

Podcast 530: Ask Andrew Anything

Episode Transcript

Andrew Pudewa: The editor's job is to fix everything up, but not necessarily try to make it good, just make it legal. Don't try to improve the quality of the thinking per se.

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 Andrew for Episode 500, we did this really cool podcast recording in the studio with the cameras and it was an Ask Andrew anything. And ever since then, we've been doing them in the studio with the cameras, but this one we're not. This is episode 530 and we are recording this in our podcast room because of schedules—my schedule, your schedule, we just couldn't schedule a

Andrew Pudewa: So this is a blah ask

Julie Walker: No, this is not a blah because I have some really exciting news at the end, so I want to save a few minutes at the end to share.

Andrew Pudewa: Can't you just say the exciting news right now?

Julie Walker: I'm going to tell you, dear listener, about what we have planned for episode 550. So it's 20 episodes from now, but that date to record 550 is coming up in July, and I'm going to tell you what we're going to do, so perhaps you can be a part of it if you so choose.

But I have several questions that our customer service and editing teams have collected through phone calls, through Facebook, and also we get some that come in through our podcast. So I have a few to share with you today.

If the same person serves as the editor and the grader, how do the roles differ?

Andrew Pudewa: Well, the editor's job is to fix everything up: spelling, punctuation, complete sentences, basic words that make sense, but not necessarily try to make it good, just make it legal. And that's the instruction that I give. And I like to suggest a minimalist approach. So do what you have to do to make it legal, but don't try to improve the quality of the thinking per se.

Julie Walker: Right. Okay.

Andrew Pudewa: And you edit that, you give it back to the kid, and then the child copies it over. Now, not always do children catch every single edit on the paper, and they may not see

the spelling fix that you put in there. They may not see the punctuation mark you added. So then they give it back to you. Okay, so now you have to make a decision. Do we go through another round of this?

Julie Walker: As editor.

Andrew Pudewa: As editor, fix up the things that were missed, again, and have them copy it over again, hopefully a last time. And there's value to that because they will then realize if I'm not careful, I have to do this again.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: So therefore, if I don't want to have to recopy the whole thing, I'd better be careful. It can also get to be too burdensome. So a little bit of understanding for things that didn't get copied correctly, and then you fix them up and you just try to squeeze in the thing that needed to be there or something. And so there's an argument to be made for both of those.

Now grading is kind of a different category of activity. Grading, you would assume, is where you're going to either accept this thing and it passes—if you want to use that term— or it doesn't pass. And there's reasons for that. In my system, the way I try to operate with students, it's only two grades. You could get A or I, A standing for accomplished or accepted. I standing for incomplete. So if you're missing a dress-up technique, it's not finished. Therefore it's incomplete. Therefore, you now have to figure out how you put this dress-up in. Now, a lot of times the kid is like, well, I don't know. Okay, then. Ask me a question such as, could you help me fit in my who-which clause into this paragraph or whatever.

Julie Walker: Sure.

Andrew Pudewa: And I kind of try to force the kids to ask the question rather than just make a statement. I don't know how to do it. Right? So it changes the context there. If you're in a school or if you are at home, but you are feeling the need to assign grades. And you don't like the A/I approach the accomplished or accepted, a hundred percent or incomplete approach,

Julie Walker: Maybe you're required to use a different system.

Andrew Pudewa: Then you can say, well, okay, there were eight things on the style checklist for each of the three paragraphs. So there's 24 things you had to do, plus a few other things. Maybe the topic-clincher rule, maybe the title rule, and you can add up all those things and assign points. And then you could say, okay, you missed this thing and that thing. Therefore, your corresponding point score is X percent or whatever. You could do that. I don't like that approach because I don't think that really accomplishes what we want to accomplish, which is a student sticking with the thing until it is indeed a hundred percent.

Julie Walker: We provide that option on our checklist generator. Do you want points or do you not?

Andrew Pudewa: Do you want no points? I'm assuming if the editor is the grader, then it's probably the mom and it's a homeschool situation. And I think you could do the A or the I, in which case they just get an A on every paper that they finish.

Julie Walker: That they finish. Because it might have to be kicked back. Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: but, but at what point do you really even need to give grades to kids? And I do always like to caution people and say, as soon as you set up a grading system, you've kind of changed the expectation from everything accomplished the way it should be, to what percentage of stuff can I get away with not worrying about?

Julie Walker: Great. I hope that helps. This was from Facebook, but I don't know, I don't know who asked it, but here we go. Here's the content, hands off content question. So it's a two part question.

Can you explain what you mean by hands off content and what do you do if the content is incorrect?

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, so Webster's edict, as I talk about it in the TWSS course, is hands on structure and style, hands off content. In other words, if you follow the model, follow the checklist, do everything you're supposed to do, I really don't care what you write. And I think that's easier to deal with when you're in Unit 3: Summarizing [Narrative] Stories, Unit 5: Writing from Pictures, Unit 7: Inventive writing. When you're in Units 4, 6, 8, now you're dealing with facts. So now you do have the problem of what do you do if someone writes something that is either misunderstood or clearly unsubstantiated by any kind of reading or research or accurate knowledge?

So I would treat that as just an editing problem. So if someone made a statement that you know is not correct factually, I would simply change that to make it factually correct. If it couldn't be, I would just strike the whole thing and figure out, okay, what else could we put in here? I think that is an indicator of maybe working with source materials that might be a little too high in terms of reading level or complexity, or just quantity of content. I've seen 10-year-old boys get a big, thick, huge book on World War II that's essentially written way above their reading level. But they really like all the pictures, and they really like learning obscure things about Sherman tanks or something, right? And so just helping them navigate the source materials that they find is going to help reduce the problem of factual errors. But increasingly we find that kids are getting information from a myriad of places, not all of which is necessarily correct.

I personally have had on many occasions the experience of using an AI search engine to get information and then reading it and thinking, really, that just doesn't seem like that could be correct. And then another query or two discovering, yeah, it gave me wrong information. Kids don't have the capacity to do that, which is another reason I think that no children should be using AI whatsoever when they are in the process of collecting up information to write papers and do research and write essays and stuff like that, they just don't have the life experience to

have the sense of “that doesn't really sound right.” At the moment, we all know AI is not reliable. In fact, one study I was reading this article yesterday, over half the time, it will give incorrect information in certain categories of questions. So what do you do? We would all do really well to have an encyclopedia, a nice hardcover, multi-volume World Book Encyclopedia or Britannica, and say, you can trust this. You may or may not be able to trust it, but at least you have the belief that you can trust it.

Julie Walker: Okay, next question is. *What worksheets can I use to help students identify wrong uses of dress up sentence openers, et cetera? I'm looking for fix the sentence type exercise.*

Andrew Pudewa: I think we have a product called *Fix-It*.

Julie Walker: It is true.

Andrew Pudewa: It doesn't necessarily do what this person is wanting and so in my talk, but, but what about grammar? And also really in the four Deadly Errors talk, those would be good ones to link to. I do talk about, and I do this myself, I've got my little pile of student papers and I see a goofy thing.

I fix it on their paper, but I copy that sentence on a separate piece of paper. Next one. Okay. Fix it here. Copy it there, fix it here, copy it there. And then I have kind of a list of examples of goofy things that students have tried to do. And then I can throw one up on the board and have a micro lesson, a little mini grammar lesson on that thing. I don't know it would be reasonable to produce a whole workbook of exercises for this purpose because you really want to be teaching right at the point of need, which is what's the goofy thing they did just now, and how do we refine that a little bit. And understand too that you're not going to fix every goofy thing, especially if you're dealing with kids who are at a naturally awkward stage of life. But they will grow out of it. And if we keep working on high quality input, good literature, poetry, good quality of language coming into their eyes and ears, that's going to assist them in avoiding the things that are less sensible in terms of language use later on.

Julie Walker: Yep. I think about most of our Writing Across the Curriculum books, well, all of them. Whenever we introduce a new stylistic technique, there are practice exercises to help reinforce that, but actually just doing the writing itself—you talk about this all the time—we require all the dress ups that we have taught in every paragraph for this very purpose. So I don't know that we need worksheets beyond what we're already providing. Just keep writing.

Andrew Pudewa: She or he, whoever said this, probably would best create the thing you're imagining and a little bit will go a long way. So if you have the time, give it a shot.

Julie Walker: Okay. I've got an interesting question because we talked about this a few podcasts ago about the discontinuing the penny. The day after we launched that podcast, Andrew, where we talked about the persuasive essay and how we did this in SSS-2B, and we talked about the penny, the next day the US government stopped minting the penny. And so

the question is: *Now that the US is no longer producing the penny, what is the best way to approach the penny persuasive essay in SSS-2B? Can you offer other suggestions for subjects?*

Andrew Pudewa: I would guess the next issue to come up is just cash. I mean it, it's the same idea. And there are many people who believe that an entirely cashless society would be possible, if not preferable, whereas other people, for various reasons, believe that cash still has a place in our hyper-modern, hyper-computerized economy. That would be one way to go. What else could you do? The postage stamp. I'm not sure what some alternatives would be, but it does seem rather archaic.

Julie Walker: Yes. If you invested in forever stamps that first came out,

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, if you bought a million dollars of them.

Julie Walker: You'd be ahead of the game perhaps.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and that's what the postal service was playing—Forever stamp. I think you'd have to look at your group of kids and say, what things in this modern world are they aware of that could be debated and then just try it out. I think you could still do the exercise with a penny, even though we have eliminated the penny, because pretty soon the nickel will be worth much less than it costs to produce; maybe already is. So now should we eliminate the nickel? You could do the same thing with it.

Julie Walker: Yep. I love it. Okay. That was great. Alright, I think I'm going to have one more question and then share our super exciting announcements and whatever questions that were asked will be answered by our customer service team. So have no fear. Okay, here it is. It's an AI question, Andrew, if universities are starting to no longer require a personal essay because of AI, how do you think they may approach selecting candidates?

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know enough about university admissions and how they're going to decide. I do think that everyone should think very carefully about whether attending a university is the best option because the quality of the experience has just been in free fall and the requirements for jobs are very different. And we had Hannah Maruyama from Degree Free on the podcast. Basically, her claim is that there are lots of very good paying jobs that you can get the training, do the job and not burden yourself with four years of lost time, probably some or a load of student debt and a degree that may or may not be connected with what you want to do in life. So I don't know enough about university admissions in general. I do know that the short list of schools that I would support my children or grandchildren attending is a pretty short list, quite honestly. And they do things differently and most of them are small schools. And I think having a relationship with the admissions—we're interested in this school, what is our best path? And maybe it includes a personal essay or not. I don't know that AI can write a very good personal essay. Because when you think about the personal essay, it's supposed to be insight into your life, right? Some experience you've had, or frustrations or thoughts or goals or dreams. That's all very personal. If anything, AI would

fail to do that more miserably than it would fail to write an essay on *The Scarlet Letter*. Right? Because everybody, there's a million essays on *The Scarlet Letter*, and it can just churn out all those pieces. But your life, that's different. So the personal essay may not die completely. It may be that people use AI to improve the technical side of the style and grammar, so I don't really know.

Julie Walker: It will be interesting to see how this evolves over the next year or so. I wonder if personal essays have to be written on a blue book and notarized that it was done.

Andrew Pudewa: That might be a possibility. But college admissions are just entirely weird right and some huge percentage of people getting into these big schools—they can't do basic math. They don't read at a high school level. Some of them have never read a book. I was just listening to a high school teacher who said, I have a student who screamed, “How can you make me do this? I've never read a book in my life.” And here they are in a college class. So, the whole world is changing very radically. And I just think there are so many possible options that could be really better than just saying, okay, we're going to go to this state university right here, because that's what my parents and grandparents did.

Julie Walker: OK, The big announcement,

Andrew Pudewa: All right, what's up?

Julie Walker: So episode 550 is going to be kids' questions only.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh fun!

Julie Walker: Yeah, I knew you. I knew you would

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I like that.

Julie Walker: So we are going to do—and I'm announcing this today because we need kids' questions. We need two types of kid questions. We need kid questions that come from our virtual audience, our listeners, so email in, have your students email podcast@IEW.com, or have them dictate to you so you could send it. We'd like their first name and their age. And I will read the questions to you, Andrew, in the studio in front of a live studio audience. And that's the second type of questions we need. We need some students here in the audience, preferably with their parents, and we will be recording this on July 2nd, it'll be summer. So there'll be time to, if you're out of town and you want an excuse to come visit Mr. Pudewa, come on down. Oklahoma is a nice, hot place to be in July.

Andrew Pudewa: It is hot. We have a lot of good and interesting things in Tulsa.

Julie Walker: We do. We're recording that on July 2nd. We've actually opened up registration for that to attend either virtually or live. And just to be very clear, we only want questions on episode 550 from students, from kids.

Andrew Pudewa: It will be fun.

Julie Walker: I think so too. Well, thank you, Andrew.

Andrew Pudewa: Thank you, Julie.

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.