Podcast 556: Support Students with IEW Writing Companion

Episode Transcript

Julie Walker: So we're excited about how we can help teachers in this age of electronics, age of technology, but yet not use tools that will thwart or cripple thinking.

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: Okay, Andrew, part four of our Writing Tools podcast

Andrew Pudewa: Yes. Part one was?

Julie Walker: Checklist generator that's a part of our premium membership.

Andrew Pudewa: Right. Part two was?

Julie Walker: IEW Toolbox, our app.

Andrew Pudewa: Part three was Gradebook, and now we have part four, which is

Julie Walker: Writing Companion.

Andrew Pudewa: Writing Companion.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: That sounds very friendly

Julie Walker: It is. We say this is your friendly helper, your loyal helper, and this is for students in particular. So it, we, I, we shared these in order of how, of when they were developed. So actually it's kind of like necessity is the mother of invention. So in this way, Writing Companion, it felt like we needed Writing Companion because of Gradebook.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, okay.

Julie Walker: So

Andrew Pudewa: So what is Writing Companion?

Julie Walker: Right. So,

Andrew Pudewa: Start with someone who knows nothing.

Julie Walker: It is a simple online word processor designed specifically to meet students at their point of need while they use the Structure and Style method. So when I say simple word processor, you know what I mean.

Andrew Pudewa: So it's like a dumb word processor.

Julie Walker: Yes. Simple can mean dumb.

Andrew Pudewa: It's the opposite of Microsoft.

Julie Walker: Well, yes. Yes, and if anybody here has had this experience, they know that when you start writing something, either an email, even in a Google Doc, it's not just Microsoft, it's in the Google world too, where you start to write something and it's trying to finish your thought.

Andrew Pudewa: It anticipates everything. Spelling, punctuation, the next word that you're likely to want to write, and I personally just turn all that stuff off. I don't want a spellchecker. I actually don't. I don't want a grammar checker. I want to check myself. But for kids,there are certain things that might be helpful for them to have someone to help them check stuff.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: That's why it's a companion.

Julie Walker: It's a companion.

Andrew Pudewa: I, I don't like the idea of companion being like an AI, so it's not that at all. It's something that is helpful in a simple way. So what does it do?

Julie Walker: The way it was explained to me initially was, do you remember when you were helping your own students, me with my boys, doing, going through their checklist? I would sit next to them and say, "Did you do it?" it's that thing that you say, Andrew, "Check what you do and do what you check."

That's what we're doing with this tool where, "Daniel, show me where your -ly adverb is," and he points to it, and I say, "Good. Show me your checklist. Okay, you checked it off. All right, next one. Show me your who-which clause in this paragraph." Or, underline, check it off.

Andrew Pudewa: Number in the margin

Julie Walker: And preferably you've already done all that, but now you're just double-checking that you got it all. Sometimes *if*, which is part of the

Andrew Pudewa: When, while,

Julie Walker: When, while, where, as, since, if, although. It's such a tiny word that sometimes it's missed.

Andrew Pudewa: You don’t necessarily see it.

Julie Walker: Right? But this Writing Companion will say, “Where, where's your www.asia?”

Andrew Pudewa: Do you know what one of my grandsons, my grandchildren does? They draw the line under the thing, and then they draw it like so that it fills up the entire line below kind of in a descending V shape. You cannot miss it. I like that. But I didn't put them up to this. That was just their way of, “I want to really show

Julie Walker: I want to be able to show you that it's here, right? Writing Companion is designed for students who are doing type papers. So the student can either have written their paper and upload it to Writing Companion, or better is have them do the writing in the tool, and that way we're sure that it's AI free. Meaning if you do it in a Word document or in a Google Doc and then upload it into Writing Companion, you might have had help over here. But this is designed to be a word processor. You can do it both ways

Andrew Pudewa: so they can not use Google Doc. They can use Writing Companion. They can see what they've done and do what they see they're supposed to. Then is it exportable?

Julie Walker: Yes. I do want to mention two things that Writing Companion does do that, just to help those students. It does spell check. So if the student has misspelled a word, not used the wrong word because sometimes you can't misspell. It won't correct grammar or usage, but it will give you the red squiggly line if it's misspelled.

But it will also, with an orange squiggly line, according to your checklist, if the word said is banned, it will give you an orange squiggly line that you've used a banned word. So it's just a little help. “Hey, you used a banned word.” Otherwise, you have to do a Control + F to find it, which you can do, but this is just that little bit more help.

But then once you're all done and you went through that whole Writing Companion exercise where you check what you did and did what you checked, then you can either print it out and turn it into your teacher or submit it to them electronically as a PDF or as a Google Doc or as a Word doc. So all these

Andrew Pudewa: And then it becomes checkable by Gradebook.

Julie Walker: Well, and that's the secret third way I mentioned. So in our last episode, we talked about IEW Gradebook, and I said that there were three ways, two ways, and then a secret third way to have the students submit papers. The first way through Gradebook is through Google Docs. The second way is through a Word doc.

The third way is students whose teachers have Gradebook can integrate Writing Companion into Gradebook. Now, we're just testing that this year. So we've got a handful of schools that are giving this the old college try, and so far it's working really well. So it's a nice way to be able to…

Andrew Pudewa: And, and so this Writing Companion is for the students to have a technology-lite word processing app online. It's a web app, and it does specific things to help them with the checklist, but it does not give them all of these automatic things that the AI-enhanced things will do.

Julie Walker: It's not going to predict what you're going to say which is really helpful. It does also have a few other tools that are in there. It does help the students format their paper correctly, because we require MLA formatting, double-spaced, Times New Roman, 12-point font. It will help them do that, and then it will also, if you're looking for a strong verb to replace a weak, lame, lousy verb, it has a built-in thesaurus. So you can click on a word and find a replacement, and the thesaurus, big surprise here, is connected to our IEW Toolbox. And our website that talks about it, iew.com/writing-companion, has comments on here like, "Do what you check, and check what you do," because that's what we're trying to

Andrew Pudewa: So we have a whole suite now of...

Julie Walker: We do. All these different tools.

Andrew Pudewa: We're better than Adobe

Julie Walker: I don't know about that. I don't know how many are in the Adobe Creative Suite, but I think there are more than four. But, now, I did want to say that like Gradebook, and probably exactly like Gradebook, not all of our Writing Across the Curriculum books will work, but most of them will.

But all of the Structure and Style for Students materials work because we have all of those checklists in Writing Companion, so those make, those make it possible. And if you have a student who has some type of accommodation, then they just don't have to do that part of the checklist, and they will know.

And it's not going to, and here's the thing that I always have to say, it's not going to tell you whether or not butterfly is a legal -ly adverb. It ends in -ly, but it's not an adverb. It's going to say, "Oh, you underlined butterfly and you checked it off as an -ly adverb? No problem." But Gradebook will catch that.

Gradebook will ask the teacher, "I don't think you wanna capture this one." So I do want to just share that because this is relatively new and because we want people to give it a chance to try it, try before you buy, you can go to iew.com/writing-companion, writing hyphen companion, select from any of those books that are down below, and you can have essentially a free trial.

It's a limited trial. It's not going to give you the whole, all of the checklist, but it will give you enough assignments that have checklists with them so that you can try it. And then if you like it, it's $10 per student per year.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, wow.

Julie Walker: So we made it very affordable.

Andrew Pudewa: cheap. Okay. Well, good. Do we have anybody reporting on the benefits of using this yet?

Julie Walker: Yes, so one of our..

Andrew Pudewa: it's a new, a new thing

Julie Walker: It is new, but Amy Bell, and Amy Bell wrote a blog post for us

Andrew Pudewa: Oh yes, I read that.

Julie Walker: It was really good, and she talked about, What's it called? The best investment I almost wasted, and this was the *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* teacher training course. And once she actually got into the whole world of what IEW is, she's now both feet in, and she teaches for an online writing school.

She says, “I love IEW Writing Companion. It will help students self-check and keep them accountable.” I think that's one of the things that we hear both in schools and in co-ops and some type of hybrid program, is they wish the parents were more involved, and this definitely helps with that, whether the parent is actually overseeing it.

But like I said, it's kind of takes the students through their paces to make sure that they did it, and if they do it well, then you can turn it in either those three ways that I mentioned, print it out, turn it in, or submit it online as a Word or Google Doc, or if your teacher has Gradebook, then it seamlessly goes right into Gradebook

So we're excited about how we can help teachers in this age of electronics, age of technology, but yet not use tools that will thwart or cripple thinking.

Andrew Pudewa: That's what we're all about.

Julie Walker: That’s what we're all about

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.