

(IEW Writing Tools) Build Confidence with IEW Checklist Generator

Transcript of Episode 552

Andrew Pudewa: It gives me, in this very broad age-aptitude range, the ability now to track it and to customize it and as much as possible to have customized checklists for subgroups within my group

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, this is part two of our series on writing tools. This one is particular- particularly suited for teachers. It is our Checklist Generator. So I would love for you to tell the story of how this tool came about.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, in the early days being an Apple user, I was using Apple Works. I don't know if you remember this, but it was a word processing kind of layout combo program, and I spent so much time creating the checklist. Actually, if you remember the old Student Intensive Continuation Course, we did this in 2003, and I just spent so much time creating these checklists, trying to get everything lined up and all that. And I just thought if, if there was just some way I could go in and pick what I wanted and it would just, boom, lay it out, wouldn't that be nice?

Julie Walker: It'd be amazing

Andrew Pudewa: And I didn't have the technical skill to create something like that, but I always had it in the back of my mind. I always had a few things that I thought would be really awesome. One would be just a way you could click the things you wanted and make a beautiful checklist, and then kind of a database of comments that you could pick from and then give to students when you're giving them feedback on their papers, that you wouldn't have to write out every single time the whole explanation of why this should have a comma or whatever.

Julie Walker: That's called foreshadowing. We'll be talking about that in our third installment of writing tools.

Andrew Pudewa: So anyway, I had this idea and, and then I, I would talk to teachers about customizing the checklist for different kids in their group because even if all your kids are born on the exact same day, age doesn't translate to aptitude or facility or ability or interest level.

And so what we want to do is help people operate in that proximal level of challenge where it's the EZ +1. So here's your style checklist. Here's the three things that are easy and one more. Practice this until it's easy, then you've got four things that are easy, then you add one more. But when you create a course, you kinda have to figure out, well, what's a speed that you can add to this checklist that is going to be appropriate for most everybody?

But you can't hit everybody because there's always some kids for whom it is not easy, and you don't want to add another thing. And you've got some kids who they've done it before, or they just understand it quickly, and you'd like to give them the next thing to keep them challenged, but you can't give that to everybody. And so I used to say, you can make your own checklists for independent, for different kids. You could go ahead and handwrite in and cross off, but yeah, people like it to be nice

Julie Walker: Nice, yes. Pretty and yeah

Andrew Pudewa: I don't know when, when did we get the Checklist Generator idea going?

Julie Walker: So of course, I'm holding the *Seminar Workbook* for the third edition. And I think one of the things that was made very clear in the third edition, it was made mostly clear in the second edition, the instruction in this seminar workbook and the checklists are for teachers. They're not for students

Andrew Pudewa: Yes, and it is really important that we make it super clear. The teacher accreditation program that we have is absolutely not the way a teacher should introduce this to kids. We dump the whole load. Okay, all the dress-ups, first paragraph. All the dress-ups and openers, every paragraph for a few.

All that, plus the decoration, plus the triple, plus an advanced, plus-- And, and even some of the feedback we give to the teachers is very specific toward an advanced adult writer, not representative of what a teacher would do for a seventh-grade student. So I think that's important that we work on communicating.

But my question was, when did we get the Checklist Generator? I don't remember

Julie Walker: I do. I do. So when we did the second edition of the *Teaching Writing Structure and Style*, we introduced this idea of a premium membership, and a lot of companies were starting to do this, and we said, "Oh, this is really good. What would be a really awesome thing to include in our Premium membership?" Which is an annual subscription, and that's when we hired a developer to create and make your dreams come true.

Andrew Pudewa: I used that continuously as we were recording all of the SSS videos. 'Cause I would sit down, I'd go through all the source texts, some of them I wrote myself, some of them I edited, some of them I wrote and then got edited, but I was very involved, and then I made the checklist based on what had been done by the students, and was this going to be in the ideal proximal level of challenge? And so I used that thing continuously through that whole process.

Julie Walker: And it hasn't changed much. Actually, I should say this, what we do with the Checklist Generator is all of the Writing Across the Curriculum resources as possible, some of them are just not possible to include in the Checklist Generator, but certainly all of the *Structure and Style for Students* lessons, those are preloaded into the Checklist Generator so that a teacher could pull up the Structure and Style for Students year three, week one, and say, well, there's no checklist for week one.

Andrew Pudewa: week three,

Julie Walker: Week three. Okay, I've got some really advanced students. I would think so. This is third year. I'm going to need to make it a little more robust, or I have some brand new students, because we are aware that we've got brand new students that start in whatever course the teachers are teaching, especially in a school, right?

That matriculation and adding on. There they are, and if they want to adjust those, then it makes it very easy rather than having to recreate them every single time.

Andrew Pudewa: And it's so easy to edit too, , , with ease. Actually, I'll tell you what I do. Would you like to know what I did? So I have a group of kids. They're... I think they're all 10 to 15 now. I started with them a couple years ago, so this is our third year. And I've got a very wide range of aptitude.

Julie Walker: And these are your grandkids

Andrew Pudewa: and their cousins and their friends.

And I started this year, and I took the Checklist Generator, as I do always because it's so easy to use, and I just put in blanks for everything. I just put in a blank line, paste, paste, paste, paste. I printed it out and I said, "Okay, guys, I want you to make your own checklist, and you tell me what's easy for you to start with."

Julie Walker: Oh, I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: And they filled it on- filled it in, and then they turn it in, and then I can see, okay, , I got one little girl, and she's like, "Ah, it's so much," and she just wanted to start with four dress-ups. Okay, no problem. And then I got little hotshot who's about the same age, and she's, "But, but I know all of this. What's next?"

Julie Walker: Oh, nice.

Andrew Pudewa: it gives me, in this very broad, age-aptitude range, the ability now to, to track it and to customize it, and as much as possible with as least amount of stress on me as possible to have customized checklists for subgroups within my group. And that's kind of an ideal I'm striving for, but that Checklist Generator, it allows parents, it allows co-op teachers, it allows school teachers, allows tutors or online teachers. Anybody can adjust that checklist, and it really takes a minimal amount of time to do the maximal benefit for the student. So I love it.

And they always say it's cheaper than a cup of coffee. , , how... What is the cost of Premium Membership after the first year?

Julie Walker: Well, so the first year it's included with the teacher training course. If someone already has a teacher training course, and maybe they bought it secondhand or something and they don't have the Premium Membership, then the first time out it is \$99 for a year.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay. And then renewal

Julie Walker: renewal is only \$39

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. So it's, it's less than a cup of coffee a month, and it brings so much more joy and comfort to your soul than even a \$6 Starbucks drink.

Julie Walker: Yep. So I want to get into a little bit of teaching pedagogy, Andrew. You mentioned these two students that are in your class, and I realize that this is not a school where you are their teacher day in, day out every day.

Andrew Pudewa: It's once a week.

Julie Walker: So you're not giving them an actual letter grade, but-- or maybe you are, I don't know. But here's my question. It's that question of if this student, the high aptitude student, does everything on her checklist, and this student who is not as proficient does everything on her checklist, and they both get A's because they both accomplish the goal, how is that fair?

Andrew Pudewa: It would be very easy for me to digress into a critique of the modern grading system, the mentality that gave birth to it, the fact that it's profoundly modern. It's connected entirely with education being an economic function rather than a human function.

Julie Walker: But you're not going to go there even though he just did.

Andrew Pudewa: I would because it's an interesting history. Like, how did grades come to exist, and why did we all experience them? And are they really good motivators? And is it even a reasonable way to assess children? But let us assume for a moment that you have to give grades, right? You have to.

Well, then, our idea is it's A or I. It's accomplished, accepted, or it's incomplete, 100% that's the only option. You did everything or you didn't. If you didn't, you do it again until you do. And that's kind of the way we operate the teacher accreditation, right? You have to do everything on the checklist to demonstrate that you understand it before we will say, "Okay, good. Pass. Move on." , but that's kind of an ideal that is very hard for school teachers, especially when they've got four sections of language arts in a middle school. So that's why we put into the Checklist Generator the option to include points or to not include points. And if you want to include points, okay, then you get a certain number of points for each dress up in each paragraph, sentence opener, everything. You did it or you didn't, and then you can, you can score it, and then you could give them a percentage, and you could associate a letter grade with a percentage.

I don't do that. I don't believe in it. I don't like it. But I completely understand that many people are in a circumstance where that's either required or they perceive it as a beneficial thing to do so that way you can give the kids a little leeway and say, "Okay, you get 92%," or whatever, of the things you're supposed to have. We'll let it go. We'll let it go from there."

And so you can click on points or click off points. I always click off points. But, , I know a lot of teachers who find that really helpful because they just can't have one kid in the fourth draft of something trying to get that last little thing right, and it's it's a headache

Julie Walker: Well, and I've done a little bit of teacher training this summer.

One of the-- This, this came up: how do I grade my students' papers? And, , kind of sharing your philosophy, which by definition is now our IEW philosophy. If you have to make accommodations, well, they do that all the time in schools anyway, so make the accommodation exactly right. And, and we're, we're really good at this, and the Checklist Generator actually really helps with this. But then we also have the students... Let me, let me

finish that thought there. I said, "Don't grade every paper. Just run through it. Did they do it or not?" But then let them know, "Okay, this next paper that you're turning in, it's going to get a letter grade, and so do your very best."

And so now they've had the habit of having you evaluate their work. Did they do it? Did they check what they did? And did they do what they checked? And now every third or fourth writing assignment, because we do assign a lot of writing at IEW, it's part of how they get better at doing it, right? But here's the other question that I had.

It's ironic that it was probab- I think it was from the same teacher. "I have kids in my class who do not capitalize correctly. Their letter I for a personal pronoun I is not capitalized." I said, "Then reject it. Mark it on the checklist that they have to have it." You can do that. Our Checklist Generator, you can add things, and if they don't capitalize the I, don't accept the paper.

I think they'll eventually learn to start sentences with capital letters, end with periods or some type of ending punctuation, or they're going to keep getting bad scores. It's a game, right? Isn't all of this kind of a game?

Andrew Pudewa: It is a game, but it's a game that becomes a way of learning. And for the teacher, you can customize everything, even down to what are the banned words that you're going to make not allowed. And that level of customization allows you to play the game with them in such a way that they learn as well as they can.

Julie Walker: And when I say game, because you know I have an undergraduate degree in recreation, I know all about games

Andrew Pudewa: I know this.

Julie Walker: Games are fun. And so if the student sees this as a challenge and it's fun and not always punitive, I mean, we say, I say it at the beginning of every podcast, we're, 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.

That confidence is needed in order for them to develop competence, 'cause they want to do this game. They want to play this game so they can become good at it.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And the word confidence is *con* with and *fides*, faith. So with faith. So how do you develop trust? Well, here's what I expect. Here's what I did. How do these fit up? So it's back to the-- we did a few podcasts ago, the basic philosophy of do what you check, check what you do, and this is just a tool that makes it so much easier for the teachers.

So I would pay for the Checklist Generator. I don't have to obviously, but I would because it has that much value in my life

Julie Walker: Well, and people ask us, can we get it separate from Premium Membership? No, it's included in Premium Membership, but you still get it. Even if you're buying Premium Membership only for that incredible tool, it's worth it

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. I mentioned the other thing that I... So I was recently doing an in-service for a classical school, and I said, "Part of what you've got to be doing here is

helping to educate the parents about what you're doing," 'cause it's different probably than what they experienced in school, if they remember.

And so we have a lot of resources on the website, both in the premium section and not, and articles that we've written, everything from why do we have a checklist to why, why have the kids write their first draft in pen? And lots and lots of articles. Grab one of those, , every month or so, and just send it out to the parents, right?

That kind of continuous communication to parents. Maybe they'll read it, maybe they won't, but the more the parents understand about what you're trying to do in the classroom with the structure and style, the more they'll be comfortable, they'll be confident and competent at helping their kids

Julie Walker: I love that

Andrew Pudewa: And we know that kids who have more parental involvement in schoolwork generally learn more and do better in school. So help the parents, help yourself, help the kids

Julie Walker: I like it. Nice triple there.

Andrew Pudewa: It's my thing.

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.