

Announcing the IEW Writing Companion

Transcript of Episode 542

Andrew Pudewa: We hope we've created a tool that, unlike a technology that will atrophy the skill which it replaces, this will be a tool that helps build the skills that we want them to have

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, it's becoming more and more of a digital world, is it not?

Andrew Pudewa: I don't think anyone can deny that claim.

Julie Walker: This is true. We talk about our own kids being digital natives. Actually, I don't know that all of my boys are digital natives.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, I don't know what defines that, but certainly our kids had a different world when it came to computers and homework and schoolwork and writing and relationships and all that compared to their children, at least generationally.

Julie Walker: Yeah, well, yes, and certainly our grandchildren grew up in this world of smartphones and computers and email and websites, and now we have this added challenge of AI, and we've had lots of conversations about AI. That's not what we're talking about today, though.

Andrew Pudewa: I'm a little burned out on it for the moment. I'll go back to my normal AI tomorrow.

Julie Walker: Well, one of the things that we try to do here at IEW, of course, is teach kids to think, and thinking happens as an extension of learning to write, and I love that. The challenge that we have, though, is so many of our digital tools that we use to write with infuse suggestions.

Andrew Pudewa: I just turn them all off. I don't want any suggestions.

Julie Walker: Don't tell me what to think.

Andrew Pudewa: I want to make my own mistakes.

Julie Walker: Exactly. Well, and how do we help parents navigate this world? There are some curriculum companies, I won't even name them, that actually are promoting the fact that

they're helping students write using AI, which is a problem. But we are not doing that, and in fact, we're trying to find ways to eliminate that, believe it or not, digitally.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and that's why we sell paper.

Julie Walker: We do sell paper. We sell a lot of paper. We sell miles and miles and miles of paper. Now we print on rolls of paper, miles of... But now we have this digital writing tools suite that IEW has. We have three different opportunities. One we've talked about before on our podcast, IEW Gradebook, which is a fabulous tool to help teachers grade all these papers.

This is especially helpful for school teachers who, especially I think of high school teachers who

Andrew Pudewa: A lot of papers

Julie Walker: have five sections of 30 kids each, and they're assigning... if you're using IEW, you're assigning multiple assignments a semester, several a quarter, maybe even one or two a week. How do you get through all those papers?

Well, IEW Gradebook. Link in the show notes to some of the podcast recordings that we've done for that.

Andrew Pudewa: We have good explanations of that available.

Julie Walker: Yeah, it's a, it's a great, it's a great resource for teachers. And then not too long ago, we launched IEW's Writing Toolbox, which is an app, a digital app that's good on, you know, your iPhone, iPad, Android, where we've expanded it a little bit to now have this built-in thesaurus.

I want to take just a minute to talk about how cool that is. We are not using a thesaurus from the website. We have built our own thesaurus. And so if you put a word in there that we haven't come across yet, we will have someone come up with a definition, not a definition, but synonyms for that word, and put it in so that we're controlling the language.

And part of that, Andrew, is because there's so many racy, sketchy things out there where a word can be misused in writing. We wouldn't use the word racy in academic writing to refer to some type of sexual overtone. We would say racy—. I don't even know what it would be. But we've vetted all these words, which is really cool, which I really like that. And then we have a third one.

Andrew Pudewa: And that's what you want to talk about. And I'll bet you even brought a guest here to help us understand it all.

Julie Walker: It took me a minute to get to that point, so thank you for accelerating that. So we have with us today in our podcast the person who helped work with our developers, actually the project manager and informer of all that we're doing for the new IEW app called IEW Writing Companion. So welcome, Heidi, to our podcast.

Heidi Thomas: Thank you. It's nice to be here. So, it's such a beautiful setting to be part of.

Andrew Pudewa: They've been working on it.

Julie Walker: You actually, Heidi, are our very first guest. She's not really a guest because she's in the IEW family for many years.

Andrew Pudewa: Guest to the podcast in this new higher tech format

Julie Walker: with cameras on

Andrew Pudewa: With cameras on

Heidi Thomas: Thank you all. It's a privilege to be here. So exciting.

Julie Walker: So tell us what problem we're trying to solve here with this Writing Companion and who it's for.

Heidi Thomas: Well, we have two problems that IEW writing parents, or writing teachers and teaching parents face. When we're accepting these assignments from our students, one problem we can have that we have to work with is that students do not always mark their papers. They do the work, but as Andrew tells us over and over, "do what you check and check what you do." They might include it, but they forget to underline it, or they forget to number it, or they forget to bold it or highlight it. So with my own children, I would sit beside them and say, "What does it say? Show me that you did it. Oh, underline it," and I sit there and wait. That even works for my Thursday kids who come to my home, and I can sit there and print out their papers and say, "Mark it before you give it to me."

But there comes a point where we're trying to teach independence, where we're trying to train our students to be responsible for what they do, particularly older students who are writing. And so we wanted to create something that would force them to not even be able to get to the print or share option until they've marked. So that's one thing that we had thought about.

But another thing, and probably something that's even more concerning, is the fact that you guys already mentioned, programs, Microsoft Word, Google Docs, they include built-in suggestive wording and things that correct our grammar and style. You put in an -ly adverb and it tells you, "No, that doesn't belong there. It should be an adjective there." And it changes the word itself. It changes the way it's spelled. And so we want our students to learn to edit their own work, to come up with those things. And so it was like, can we have an application that would let us have an online word processor with no AI features? Not just AI features, no suggestive text features, no Grammarly features.

Andrew Pudewa: So a dumb app is what we basically are trying to have.

Heidi Thomas: We want the flip phone, right, of an online word processor. Just let me type, Let me just type. Let me be able to say center without having to click three buttons. Or once we get particularly in upper level B and level C, where typing that final draft has become a

necessary product. We always encourage writing the key word outlines. We encourage writing the rough drafts. But when we get to upper level B and C, keyboarding skills are important. But we don't want to spend all that time learning to format something. Can't we just start out in Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced?

Julie Walker: And the app does that for us

Heidi Thomas: It does that. That's the default. So the IEW Writing Companion is an online word processor that supports IEW students as they complete a particular IEW writing curricula.

Andrew Pudewa: So it doesn't fill in what you should write.

Heidi Thomas: Not at all

Andrew Pudewa: But it does do something other than just be dumb.

Heidi Thomas: It does. It does. We have a Writing Companion for the majority of our student books. So if your student is going to use *Wonders of Science* writing lessons this fall, you can purchase Wonders of Science Writing Companion. And this is a digital product that supports the *Wonders of Science* student book, I should say.

But when I open the online app, I choose the checklist that I'm working on, and digitally on my screen, the checklist appears on the left side for the assignment I'm supposed to do. And then a blank screen, two-thirds of my screen is blank, and that's where I type. I start by looking at the checklist. It says name in upper left-hand corner, so I type my name. I have to type it though. I'm responsible for typing it, for putting a check mark in the checkbox. So it's just a digital checklist, the exact same checklist that's in the book.

Julie Walker: So once the student has completed their assignment and now they're ready to go through that checklist, they're ready to have their companion be the mom that looks over their shoulder that says, "Did you do it? Did you do it?" Describe how that process works.

Heidi Thomas: So okay, you are talking about the guided review. Can I back up just a second? As I'm typing, the checklist is, is there, the digital checklist. There are built-in reminders and word lists. When I look at... it's my Portable Walls digitally, So when I see that I'm to do an -ly adverb, I can click a question mark next to my checklist and say, "Show -ly adverb list." It's just the same word list that Andrew hands out on the video or that we have printed in the book.

But I can digitally see it there because our students are used to having everything at their fingertips digitally and not always opening a book to find something. Same exact information though. Nothing's different about it. It's not going to tell you what word to put in. It's just that list. Okay, so there's built-in reminders. There's word lists. We have a thesaurus built in. The same thesaurus that we have on our app is built into the Writing Companion. But when I'm done writing and I say done, I am sent to a thing that's called a guided review.

Julie Walker: This is my favorite part of this app. This is my, which is why I jumped there. So sorry, Heidi, for jumping ahead, but the guided review is my favorite part of this app.

Heidi Thomas: The guided review, when I explained to the developers what I was imagining, I said before I would accept a paper from my own boys who I homeschooled, before I accept a paper from a student who I know didn't mark everything, I will say to them: "Show me your checklist. Let's just run through it,"

Teaching them to read a rubric that they need to do in college, teaching them to read a checklist. "Oh, first thing, here's your name. Show it to me." And so what the app does is you double-click on it, and then it checks it, and then you go, "Oh, date in upper left-hand corner. Show it to me. Double-click it." Title. If you don't have the title, you type it, and then you can double-click it. Proving you followed the title rule: Do I have some of those words in my final sentence? Click it. Move on. So it just takes you through that. Once you complete the guided review, it won't tell you you did it wrong, so if you wrote the word *ugly* as your -ly adverb, it's going to let you do it.

It's just going to make sure that you marked everything, that you included everything on the checklist. Once you have proven that you've completed everything with a click of a button, then you have the ability to either print or save as a Word document or in your Google Drive or as a PDF, you know, those number of things.

Julie Walker: I want to go back to the *ugly* thing that Heidi just mentioned because I think this is really important. I love this idea of "show me your checklist" because we have so many students, so many parents and teachers who are in a classroom setting who say, "My kids are not checking in with their editor. They don't have an editor." So in some ways, this acts as the mom, the older sibling, the grandparent that says, "Show me your checklist and do it." But it does not let the students know that *ugly* isn't an -ly adverb. But IEW Gradebook does. So there is a difference, and I just wanted to mention this in terms of we've got three digital products. The one for teachers will let the teachers know this student who underlined *ugly*; that is an incorrect -ly adverb. Here's a point of instruction, teaching at the point of need kind of opportunity. We don't want to do their thinking for them, I guess, is what we're saying.

Andrew Pudewa: I hope not.

Heidi Thomas: That's true. IEW Writing Companion is designed for students who are typing final drafts. So it's not designed for the younger students who are still handwriting a final draft. It's designed for the student who is expected to type and submit a final draft. It's going to have a digital checklist there so that you can see it, and you can click in and see word lists.

You can see that the number four opener begins... You'll be reminded of the rule, that kind of thing, if you say, "Show me more." That's the help that it's limited to. IEW Gradebook is designed for teachers. Primarily, we designed it for teachers who grade multiple student papers each week. That, on the other hand, does give information, suggested auto thing of saying, "Look at this -ly adverb again. We suggest you don't give points." Of course, you

always can, but would say because it's an adjective or because it's, you know, butterfly, a noun.

Andrew Pudewa: Do any of these, do either of these have the ability to read a student's handwriting?

Julie Walker: Not yet

Heidi Thomas: Neither, neither one is doing reading

Andrew Pudewa: just make that clear so everyone knows

Julie Walker: It's very good.

Andrew Pudewa: It's not a case where they can handwrite it, scan it, and boom, it populates. They actually have to type it. Someone has to type it

Heidi Thomas: Right. IEW Writing Companion is designed--it's just an online word processor. When you look at it, it looks very similar to Microsoft Word, simplified, Google Docs, any place where you're just typing on a white blank page. That's what it is. So Writing Companion is designed for the student who's expected to type a final draft. IEW Gradebook is designed for the teacher who is grading papers that are typed. In Gradebook, we do have a student portal section where you can submit key word outlines handwritten and rough drafts handwritten. But the actual part where we're, where we're looking at and assessing dress-ups and openers and all of that, that's based on a typed, digital.

Andrew Pudewa: So they can attach, so to speak, their outline and rough draft to the typed version.

Julie Walker: This is Gradebook.

Andrew Pudewa: and submit that all. So the teacher can see it all the way they would if it were all on paper getting turned in in a classroom.

Heidi Thomas: Absolutely. Absolutely. Yep. Yeah. All of my students that I have, one of the, one of the strengths of the product development team is that most of us, I believe all of us, are teaching, um, in some form or another. So, um, just as you continue to teach your own students, Andrew, it keeps us sharp and familiar with what students really do do in the real world. It's not the theoretical thing.

Andrew Pudewa: The real world

Julie Walker: The real world.

Heidi Thomas: It's just not the- just theoretical. Those of us who are writing products are working with students, and so we do know what they're doing and not doing. And all of my

students that come to my home on Thursdays, we went through *Frontiers in Writing* this year, and they submitted handwritten key word outlines every week.

We would sometimes start them together on Thursdays. Other times, we would talk about them, then they would do them themselves. But they always submitted them. I always looked at them. I always commented on them. But those were all handwritten.

Julie Walker: So this is a relatively new app. It's just come out. So I want to share a testimonial. I love this. This is from Amy Bell, who is an instructor.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I know Amy.

Julie Walker: Uh, do you know Amy? "I love the Writing Companion. I can totally see myself requiring it for careless students and those who struggle with executive function."

Wow. "I also appreciate all the little tips. Writing Companion will also come in handy for comma rules. I'm super excited about that. IEW Writing Companion will help students self-check and keep them accountable. As I'm writing this, I realize that IEW Writing Companion will help my careful students too, especially in regards to commas." Which, you know, commas.

Andrew Pudewa: And as the checklist gets longer and more complicated, it's hard to find all that stuff and be sure you... I mean, it's very good for the kids to have to be responsible for all that. But we just, we hope we've created a tool that, unlike a technology that will atrophy the skill which it replaces, this will be a tool that helps build the skills that we want them to have.

Julie Walker: Exactly. And of course, I wanted to let all of our listeners know where you can find this and how you can actually try it out. And this year, we have spent quite a bit of time aggregating our try pages. So if you go to IEW.com/try, you will see about a dozen different opportunities to try our materials completely free, and Writing Companion is now on that page.

So you can just click on that, and there will be instructions for how you can try this. It's a limited trial, and the idea is just get right in. Whatever book you have, whether it's *Structure and Style for Students: Year 1, Level A*, or whether it's *Wonders of Science* that Heidi mentions, or even *Frontiers in Writing*.

If these checklists are something that we could adapt, not adapt, but put into Writing Companion, and Heidi has spent a lot of time doing that work with our app developers, you can try it completely free for a limited time. And then, and when I say a limited time, if you, you could even decide, "I'm not sure which curriculum to buy this year. Let me see what Writing Companion has as far as this particular checklist," 'cause it... You could see a few of those checklists right at the beginning. So it's a great opportunity to try it for free with no obligation, and then eventually, if you decide to buy it, we've made it very affordable. It's \$10 per student per year.

Andrew Pudewa: Per year?

Julie Walker: Yes, and so you've got a year to get through that book, 365 days to get through that book so that, and then after that it expires. And so it's essentially a license for one year to be able use it.

Andrew Pudewa: to go with a specific product

Julie Walker: Correct. It also helps to answer a question we sometimes get: Can I use *Structure and Style for Students* and a Writing Across the Curriculum resource?

It's like, "Well, you can, but you shouldn't." It's intended to be used year after year. Use this one year, and use this another year. So Writing Companion is \$10 per student per year. If you feel like you need more than one book, then you're providing too much to your students.

Andrew Pudewa: Right.

Julie Walker: Right. So if you have...

Andrew Pudewa: Try it?

Julie Walker: What's that?

Andrew Pudewa: Should I try it?

Julie Walker: You should try it, Andrew. Absolutely. And if you have multiple students, it's the same. It's \$10 per student per year per book. So if you have a student in *Frontiers in Writing* or *Wonders of Science*, or if they're both in *Frontiers in Writing*, then they both need their own subscription because it tracks their assignments.

Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: All right

Julie Walker: Anything else we forgot to mention, Heidi?

Heidi Thomas: No, I think you've, you've covered it. It's a beautiful product. It's affordable, and students can try it before anyone has to buy it.

Julie Walker: Yep.

Andrew Pudewa: It's the way we like it.

Julie Walker: That's the way we like it. Well, thank you, Heidi. Thanks

Heidi Thomas: 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 or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here

you will find our show notes and relevant links. One more thing: would you please rate and review our podcast? This helps other smart listeners like you find us. Thank you.