

Podcast 527: Navigating the Four Deadly Errors in the Classroom, Part 2

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: All the research shows writing without AI uses more of your brain than ai. We aren't training kids to use a tool until they have the basic knowledge needed to know whether they're even using that tool well or not.

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 I have a question about now, these advanced students, what suggestions do you have?

Andrew Pudewa: What suggestions do you have for the kid who writes really well and doesn't like the checklist.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Feels it's constraining. Come up you and go, I could write better if I didn't have to do all this stuff. I've had that a couple times, so I generally say, "That's phenomenal. You write it one way, the way you want to. And then you write a second version of it following the checklist and report back to me." And always they'll come back and say, "Oh, okay, fine. Yeah. Having to do those things, it made me think a little harder. It made it, it made it better." And so there is that kind of. When you're good at something, it's a little harder to take instruction on something you think you're good at, but if it's the right kind of guidance, it should expand your repertoire of what you're capable of.

And so even for the very talented kid, "This is what we're learning. This is what we're doing." And you can always go back to the sports or the music analogy, right? You do dribble drills and wind sprints, not so you can show off those things. Yeah, you're a good player. But you'll be even better. If you get better at these specific things.

We play scales and etudes, not so we can play them at a recital, but so when that little pattern pops up in piece, you're trying to play, you already know how to do it. That I think for a lot of kids, that analogy, this is like training for sports. This is like learning an instrument. You do exercises, but that's not something that's been part of writing instruction in so many places for decades now. Right? So we are having to kind of redefine the discipline.

Jessica Tinney: And I will say, I'm noticing that my son is a junior, and I will not name the college where he is taking concurrent classes, but. I really wish that that instructor had been exposed to IEW because it was very vague, very vague expectations, not a rubric, nothing to follow. And he is like, mom, I don't know what to do. I met with the tutoring center. I did everything. And so he was doing that at the time that I was starting here. And so I was like, oh my gosh, let's just write it this way. Because I think it really does help. And like you said, there's. That's not how it's been done for a lot of times. And so you get an instructor who's never been exposed to this and they're committing all the things that you said not to do. like not being clear and overexpectation that are not explained. And so, and.

Jennifer Mauser: I see that, but it brought up the idea that so many of the teachers out there, they get their reading methods class. They get their math methods. But how many teachers have gone through a writing methods class at the university? Unfortunately, a lot of our instructors are coming to the classroom and they have the best of intentions. But they are— “I don't know how to teach writing. I just know how to write.” Yes. And I was one of those teachers. . We write, I knew how to write, but I did not know how to get what I knew in my brain into the brains of my students. . . And that is where IEW, the structure and style method, it was like taking this weight off of me because here was a method that was clearly delineated and I was having my students jump over little puddles, not high jumps. It made sense. It was easy for me to implement. The students engaged with the material. It took the pressure off of everybody, and I'm so grateful that I found that before I reached age 50.

Jessica Tinney: And I feel like it's so nice because you can, you can identify when something is not well written, but it's hard to verbalize. And this, I feel like, gives us that, well, this is what we're testing against. And like in math, I mean, it's pretty clear it's black and white. Two plus three is five because it is, but in writing it's, it's not like that, you know?

And so I think the checklist is so nice as it narrows down, like, did you do it? Did you not?

Jennifer Mauser: It benefits my students with ADHD and autism. They love it because they don't like fuzzy assignments. They just want to go outside and play. So if they have a checklist,

Jeff Nease: Am I done?

Jennifer Mauser: I got my -ly? yes. Okay. And they've done it. It's like they are just the happiest little critters afterwards, and they get to go outside and leave that task because they know they have done, yeah, they've accomplished it.

Jeff Nease: Well, well, Julie originally asked us, have you ever committed any of the four deadly? So unclear assignments. Guilty. I remember when we did a five-paragraph essay about something and students were rightfully asking me, “How do I do my introduction and how do I do my conclusion?”

Jennifer Mauser: You just do it.

Jeff Nease: And that was my answer of, well, your introduction just introduces your subject and you give some background information and you just introduce it. What about my conclusion? You just wrap it up. Okay. Well, how do I wrap it up?

Jennifer Mauser: You conclude it.

Jeff Nease: You just kind of, you put a nice bow on it. Any more questions? And then I would grade it and go, this is not really good. There's something wrong with this assignment. And it's me and so, but it's also really, I don't want to say it was my fault because when I was getting my degree, I was never taught, well, this is how you should instruct your students to write. Yeah. It was with social science, very heavily content-based. You need to have European, non-European, US. I remember I had an African history class. And one of my assignments was you have to, here's a blank map of Africa and you had to label every single country, every river, mountain range, everything. Just geography, everything. And there was a bunch of papers in there too, but never, this is how I want you to write, especially in college, it's, I had a couple classes like this, praise the Lord that I passed. You have three assignments you have . Your first paper. . Your midterm, final, that's it. And it was on the syllabus. And if you didn't read your syllabus, that's it. So

Jennifer Mauser: Another great plug for short frequent assignments.

Jeff Nease: And it's hard because at the college level, there really isn't a lot of feedback. No, it's Did you submit it? Here's your grade. Next paper's in maybe a month or so. And that's why a lot of colleges have writing labs. And so I would take my papers to the writing lab, and then the people at the writing lab would go, this sounds good to me.

Then they would say, and this is what you say too, who's the professor? And it goes to. Find out what he, she likes, go to the library. And that's what you do?

Julie Walker: Imitate your professor. Imitate.

Jeff Nease: Yes. And then if you just straight up ask him or her what? Oh, I can't, I can't help you on that.

Julie Walker: Okay. I have a hot topic that is being talked about that probably will take the rest of our time, but I do want to save some time at the end for each of you to share the most important and why tip that you can give to these teachers that are watching. But here's the hot topic. Also, start with you, Andrew, to speak on—Can you guess?

Andrew Pudewa: Don't start with me.

Julie Walker: I won't start with you. It's the topic of AI. Why do we teach writing if AI is going to do all the writing for us? How do we prevent students from using AI if we don't want them to use it? It's just the whole, the whole really scary thing of AI that reared its ugly head. What, just a couple years ago? And is now basically taking over. I am not going to start with Andrew. I was told not to. Oh, go ahead Jennifer. Let's just go down the line.

Jennifer Mauser: Well, I'm going to lean on Andrew's wisdom. So I remember he said whenever we take a piece of technology to replace something that we have done previously by our brain power, we limit or reduce the efficacy of what we could do in our brains. So. AI? Well, what are we doing? We're subjecting or subjugating our intellect, our humanity, if you will, to a computer algorithm. And it's not even necessarily going to be correct because it cites itself. So, um, if, if we want to.

Jeff Nease: Circular reason right.

Jennifer Mauser: Very circular, and sometimes it's not incorrect. I mean, try, try Google, try try doing AI on yourself, and you'll find some really interesting things that you never knew about yourself. So, I think that this is an issue that is, I think it is of such critical importance that, I don't know, I, I'm going to maybe sound very extreme, but I think that this is a potential of life or death for us. How do we, how do we live aside something that, to borrow a biblical term that's Babel-esque that we, that we believe that we're going to put all of our marbles into this and we're going to rely on that, and it's going to raise our standard of living, raise our quality of life, and reduce our effort. Well, Wall-E took care of that in the movies if you ever saw that one.

Jeff Nease: Oh my goodness. Well, I didn't have to, I never dealt with AI in the classroom. No, like Julie said, I mean, really the last couple years is really where it's, it's reared its head. AI can be great for a lot of things, but just like anything, it can be very dangerous. But also to go back to Julie's question of why are we even teaching writing?

If I can say I need a five-page paper, double spaced MLA format on World War II, whatever the case may be. Yes, you may get something and it might sound really great, but AI is not always correct. Just like Jennifer said, Google yourself in AI and you're like, wow, I wrote books I didn't know.

Jennifer Mauser: I'm way more accomplished my, I'm

Jeff Nease: I'm way more accomplished on AI than real life. But also too, writing teaches students to think, right? And I agree with Jennifer that. AI is going to be here to stay. . I don't foresee it just going away. Yeah. I think it's only going to get more intrusive in our lives and students' lives and things like that. I mean, you could just talk about something and all of a sudden it pops up on your phone. So how do we deal with this? And I think educating students of what it is good for and why we want to shy away from it in terms of writing. I think it can be a good starting off point to say, Hey, I just need some ideas. But I mean, you start losing that ability to think for yourself and what you said too. Think about the big tech companies also that could really determine the algorithm of what people are seeing. So if we have this kind of dumbing down of the society. And people just rely on everything AI. Well, those small group of people that can control those algorithms, truly can control the way people see the world, the way they think. And for us, we see beauty in thinking. We see beauty in individuality.

Jennifer Mauser: In imperfection.

Jeff Nease: imperfection. Nothing has connected me better with students than showing them I am not a perfect human being. I do not know every single social studies fact or anything like that, but I think we start losing that with AI.

So, I mean, my big suggestion would be just to try to educate students on what it is, what we should use it for, what we should not, and the benefits, the pros and the cons. So that's just kind of what I'm thinking off the top of my head.

Jessica Tinney: So, I would, my initial instinct was to just say it limits our ability to think. And my son and I have this discussion quite a bit because he's really asking really good questions right now. And like Jeff said, if AI is being driven by one group of thinking then they're not getting accurate information. And I think that's just incredibly dangerous. . . Because like if we're talking about history. My husband recently was working with a young man who wanted to join the Armed services, and so he was doing some training with him and he was telling him, I don't think the Holocaust was as big as they made it out to be. I know. And I was like, the danger of that. And he immediately was like, where are you getting your information from? And so he was talking to him about the importance of history and the importance of knowing all of these things. And that opened the topic with my son and I of how easily things can get forgotten. Because if you're just looking to AI for all of your things and you're not looking at legit history and you're not looking at all of these things, and then we got into, okay, you can see a video of something and used to, you would believe what you saw because you saw it, and anymore you can see things that aren't true. And I think it also has the reverse effect of, well, if I can see things in a video that have been proven to be AI, maybe other things were made to be a bigger thing than they were. And I think it just really warps their understanding and their way of thinking and their way of processing. It's really scary. Because you can, you can manipulate history, you can manipulate facts, and then if they don't do further research, they take that as gospel truth, right? And that, that shapes their view, their thinking. And so I think, like Jeff said, it's a great jumping off point. Like, Hey, I, I want to learn about different kinds of fish in the Pacific Ocean. Okay, give me some to write about and then research those, but don't have that be your driving information because it's so incredibly dangerous when you can be given information about things that are so incredibly, profoundly important that happened in our world, that are being minimized by manipulation of information.

Andrew Pudewa: So I would point to possibly. I would say greater, but a different category of danger. And that is self-deception. So if you ask AI to give you information and it gives you really nicely polished up information and you say, well, I can't use that, but I can tweak it around. In fact I can even manipulate it and get all my dress up and openers and, and, um, I can just kind of fix this up so that it does what the teacher's rubric says, and then I put my name on it and turn it in. I have just deluded myself into thinking that's what I thought. So

that level of self-deception, it's so much more present as a temptation and we can all easily fall into that.

So I think there's a division actually happening in schools right now. And there's a certain contingent of we don't really need to bother to teach kids how to do math or grammar since that's so awful and tedious or even how to write. We just need to teach them how to use the tool. And there's a whole category of teachers that think that way. And then there's other schools, they're getting rid of the Chromebooks, they're getting rid of the internet to the degree that it's going to preclude any of that actual collecting up, organizing, thinking, presenting facts, and making the judgements you need to.

I do like to use the analogy of calculators, because this makes sense to pretty much everybody. You got two people, one person knows their math facts, can do some mental math, can translate fractions into decimals approximately, could probably figure out something like 22 times 14 if they really had to in their head. Okay, so you got that level. That's where I think most people are. I'm not talking about remembering the quadratic formula, right? I'm just talking about basic ability to think mathematically, and then you've got a person who can't do that. They never learned their multiplication tables. They were taught how to use a calculator to solve all the problems in class. And this is happening younger and younger now you see calculators in fourth and fifth grade classrooms.

Okay, so you got those two people. Now you give them both a calculator. Who's going to use the calculator better? The one who can think mathematically, who's the one who's going to take an answer and not be able to think about it, not even know if they pushed the wrong button, and are a factor of 10 off in there.

I think we see the same thing in language, although it's a little bit subtler. So I would be in favor of following the research, right? Everybody wants to, well, all the research shows writing on paper uses more of your brain than typing. Writing without AI uses more of your brain than AI. We aren't training kids to use a tool until they have the basic knowledge needed to know whether they're even using that tool well or not. And so that's why I would encourage all of you teachers out there who are kind of going back to, "okay, let's just write on paper now." That might be threatening if you've got kids who haven't done that for ever or a few years or what, whatever. But I don't think anyone would say, yes, I'll be perfectly happy if my kid hits adulthood and can't write a paragraph on his own. I don't know anybody who would think that way. And yet that seems to be the way so many schools have moved. So don't be afraid of stepping back from the technology, creating basic skills, and then giving the kids the technology. It won't atrophy so much. It won't replace so much the skills that they have. The cognitive thinking,

So self-deception, and then knowing what you're doing with the technology. A friend of mine said that we saw three things happen. The Industrial Revolution kind of separating people into the haves and the have nots, and we had the information revolution that separated people into kind of the maths and the math nots. People who understood math could create all this

stuff and everybody else just using it. Now we're separating into the thinks and the think knots, and I want all my students to be in the, I know how to think category.

Julie Walker: Which I love that all those years ago, Andrew, we added “think” to our tagline. Because that is what we're teaching. We are teaching thinking. I do want to say that so many of you have submitted some awesome questions. We are not going to get to them all but on this panel. But every week Andrew and I do a podcast together and every 10th episode of that podcast, we do something called Ask Andrew Anything. And some of these questions I'm going to collect. Pitch them to Andrew and see how he does with them, but also we are committed to making sure all of your questions are answered. And we have an incredible team of customer service agents. Some of them are Educational Consultants, some of them work with homeschoolers. We are committed to getting all of your question answered. We are not a love ‘em and leave company. We care about your successful journey in teaching, writing, and thinking. And on that, I would like to just go down the line and ask you in one minute, give your best advice to these teachers out here.

Jennifer Mauser: I would say, I don't want to steal Jeff's trust the system, but go through everything on schedule. Don't feel like you're going to get bogged, don't bogged down in Unit one and Unit two. Move on. Don't expect perfection that first time through, even the second time through because it's a process. So move through the process and do it over multiple years.

Jeff Nease: My biggest advice, and this isn't just for writing teachers. Be patient with students. Be the teacher that you wanted when you were in school. And if we are patient with students, seeing them all as individuals, it helps us not see them as, oh, this is just my ninth grade class. But these are individuals that have all different backgrounds, all different learning styles. So being patient with students, getting connected with them on a personal level and just being patient and being the teacher you would like that you wish that you had in high school. Maybe you did have. That would be my advice.

Andrew Pudewa: A little bit different and perhaps unexpected. Eat well. Don't eat a bunch of processed foods and refined sugars. It just destabilizes you. Sleep as well as you can. Exercise. Because if you are in good condition, you'll be a better teacher. You'll be happier, you'll be more patient. And if you are zapped out, sleep deprived and low energy, you just can't do that as well, even though you kind of know you should.

And then I guess my best advice is always have a good joke kind of up your sleeve because it brings people in. Humor is a bonding, binding, trust building experience. When you can laugh together, you can learn together more easily. So those would be my non-conventional.

Julie Walker: Okay, good. And Jessica.

Jessica Tinney: So mine actually came from your article on the four deadly errors. Remembering with the smaller kids that writing, spelling, and neat handwriting are all different skills. And I walked that with my own children. I had one who struggled with

auditory processing and was also required to do cursive at the same time. And so when I read Andrew's article on that, just understanding those are very different skills. And so their spelling may not be perfect, or their handwriting may not be perfect, but hone in on the skill that you're wanting. If, if you're working on handwriting, work on handwriting. If you're working on spelling, work on spelling. If you're working on writing, those other things, maybe have a little bit of a backseat. Make the main thing, the main thing,

Andrew Pudewa: And then they integrate. As the kids get older.

Jessica Tinny: Once they, once they are able to do that, absolutely.

Julie Walker: Okay. Well thank you panelists for your great time and attention, and most importantly, your advice.

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.