

Podcast 520: Live Ask Andrew Anything

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: If we can help this student understand that, yeah, okay, it's a little uncomfortable. It's not what you would naturally do it. It doesn't mean what you naturally do isn't already good, but this is going to give you the extra muscular power.

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: This is a live Ask Andrew Anything episode. Episode 520, and we do have a live audience here today, so if you have any questions for Andrew Pudewa, now is your time to ask them. But if you submitted them to podcast@IEW.com, we might already be addressing them. So we get our questions for this episode in many areas. One would be a customer service call. Our customer service team answers the question, but we think, oh, that would be a good one for a broader audience to hear the answer to. So we collect that. We also have several today from social media.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, well good. We like to answer those.

Julie Walker: yeah, exactly. So we've got a goodly amount and some really good questions today, and I have to be careful too because I don't like Andrew to read them ahead of time.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know the questions. It's like a trick she plays.

Julie Walker: It is a trick I play, but he also, I also happen to know that he can read upside down so I can't lay it on the table because he'll pick up where I put it down.

So in no particular order, but I'm going to start with what I think is the funniest one. This is from Christie and she says, "After listening to the podcast about audio books"—remember we did two parts of what's in our Audible account—

Andrew Pudewa: Oh yes.

Julie Walker: "that mentioned Patrick Lencioni. I wondered what Andrew Pudewa's working geniuses are and how those have helped him with IEW." I'm going to read the whole question and then you can understand why I laugh.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay.

Julie Walker: “Additionally, what has been hard for him in starting a company?” This is a really great question, and then the funny part: “And are Julie Walker's working geniuses Andrew's frustration?” The books that I love, that inform a lot of what we do here at IEW in terms of running a business, you kind of have an aversion to.

Andrew Pudewa: No, I don't have much interest in either self-help or business books. And actually the allergy started a long, long time ago, and I don't know if you know what book this was, but I read or listened to it and the author talked about McDonald's as being one of the greatest businesses ever, not because of their product, but because of their business. And I just thought I don't want to even engage in that level of stupidity. I got the point, which is, here's how you organize a successful business, but we've never had a goal to be a successful business. That's not part of our mission. Our mission is to serve people well, which should make a successful business. But if you get the priority there mixed up, it's kind of a problem.

So, my greatest challenge really has been over the years, and I think I'm pretty much close to over it, is just being willing to let responsibilities go. And you came on and, okay, what can you do? And

Julie Walker: You gave me a lot.

Andrew Pudewa: You can do more and more and other people. And then pretty soon, I had that point where, well, I've always done this myself, and it's hard to give away that job because you think, well, nobody could do it as well as I could, which is just straight out pride. It turns out that most of the people who do all of the things I used to do, do it better than I ever did. So, with growth... The other thing I haven't liked, but I understand the need for is management levels, right? I like the idea of, well, let's just all. Go do our job in kind of a egalitarian—I can trust everybody to do everything the way they should and why do we have to have supervisors and meetings?

So those are the kind of things that I have resisted, and that's just been the result of growth. But fortunately, I have an MBA and I hope I pay her well enough. I don't have any degrees myself, but the Lord has blessed us with really good people, and that's of course always been that point. We don't go searching for people so much as we make our needs known and Providence provides. And so I still don't really have much of an interest in Lencioni books, although he is a good storyteller. I would just rather use my reading time differently.

Julie Walker: Yep. So are there any working geniuses that you go to in terms of informing your business decisions?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, not really. I was part of a business owner group for a while, if you remember that. And it kind of fell apart at COVID, so,

Julie Walker: Well, and it was also right about the time that we were getting ready to start this big project.

Andrew Pudewa: And it is traveling over at Oklahoma City to meet. I think I gleaned a little bit from those people in that program, but after a couple years, it's really not worth the time and money. So I would hope that my working geniuses are things like the Book of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. Or, what was the company? The demotivators, despair.com or Despair Inc. Here's my cup, in case no one's seen it. It's got a picture of a bear about to eat a jumping salmon, and the title is Ambition and the caption is "The journey of a thousand miles sometimes ends very, very badly." So. My basic motto is, expect the worst, but prepare for the best.

Julie Walker: Okay, you're not going to like this question.

Andrew Pudewa: Of course not.

Julie Walker: But it's from, also from Christie. Oh,

Andrew Pudewa: Christie? Or a

Julie Walker: It's the same Christie. And I'm just thinking, I personally, I'm, I'm liking this girl because she and I are kind of, we're tracking on the same page here. What is Andrew's Meyers-Briggs?

Andrew Pudewa: I do not like any of those profiles because I can take that thing and I can get wildly different outcomes. And so I'm very frustrated with the fact that I can take it once and then I can take it again sometimes even within a very short time and get a different thing. Is that because I'm not honest or is it because I'm so changing? But I actually have a belief that as you grow, you would get more toward the center. So. It would be harder to harder define your thing. I once got a reading of being an, what is it? E-T-F-J?-

Julie Walker: E-N-T-J.

Andrew Pudewa: But like I said, I could, I could do it today. I could do it next week and it could be different.

Julie Walker: could be different

Andrew Pudewa: So I guess it depends on my mood,

Julie Walker: probably. Yeah.

Andrew Pudewa: or just the way the questions are phrased

Julie Walker: Exactly. So there you go. Maybe ENTJ,

All right, now getting into the *Arts of Language* type questions.

Andrew Pudewa: The valuable questions.

Julie Walker: "I have a seventh grader who is severely dyslexic." You can relate to that.

Andrew Pudewa: relate to that.

Julie Walker: “His testing indicates that he's at the second grade level in reading and writing. What can I do to help him enjoy learning and get him up to grade level? So seventh grade, that's probably about 12 years old.

Andrew Pudewa: So a few things. One is there are reading programs that have shown great success with dyslexia. Susan Barton. We interviewed her on a podcast, we interviewed the Eides who wrote *The Dyslexic Advantage*, so we can link to those podcasts. We have one of our team members, Jennifer, is a certified Barton Tutor at like their highest level, and she would be very happy to correspond with this person.

Julie Walker: Yeah. She won't tutor your son.

Andrew Pudewa: Or anyone else who has questions. So that would be the first thing— Are you working with materials that are appropriate for that?

A second thing would be to understand that usually right around this age, things start to get better. So my son didn't read four letter words until he was almost 11, and he didn't read a book until he was 12, but then things picked up pretty quickly. Spelling was, and probably still is and maybe always will be a challenge. But usually right around puberty, those kids get this kind of burst of power. This ability to exercise their will over their eyes and brain and kind of make them work better. I'm assuming this person knows me well enough to know that I would strongly recommend continuing to read aloud to children of all ages, whether they're dyslexic or not, but you read to them above their own decoding level, and that helps build vocabulary and then audio books.

So, love of learning is kind of a pop culture term. We think that, oh, well, a love of learning means you love learning everything, right? Which is not necessarily the case. We generally love learning things that we are already a little bit good at, and we generally dislike the things that we are not at least a little bit good at. Show notes, motivation podcast

So the trick then is to help the kid get better at doing something and. Then go more in that direction. With math and dyslexia, sometimes that's a problem because they'll reverse letters or numbers. Placement of numbers, direction of numbers makes it hard and I think a lot of mental math is actually good for everyone, but it's particularly good for kids who may be able to learn how to do like 21×7 in their head better than they would learn to do it, say on a piece of paper.

And then copy work, just straight copy work. You kind of give up on that around 11 or 12. But there's value in it and there's a lot of research to show that if kids can spell a word, they are more likely to be able to read it. So working on copy work and spelling and sometimes cursive works better for dyslexics than printing just because the letters are more distinct and the kinesthetic experience of writing a letter is different, more different in cursive than it is in printing. So a lot of resources there. If I had a magic pill, I would be truly wealthy.

Julie Walker: Yes, you would. Yes. We have a lot of, and I, we've said this a hundred times on any number of podcasts. Our writing method works so well for kids with learning differences because it's broken down into the smallest steps.

Andrew Pudewa: And the kids, whether it's dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADHD, spectrum stuff, auditory processing, the thing that makes everything harder is overwhelm of complexity. So you have to always think, well, how do I take this thing that seems overwhelming to them and break it into smaller, more manageable, doable parts?

Julie Walker: Good. Okay. Hope that helps. That actually was from Virginia. I don't know if I mentioned that.

So this one from Kara. I'm looking for recommendations for teaching logic to my older middle school students. We have used materials recommended by Well-Trained Mind. Do you have any suggestions?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I have taught using both the Memoria Press. Martin Cothran's, *Traditional Logic I, Traditional Logic 2, Material Logic, and Aristotle's Rhetoric*. And so it's a four plus year sequence, depending how fast you can do it. I will confess it's kind of dry. It works well for kids who are kind of tuned in, and they like the technical side, and they don't need to be fun because they already are aligned that way. I've also used the materials from Classical Academic Press, *Argument Builder* and *The Art of Argument*, their tagline for their company is classical subjects creatively taught, or something like that. And it's, it's definitely a little bit more engaging for the average student today.

Julie Walker: Yep. So maybe that would be better for a middle school student.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And one thing I like about it is, there's a lot of application to say: "Here's a hypothetical advertisement you see. Can you apply your logic knowledge to this advertisement? What fallacy may be embedded." And so there's a lot of real world application there, but there are other publishers with good materials. I don't know, but I'd probably start with Classical Academic Press. Just take a look at that and see how you like it.

Julie Walker: Okay, next one. This is one of our Facebook families. Carol asks about, she has a 10-year-old doing *Structure and Style for Students: Year 1, Level A*, and struggling with writing clincher sentences. Year 1, Level A—that's not surprising.

Andrew Pudewa: Well no. There's a few approaches. Number one, dictate a clincher sentence. Just give them an example of one that works. And you keep doing that, and then the student learns by example. What works. And a lot of people believe that well, if the kid doesn't think of something on their own, they're not learning; whereas, kind of the opposite is true. If they can't think of it, that's when they're not learning. They need more examples. So don't be afraid to help enough to give examples, to dictate a couple options. Say, well, you could write this, or you could write that.

I've also had a few teachers who are a little less able to help kids individually because they're in a classroom, use this method, and I think it's a decent place to start. Just tell them to rewrite the first sentence. Then find one or two words that they could change. Equip them with a thesaurus type of tool, and see if they can just rewrite the exact same sentence, but change a couple words. And you think that that would be narrow or redundant or uninteresting, but actually it works quite well in many cases. So just having that thesaurus-like tool to help.

The third trick that I discovered some students figured out is if you just make your topic sentence really long, then you have more words that you can pull from to fit into the clincher.

And of course, we provide examples of topic-clinchers in the *Magnum Opus Magazine*, in the exemplars that many of the books have. And, teaching again by example kind of helps them get the idea there. But there's always going to be some compositions that are more challenging than others. And I had one of my sharper kids try to squeeze by me just last week using the word *in* as a topic-clincher key word. So yeah, wondering, but is *in* a word you would put in a key word outline.

Julie Walker: I'm thinking of the title rule. The one to two. Yeah, two to three.

Andrew Pudewa: And she wanted to use one of two as the word *in*. I just didn't let it go.

Julie Walker: No good

Andrew Pudewa: I handed it back, said, I know you can do better than this. That was just cheap.

Julie Walker: There's another piece to this question, and I just, the reason I didn't stop you is I wanted to have you explain that, but I also wanted to hear your thoughts on using this as part of your clincher sentence. "These are the reasons" or "that is why. . ." Would that be wrong? Especially now I'm looking at SSS: 1A.

Andrew Pudewa: I'm not going to really pick on that kind of thing at that level. The, the only thing I would probably try to disallow is some statement like, "Now I have told you", right? Or, "This is what I think about. . ." I try to get rid of the *I* and just restate it, but I would suggest just copy the first sentence, change a few words, and see if it works.

Julie Walker: Yep. Sounds great. Alright, *Fix It! Grammar* question.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay.

Julie Walker: "My teenager is starting *Fix It! Grammar* level one. He is balking at the lines for rewriting the passages because those are the lines for the little kids."

Andrew Pudewa: Just do it on a separate piece of paper. if, first of all, if he's doing *Fix It! Grammar* Level 1 as a teenager, I would think that he's doing that level because of either challenges in that area of writing, reading, whatever, and the copy work is going to be good, but I can see that it does look like little kid lines. So I would say just get some paper he is

happy with doing it, and then just do it all continuously on a piece of paper, and then he'll have many pages of that whole story completely rewritten.

Julie Walker: Yep. Yep. I like that a lot. The value of rewriting that. There's so many values to copy work, but especially in *Fix It! Grammar*, you're fixing the sentence, so you're really. I think what I love, and we've talked about this so many times, but what I love about our grammar program is it translates from just a grammar workbook page into their actual writing, and I think this copy work is a piece of that.

Andrew Pudewa: It is a bridge, and there is a skill. Like I'll have kids who will follow my instructions, which is you write your rafter. No erasing allowed it. You double space, it's okay if it's messy. Then you give it to your editor, and your editor fixes whatever needs to be fixed. So a spelling thing, a punctuation thing, a missing word thing, and then you copy it over. But sometimes kids miss the edits when they're copying.

Julie Walker: Oh, right.

Andrew Pudewa: So this helps to create the habit of attending to copying it with the edits they made themselves, but in a controlled, guaranteed-to-be-correct way.

Julie Walker: Great. Excellent. Okay, another Facebook question. “What would be your best advice for a gifted ninth grade boy in my class who writes brilliantly and creatively—nice dual there—but hates being constrained with rules and checklists? He claims IEW rules ruin his writing and make it sound awkward, and his mom is hesitant to make him follow the checklist completely because he naturally likes writing a lot and she doesn't want to take the joy away from him.”

Andrew Pudewa: I understand this. I've had a couple students like that, and I've tried to explain to them: they have an awesome way of writing, but in writing, as in music or sports, you can expand your repertoire of skills, of things you can do. That's why we have the checklist, not that following this is going to make your writing necessarily better, particularly in your own opinion, because we do tend to always hold our own way of doing things higher than others. But it's going to push you a little bit and force you to try to use words in ways that you might not otherwise use them. And in doing so, you will become stronger.

We had a marvelous podcast episode with Scott Newstok, who wrote the book, *How to Think like Shakespeare* and I think that actually might be a really interesting thing for this particular student to listen to. And in his book, *How to Think like Shakespeare*, he talks about plyometrics, which is actually a word in fitness that technically means jumping. But what he was saying is learning to do things forward and backwards and sideways and all around gives you this skill, this flexibility, this mastery that you don't get if you just always do things the the way that you do them.

And so if we can help this student understand that, yeah, okay. It's a little uncomfortable. It's not what you would naturally do. It doesn't mean what you do naturally isn't already good.

But this is going to give you the extra muscular power and flexibility of using language that will serve you well later on. I also had a student and she was extraordinarily talented, and she kind of had the same complaint, like, why do I have to do this? I said, well, we'll make a deal. You do it the way you want to, and then you do it again following the checklist and tell me if you learn something in that process. She was, I don't know, 15, very talented kid, and she had enough maturity to notice that, well, yeah, having to fit in all these dress ups, openers, decoration, triples, topic-clincher, it made a difference in the way she was thinking about language. I also had a teacher who came once to a seminar, and she was a high school English teacher, which always makes me nervous because they kind of do know everything. But she came up to me at lunch and said, this is fascinating. Before I got into teaching, I was a journalist, I was actually nominated for a Pulitzer, like she's a top level journalist, and she went into teaching kind of as a different career. And she said, "In doing this today, these practicum exercises, I've realized that I have my little ruts and this has kind of forced me to notice that. It's been really good. Thank you." So that was, I think, a very mature thought. So we'll see what this kid can do. It's not going to hurt him, and I don't think it's going to destroy his love for writing, especially since it's just one assignment a week or a few a month, and the rest of the time he can do whatever he wants.

Julie Walker: Well, and I have a son who's a musician, and he was composing music before he even took lessons because he was playing everything by ear, but creating his own compositions. And he would get frustrated with the lessons that he was given. But as he continued to grow in his musical abilities, his own composition skills improved dramatically. And that analogy of music and writing is so true. And it got to the point, Andrew, where we had to put the piano that was in the living room into his bedroom so that he could play as often as he want, whatever he wanted, including maybe a half an hour day of practicing his lessons. So,

Andrew Pudewa: And I, I recently had an experience where I'm trying to improve my bench press. And I have a particular goal, which would be to bench press my weight before I die, which means I'm either going to have to get stronger pretty fast, or I'm going to have to lose too much weight.

Julie Walker: Please don't lose any more weight.

Andrew Pudewa: But it's interesting. So I have a new trainer. I said, I have this goal and I don't think I can reach it. because my progress has been so slow. But what he got me doing was being extremely attentive to the smallest little details of form.

Yeah, I could bench press what I could do, but I couldn't do more than that because I, I just maxed out. But now that I'm attentive to these details of form, I've been able to add little by little, and who knows, maybe I'll get there, maybe I won't. But I thought that was very instructive because I wasn't able to be aware of the things that I could improve on until it was pointed out to me. So there are a lot of analogies to this.

Julie Walker: All right, here's one from Asana. I think that's how this name is pronounced. "My son is in the habit of writing "which is extremely cool" to fulfill all of his who-which clauses and probably an LY dress up there too because extremely. Can you offer some guidance on this so I can broaden his writing?"

Andrew Pudewa: My guess is he's pretty young. You can put *cool* on the band words list. You can also try to help him find a list of substitutes for *extremely* and let it go there for a while. I think a very good exercise for younger children, even middle school children, is to explore the nuance in the different meanings of words.

So an example of this would be, and this works well in a small group, you could do it one-on-one, but what are some things that are awesome? Make a list. All right. What are some things that you would consider noble, right? And make a list. What are some things you could consider engaging and make a list? What are some things you would consider cool and make a list. And kinda work with maybe half a dozen of those synonyms for *good*. What are some things that are good and what then they start to realize is that wow, having an exciting book might be awesome, might be cool. Not quite noble. But engaging, right? So then they can start to feel the nuance of difference between the meanings of words. Usually when kids say the same thing again and again, it's because they don't have the vocabulary to say something else. So then it's really on the parent, the teacher, the coach, whatever, to try and expand the available vocabulary options. Also, you could make a rule. You can't put *is* after the word *which* and that forces them to, to do something else. But you may have to give a lot of examples. And then the other way I would work on this is to look at the key word outline with them and say, are there two lines on this keyword outline that could possibly go together in one sentence, being connected up with the who or which.

Julie Walker: Yep. That's nice. That's sentence combining, and we know that that's really helpful for students to know how to do that. Okay. I have two more questions.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay.

Julie Walker: I'm going to say, okay, I'm going to do the longer one first and then the last one last. "My 14-year-old has completed SSS1B and is working through Canadian history based writing lessons. She tends to tick the boxes without applying herself. Her work lacks a sense of caring about the quality." 14-year-old. "Although I'm trying to stick to hands-off content, I don't know how to motivate her to do more than the bare minimum required. How do I push her to do better and strive for more?"

And I want you to know, Andrew, this right here is I'm reading all kinds of articles about students in schools and employees at work just barely getting by.

Andrew Pudewa: Don't care. It's a modern cultural thing. Well, there's a few areas here. Number one, 14 is an age and kids don't remain 14 forever, and the odds are very good that she'll get through that phase, but I understand it. If you have a group and you can kind of read some of these compositions and then you see something you really like and you're reading it

out loud to a group, you can say, wow, I really love how you did that. And then other people will kind of be more likely to want to try to do something that you will notice. Plato said that which is honored is cultivated. He said that kind of about societies, the city state, that which the state honors you'll get more of, but a classroom or a family is an organizational unit wherein that I think is still true. So if you don't have a class, then what I would do is just look really hard for something she does that is of good quality and just point that out and say, that's probably the best sentence you wrote in this thing. Or that paragraph may be the best paragraph you've written because you did this and this. And don't worry about if you get into criticizing the thing. "Well, that's kind of shallow thinking, or couldn't you think of a better word than this?" Then it just, it, it doesn't accomplish anything. You're, you're not cultivating what you want.

The other thing, and this may or may not be something this mom can do, but if you write the assignment yourself, the same assignment that she's writing, and then you let her read what you wrote, that could have kind of expanding her view of what's possible.

Julie Walker: Right?

Andrew Pudewa: Children generally do want to make you happy. They generally do like doing their best, but they don't necessarily know how to do that. So again, having examples of things that are a notch above what she is doing, but probably still in the zone of what she'd be capable of would be.

A third thought is, I'll tell you, I've seen this again and again. You get a kid into a contest—an essay contest, or a story contest, or a poetry contest or a speech contest, and they will work a hundred times harder than you would ever be able to just get out of them by saying, you have to do this. So I would look for maybe a writing contest and she might say, well, I could never win that. And you say, oh, I'll give you \$20 bucks if you just try. And then it changes the perspective a little bit. I've seen again and again, just getting, just entering the contest, but getting like a honorable mention even. It just changes that whole perspective of one's self as a competent writer,

Julie Walker: Well, I don't think he actually read my, but I'm suspicious.

Andrew Pudewa: No, I can't see it.

Julie Walker: The last question I have for you is, what are the benefits for students who enter a writing contest? And we have a writing contest actually. On March 11th when this podcast launches, we're in the middle of our writing contest. We start at March 1st, and then you have until April 30th to get those submissions turned in. A link in the show notes.

Andrew Pudewa: Do we also have a page where we list writing contests, other contests? Do we just try to update that when we hear about one? If I notice one, I'll send it. And sometimes honestly, the bar is kind of low,

Julie Walker: The last time Andrew, we had our own writing contest. We had hundreds of submissions and they were exceptional.

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, our bars are not low,

Julie Walker: no. And we published those in our *Magnum Opus Magazine*, so we're excited about that. Okay, so benefits of entering a writing contest.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, it gives you a concrete goal. It's going to hopefully encourage a child to use the best words they can and get help and get someone's opinion and rewrite. And there is kind of a fuzzy line between how much can you help a child in a contest and do you give them zero help or do you just answer their questions or can you give them suggestions?

And there's no way to make that a non-fuzzy line, but that idea of I could do this. I did this, I accomplished it. And we see this with speeches all the time. Kids are like, oh, I don't want to do any public speaking. And then they do one and, and then they go to a competition and no, they didn't win, but they, they feel like they could. So it changes the paradigm for what's possible. And I think maybe a writing contest helps to do that. And if you don't have a good one, maybe you could start one. If you're part of a school or a homeschool co-op and say, Hey, let's have a writing contest and get some local merchant to donate some gift certificates or something.

Julie Walker: Yep. Sounds great. All right, Andrew, those were the questions for today. I have in my hand our 2026 magalog. I was actually hoping to show the school one too, because we have one for homeschoolers and one for schools, but these are still warm, they're hot off the press. And so a lot of great articles in here, including one written by Andrew called Back to Basics, which is our theme for this year. Then all kinds of great content in here, including our feature of our Hillsdale relationship and the six books now that we wrote in collaboration with Hillsdale College, K-12 academic. So super excited about that. So

Andrew Pudewa: Alright,

Julie Walker: That's it. Thank you, Andrew. Bye everyone. Thank you.

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