

## Podcast 522: How the Word Because Promotes Thinking (Laying the Foundation)

### Episode Transcript

**Andrew Pudewa:** One of the most important questions you can ask about anything in order to think about it is why is something the way it's, and that's what the *because* clause really forces a student to do it.

**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:** Andrew, this particular podcast fits in the series that we're working on this year called Laying the Foundation—kind of that idea of back to the basics and the reason we are talking about this particular podcast is because we're talking about the word *because* and how it promotes thinking.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, okay. How many times in one day do we use the word *because*? It would be so interesting to have a way to log that.

**Julie Walker:** Dear listener, I'm just going to tell you right now that as we got ready for this podcast, Andrew said to me, there's no way we can spend 20 minutes talking about *because*.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Which is good news for you, O listeners, you'll be done in, 13 or 14 minutes

**Julie Walker:** I think there's so much wisdom that you're going to be sharing, Andrew, that you may not even know you have. But let me just kind of set the scenario. We are in our recording studio here in Bixby, Oklahoma, and Andrew is teaching the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* course to a room full of teachers, some new to IEW, some very experienced, and he starts teaching the stylistic techniques. Actually from the very beginning, I'm taking notes on possible podcast topics that can go with this idea of laying the foundation, because truly the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* is a foundational course. This is what we hope all teachers have an opportunity to participate in. Yes. And so I'm taking notes and you said when you teach students how to use the *because* clause, you are helping them think. And I wrote that down and said, wow, that is going to be an absolutely fantastic episode because it's going to be talking about laying the foundation and thinking. And we do both.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, part of my whole odyssey from the beginning to here was being confronted in some cases, or having a little bit of internal questioning, just kind of pushing against a little bit. Okay. Webster came up with a system, is all of it something worth

promulgating? And my first experience of a question like this occurred the second time I ever did what I had created and called the TWSS seminar.

Of course, in the early days it was one day, and it was all nine units. I had a sixteen-page handout, so it was very rudimentary and I did it for a school in a town where I'd lived that I knew many of the people had gone to church with many of the people there. And I was going through the style techniques and I got to the *because* clause, and I'm just teaching it the way we did it in Canada and the way I'd been doing it with kids. And I never really stopped to wonder, is this even a good idea? And one of the teachers, a second grade teacher, we got to this point and she popped up her hand and yes. And she said, "I would never teach my students to use the word because in their writing." And I'm just, I'm young, I don't know what I'm doing. I'm, she's obviously an experienced second grade teacher, so I naturally said, "why not?" And her answer, ironically, if I recall correctly, and I believe I do, was "because they do it anyway."

So I started to think about that question and that answer. I came to a few conclusions. The first thing that I realized was that it's smart to have some things in the checklist that are easy, that are natural, that are colloquial in a way. And I came from a Suzuki Method background, where you'd have kind of a, a harder piece. And then you'd have kind of a easier piece that you could learn more quickly and easily. And then you'd have a little bit of a harder piece that would require a little more effort, and then you'd have a little bit of an easier, and I realized that there was some wisdom in not having everything just be a new hard thing but to have a break and let everything kind of solidify. So when she said, well, they do it anyway, I thought, of course, it's one of the words we probably use dozens if not hundreds of times a day, depending how much we talk. And so putting that in writing would be a natural thing for young children. So I thought, okay, that's interesting, Webster put it in there, not because it's hard, but because it's easy.

**Julie Walker:** Maybe.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And then over the years, I would get people kind of, and students too, students, parents, teachers saying this *because* cause seems to be awkward. It's the one that when you force it in, it just seems unnatural and we don't like that. I came to a couple conclusions. Number one, it's okay. It's okay to have on the style checklist a thing that is a little awkward because that's how you learn to make it less awkward—by doing it, by kind of stretching, stressing yourself a little bit in that way.

**Julie Walker:** Every mother of a violin student or a saxophone student knows that it's going to sound bad sometimes.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So don't be afraid of awkwardness. And that became a theme that I have continued to coach people just because it's common sense really. If you introduce a new idea and you force it, it could be awkward, but that's okay. However, it was when I kind of really dug into the teaching of Unit 7, and we got to this problem of inventing content and coming

up with enough to write about that I started to realize one of the most important questions you can ask about anything in order to think about it is “why is something the way it is?” That's what the *because* clause really forces a student to do, isn't it?

**Julie Walker:** Yes, exactly right. And as you're saying that, I'm thinking of a couple things. One is in some of our advanced materials, the *University-Ready Writing* and then. We teach this in the new teaching writing structure and style, the thesis and how to come up with the thesis, almost with a formula. But then you take out some of those words, “although blah, blah, blah, blah. I think.” But of course you have to get out the I in there because it's formal writing. I think this because this and then you just get rid of the, *although I think because*, but that becomes that formula to, as you say, forced thinking. The other thing I was thinking about as you were telling your story, you had a teacher who, and this is now because we have, because as a dress up, and then we also have it as a sentence opener.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, no, not really. To clarify—and this was where I broke with Webster ever so slightly. I realized that this checklist is growing and it can hit a point of being cumbersome. And I would be the first to admit that I have personally experienced trying to force a *because* clause into a paragraph and just couldn't figure out a way to do it that was not slightly awkward or unnatural.

And so I came to this decision, I guess, that when we introduce the number five sentence opener, which is *when, while where as since if, although* that is the point, plus or minus a little bit, but that's generally the point where I will say, “okay everybody, we are going to eliminate the *because* dress up and add it as an option to the *when, while, where, as, since, if, although* dress up and then it becomes the, because, so you get the *www.asiab* which has no meaning, but is easier to remember. So now there's only five dress ups. And you can use or not use the *because* clause as it's appropriate. This usually is happening later in the year or second or even third year, where students are now, they have the freedom—because it is the grammatically, it's the same thing, right? It's creating a dependent adverb clause.

And so after that, I will say now the AC clausal sentence opener. You may use the word *because*, but I always give a little caveat here, which is number one, if you start a sentence with the word *because* you must have a comma, right? Because if you don't have a comma, you run a huge risk of it being a fragment, which is what all the poor second grade teachers were allergic to.

**Julie Walker:** Well, and that second grade teacher told you why she doesn't like the word, *because* with a fragment because they do it all the time.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Which. Well, the way we speak, the way we, there was a, there was a, a multi-level beautiful irony and I, I really appreciate the experience because if she hadn't done that, I wouldn't have this to talk about.

**Julie Walker:** It's true.

**Andrew Pudewa:** So then we move into a point of freedom and refinement. And as I say, when I introduce all the style techniques, the goal is not to do every single one of these things in every paragraph of everything you write for the rest of your whole life.

The goal is to get so good at it that you can do it, and then graduate from the checklist and then use or not use the techniques as opportunity or demand presents itself. And then the other caveat, just so I don't leave a loose end here, as I always tell people there are, I tell kids there are opinions about whether or not you should start a sentence, you could legally start a sentence with the word *because*. Some people, I guess very old school would say never do that. That's probably a died out for the most part attitude, but you might bump into someone who kind of passed that on from generation to generation. Like why you cut the end off the ham when you put it in the pan.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly right.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And other people have done it and it's not a problem. But let's err on the side of being safe. If you do it, check and be sure you have a comma and the thing after the comma is the subject of the sentence. And then 98% of the time you're safe.

**Julie Walker:** Yep. I love that you encourage the teachers all the time in these podcasts, in that teacher training seminar that we just recorded, to do the assignments, because if they do the assignments they're going to be better writers and experience the system themselves so that they can have some empathy, but some more knowledge about how this works.

**Andrew Pudewa:** It's kind of as though. And I had a teacher who came to my seminar once. I remember this pretty well as a matter of fact, it was in Spokane. She came up to me and I knew she was a high school English teacher, which made me always a little bit cautious, especially in my early years, because they might know more than I do and what did I do?

But she was very kind. She said before I came into teaching, I was a journalist. I was nominated for a Pulitzer. I have been a writer my whole life, and now I teach it. And this has been a really good experience for me because I realized that I can easily get in a rut and just kind of do things the same way. And this using this checklist has stretched me a little bit to realize, "Oh, I don't just have to kind of write the way I always do." And we all have that. We have all of our habits, our speech habits, our thinking habits, obviously things that challenge our habits can be uncomfortable, but sometimes really beneficial.

So I think linguistically, that checklist had that effect for her, and I thought, okay, that's probably good for all of us. And of course I experienced a similar thing though I was never nominated for anything. But I experienced that with Webster being almost weirdly fanatical about getting everything in, and when I finally got it and I just worked to make it fit and sound good, and I thought, wow, that was a lot harder than it would've been if I just did it without thinking about all those techniques and how to fit them in. And that's not necessarily a better thing, right? Hard can be good because it stretches your mind. It stretches what you're capable of thinking. So the humble little *because* clause.

**Julie Walker:** Mm-hmm. Right, right. Stretches thinking gives us the opportunity to defend our position. I think it's worth spending a whole episode talking about *because* because, we are the Institute for Excellence in Writing. And our tagline is, listen, speak, read, write, think, and *because* is just one of those words that can help us do the thinking while we're learning to write.

**Andrew Pudewa:** I do believe that learning to write, and not outsourcing that the way so many people think you could do now, actually does help you learn to listen better. And I actually flashed on this yesterday and I thought, because I know something about constructing language, I'm able to listen and understand language better.

It's kinda like when you study logic, you then listen differently because you, you kind of think so logically, and you're looking for what are the premises, what's the conclusion? Is that valid? If you don't study logic, you don't quite have the tools to do that. You may have an intuitive sense, well that's not a good argument, but why? So with grammar in the same way, when you learn to construct language, then you learn to see weaknesses in language that can often kind of be a covering of what's really meant or really said or really true. And so you can kind of see through superficiality. I think these are the best reasons to teach grammar and logic because it's not that you use it per se on people, but it's—you become better noticing when people might be trying to use that on you.

**Julie Walker:** Exactly, and I've said this before, it's one of my “momalies”, these expressions I used for my kids growing up that if I said them now they could finish my sentence. I would say “hard work” and they would finish my sentence “is immensely satisfying.” And that is so true. You're talking about, you're completing that paper for Dr. Webster and using six dress ups, six sentence openers, knowing all six decorations, but using them appropriately. And of course, with IEW, we've changed it a little bit so that ultimately there's five dress ups—we're so nice—six sentence openers and six decorations.

**Andrew Pudewa:** And don't forget a triple.

**Julie Walker:** I was getting there and the triples that are in there and the advanced style. My dear friend sent me a text message yesterday and said, Julie. I am now an accredited instructor with IEW. So she persevered, pushed through, and did it herself, and she never thought it was going to be possible. And it is, it is possible, and I think it's even more possible with our new *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style*, now, third edition. You talked about how your first time you taught this, it was just a 16-page handout.

**Andrew Pudewa:** 16-page handout.

**Julie Walker:** And then. You did the first edition, the official first edition that we published and sold, and that had maybe 120 pages?

**Andrew Pudewa:** Well, there was 60 some. And then after a couple years, I put together an appendix to add onto it because I didn't want to have redo all of it..

**Julie Walker:** Yeah, exactly. Well, and then we did our Tips and Tricks to also extend the life of that a little bit longer. But then when we did the second edition, we completely rewrote the seminar workbook and that blossomed to well over 200 pages.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Yeah. Ballooned or bloated might be a better B word for that.

**Julie Walker:** To that end, I just want to kind of just speak to how amazing the third edition is. I think we landed in the balance. It's not 16 pages, but it's not close to 300 pages. The seminar isn't one day. We did record it over a number of days, but the amount of time that the teachers are watching is significantly shortened because what we wanted to do was do exactly what I said at the very beginning. Lay the foundation, stick to the basics, make sure that it's not overwhelming because we don't want it to be easy plus a lot, or hard plus a lot. We want it to be appropriate.

**Andrew Pudewa:** Those practicum assignments, they go pretty fast,

**Julie Walker:** Well, you can space it out. But this *Seminar Workbook* has around 170 pages or less, so I, I believe that we have struck a balance and it's just fun. And I will say this, if you haven't yet seen any of the sample videos that we have online, we'll put a link. In our show notes to it. You can see this really cool bookcase that we have in the back that we've put some artifacts on including, and you can't see it very well, but our video team did put the picture of you learning violin with Dr. Suzuki superimposed over the video.

**Andrew Pudewa:** See how much I've aged in 10 years.

**Julie Walker:** You look great, Andrew. Thank you.

**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.