The previous one was based on the *Portable Wall* and *A Word Write Now*.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and for those people who don't necessarily want their kids to default to screens as a reference—and I'm in that category—we still have our awesome *A Word Write Now* book, and you can still buy paper dictionaries and thesaurus.

Julie Walker: *Roget's Thesaurus* is still available.

Andrew Pudewa: *Word Finder*. There's so many good options. So I think helping kids learn to use real reference books at a younger age prepares them for using digital reference materials later on. But either way, we've got it covered.

Julie Walker: We got you covered. Except we're not selling used *Roget's Thesaurus*.

Andrew Pudewa: No, not, not at the moment.

Julie Walker: But speaking of digital, I would like to take a moment to talk about a tool that's available. It's a web-based tool that is included with our Premium Membership called our Checklist Generator.

Andrew Pudewa: This is a tool for the teachers. For parents, tutors, teachers. Many, many, many years ago when I was creating some of our products, I spent a tremendous amount of time creating checklists on some kind of Apple word processing or design application. And I had to memorize the keystroke combination to get those little boxes, and then I had to tab and

and space. and I spent so long creating those checklists. And I remember thinking there should be an easier way to do this because you want to be able to create the checklist the way you want it, for the level of challenge, the EZ+1 level that you have for your student or students. But you don't wanna spend a lot of time doing that. And so, I don't remember, do you remember when we got that first Checklist Generator going?

Julie Walker: It was 12 years ago, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: It was 12 years ago. Wow.

Julie Walker: And the nice thing about having now 12 years of experience is we've refined it over the years and it just gets better and better.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. And we've corresponded checklists with the books that we've published so that there's a checklist in the book, but if you want to adjust that, you could cross something out or you can hand write something in. That's valid. But if you want something that looks a little nicer, you can go to the Checklist Generator, click a few boxes, create a PDF, print it. And I use this almost every week in my teaching because I like to have the checklist be exactly the way I want it.

Julie Walker: Exactly, and you can customize it. You can print out 30 copies if you have 30 students in the class that are all at the same level, or you can customize it and print out the five for those more advanced students and the three that need a little bit more help.

Andrew Pudewa: And you can change the band words if you want to. You can decide how many paragraphs you want on the thing. You can add in any other little thing that you might want to add in or take off the things that you haven't addressed or you don't think need to be there. So to me, that tool is so worth the Premium Membership, which is, I don't know, what is it about?

Julie Walker: It's \$99 for the first year because we put a bunch of other content in there.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. You, you get the whole TWSS video course.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly. But then to renew it, it's just the cost of seven cups of coffee for the whole year, and there's that checklist

Andrew Pudewa: You mean it's \$50?

Julie Walker: Oh, wow. How, how much expensive is coffee?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I, last time I was at Starbucks in an airport with the required tax fees and tip. It was \$7 for a Venti Americano with three, four shots.

Julie Walker: Link in the show notes and a price for renewal will be in the show notes and the reason

Andrew Pudewa: Our alternative currency today is number of cups of coffee.

Julie Walker: Yeah, exactly. Exactly, exactly. But the, but people have asked, can I just get the checklist generator outside of the Premium Membership? And the answer is no. But you can get the checklist generator with a subscription and then get all these other things added onto it. And that's called Premium Membership, right?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, no, I'm profoundly grateful we have it. I bump into teachers all over the place. Some of them who are using it very excitedly and happily. Other people who didn't really even know they got the Premium Membership with their TWSS course, but they hadn't really explored that. So it's pretty easy. You just go to your account and if you've paid, it should be there and you can click, click around, see how it works. I even have a PDF editor, so I can print the thing and then I can even edit something that wasn't changeable in the Checklist Generator and change that if I want to.

Julie Walker: Yeah. I want to go back to one of the things that you said that I think is very helpful. We have our *Structure and Style for Students* video courses, and just about every single week there is a corresponding checklist that goes with that assignment. Those checklists are in the curriculum, but they are also preloaded into our Checklist Generator, so that even if you are doing an IEW course, you can customize that. So if, example, week three, you're doing Baldman in the fly with *Structure and Style for Students* Year one, Level A. You can say, well, Mr. Pudewa introduced the *who/which* clause. My kids are not ready for that. Boom, take it off. Or they are ready not only for the *who/which* clause, but they want to start trying the quality ad adjective.

Andrew Pudewa: Strong verb is next.

Julie Walker: Oh, strong verb is next. Thank you. Oh, wow.

Andrew Pudewa: I mean, you could jump to quality adjective.

Julie Walker: You could on the checklist generator.

Andrew Pudewa: The video's going to do strong verb next. So, yeah, and that's one thing we've tried to do over the past, I know really five or six years, is just kind of keep things consistent between all the products. So whatever you're using, it's going to follow that same sequence and that's reduced a bit of confusion that sometimes we get from people.

But checklists are such a good tool for kids. And one of the things that I've been noticing is that I think children who have detailed checklists—like how to clean a bathroom, right? And schedules like— how to organize time. When you give them these things at a younger age, it really helps them to kind of organize their mind, their brain, so that as they get older, they get that habit of creating schedules and checklists and priorities and things that are going to make them more happy.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Successful and happy as adults. So it's one of the intangibles that Mrs. Ingham used to love that word, and she'd talk about, yes, we're teaching kids how to read and write and do phonics and spell and memorize poetry and all that. But under that, what we're doing is we're helping develop minds and hearts and build responsibility and integrity and all of these kind of more character, intangible things that I think are really what most all parents and teachers want at the core of education. And it's also very nice because you get the paper and you look at the checklist and, and you look at the paper and, okay, well you checked it off, but I don't see it. Just stop right there. Kick it back and say, I see you checked this, but I don't see where you did it. You have to do what you check and then check what you do. These have to match. And so,

Julie Walker: that accountability.

Andrew Pudewa: It's not like, oh, the teacher doesn't like my thing. You're not picking on them, you are not criticizing them. It's just missing. Okay, so let's work together and get it in there.

Julie Walker: Yep. And just, one final plug for the Checklist Generator. If the children are, their students are frustrated because it's too hard, that's where the beauty of the Checklist Generator comes in because you can make it easier for them. They won't even know necessarily that their checklist is different than everyone else's because it looks pretty similar.

Very professional and polished, which is what we love. Well, I think this has been helpful and 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. 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.