

Podcast 407: University-Ready Writing Transcript

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, we had some friends over for dinner last night.

Andrew Pudewa: You did? Who's that?

Julie Walker: Well, some people that work here at IEW, new to our team, and they have a student, well, they have a child, a daughter, who is going into college. She's in college, and she got straight A's in high school and is really struggling with college. Her high school did not prepare her for college success. And of course like I said, they're new to our team, and they were basically bemoaning the fact that they did not know about IEW before they had an opportunity to give her more skills. And so, of course, that's what we want. We want students to be successful. And so we want to equip their teachers, and them, with the tools that they need to be able to be successful specifically in the area of writing.

Andrew Pudewa: It is the number one thing that anyone who teaches, not just English, not just. I mean, anyone who teaches college or university classes, will complain about the abysmal writing skills of pretty much everyone. It's just universal. It's ubiquitous. I don't meet a college teacher who says, “Oh, the students coming into my class write so well.” It's never happened.

Julie Walker: Right, right. And yet we hear over and over again, IEW students who have gone to college and have gotten remarks from their professors about their writing.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. “Where'd you learn to do this?” “My mom taught me. It was, it's what we did in school.” I mean, kids don't know what they do because they don't compare it with anything they don't do.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, we are here, of course, to talk today about our newest release, *University-Ready Writing*. And I love how our titles of our books actually say what we're attempting to accomplish.

Andrew Pudewa: It's not a catchy title, but on the other hand, maybe it is because there's nothing else out there named this.

Julie Walker: right. It's true. And the subtitle is *Preparing Communicators for Collegiate Success*. And that's our goal with this course. And so it may be a teacher in a high school class teaches her students this course, and so they're all doing it together. So therefore, it's for the teacher, or it may be that there's a student who really wants to do well in college and they're motivated enough to be able to, “Hey, mom, get me this course. I'm going to do this over the summer so that I can be better prepared for college.” Or, we have this wonderful idea that every college writing tutoring center should have this on their shelves.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, that's a chief marketing officer's vision dream. It's hard to break into large institutions, obviously, but there are individual teachers out there, instructors, professors who would be super grateful if they could just say, "Do this, it'll help you, it'll make everything better. And then come back and give me another paper."

Julie Walker: Yes. Exactly. And, we talk about in high school, we've talked about this before, high school teachers are a little bit reluctant to assign writing assignments because they don't want to grade all those papers. They don't have enough time.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, I'm sure there are many draws. What I notice about high school is that very often, there are exceptions of course, but very often the English people kind of are in their world of English, and literature is their main thing. And so the kids are maybe trying to write about literature, maybe do a little creative writing along the way. And then the content area people—history, civics, science—they're reluctant to give writing assignments because they don't necessarily want to deal with it, and they're not sure that they could steal the time to teach them how to do it.

Julie Walker: How to do the writing assignment.

Andrew Pudewa: Or they just assume, well, these kids should be learning to write in English class. So it's kind of like it slips between the cracks in many cases, and that's probably what happened to your friend's daughter. Who, getting straight A's, obviously learned how to make teachers happy, but didn't necessarily gain the fundamental, transferable skills

Julie Walker: Right, right. Well, and now with her parents, both of them working here, I'm pretty sure she's going to get some resources to help her be more successful.

Andrew Pudewa: We, we will hope so, and it'll be fun to see a year from now, is she more confident.

Julie Walker: So, I think it would be helpful for our listeners to know what is in this twelve-week video course, *University-Ready Writing*.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, a little bit of history because a little over twenty years ago, I did create a video course called *Advanced Communication Series*, and it contained three talks, three classes, about two hour classes. One was called Advanced Notetaking. Another one was called Persuasive Writing and Speaking. And the third one was called Power Tips for Planning and Writing a College Level Paper.

Julie Walker: Exactly. But you had another title for it, which I love.

Andrew Pudewa: which is "how to spy on your professor and figure out his or her writing style so that you can imitate that and get a better grade on every paper you turn in."

Julie Walker: Now that's an amazing title.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, it would be, but it would take up too much space on the title page. So, we sold that program for years. It was very niche in a way, but people got it. And it was particularly delightful when I would go out and meet a family and discover an older student who had done this course and was sitting in my seminar, taking notes according to the

advanced note taking method that I had taught in the video. It's like, wow, someone watched this, practiced it, and now they're using it.

Julie Walker: And, to our listeners, that method is the stick and branch method that you can spot, I won't say a mile away, but certainly from where you were standing as a speaker, you could see that the student was using that approach, the stick and branch.

Andrew Pudewa: So, in the process of saying how do we redo or replace these older products and make them so much better, that's how we came up with the plan for this *University-Ready Writing*. Instead of three two-hour classes, it's twelve video courses, which could be done one a week or could also be stretched out one every other week. There's no terrible rush.

Julie Walker: Well, don't forget about the *High School Essay Intensive*, also another course that was niche, and we basically had to discontinue it because what it was for was no longer needed.

Andrew Pudewa: ...was no longer, which was the essay portions of the ACT and SAT tests, the college application essay that still had some relevance, but yeah, it was a product that had reached its lifespan and lived a good middle-aged life but needed to be retired.

Julie Walker: Well, and I don't know if you know this, Andrew, and I'm certainly sure that our listeners don't know this. My son, who works in our editing department, our video editing department—that was the first video that he actually edited was a *High School Essay Intensive*.

Andrew Pudewa: Right, because we recorded it here in Tulsa. Well, this is just such a magnitudes better product.

Julie Walker: We took the best of those two courses, put them in here, and then added more content to it. And it is so good. I, one of my jobs here at IEW, marketing is product, first and foremost, you have to have a good product. And so part of what I do is review these videos over and over again. And I laugh, and I just go, wow, this is so good. These families, these teachers are going to love this.

Andrew Pudewa: I'm glad you think so, because when I imagine you watching videos of me for hours at a time, I just think, wow, she's doing her purgatory on earth, winning extra crowns for the suffering she's endured. But I'm glad. I'm glad that you can, in all honesty, say. This is good. This is engaging. This will work.

Julie Walker: Yep. And it is engaging. It is not dry, boring lecture, which we cannot promise that won't happen in your college experience, but we can promise that this will be engaging.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, one of the things that we did right off, obviously, is teach people how to do a key word outline because everything we do is based on that idea. And, pretty soon, I'm going to hit three decades of teaching this stuff. I've really come to see this incredible value in just that basic skill you can teach to a grade two kid, you can teach to an adult, and everybody in between.

And then with the stick and branch method of note taking, it's like a key word outline on steroids because you add into it a geographic arrangement of those key words that does so much more to connect ideas and enhance comprehension and understanding.

And I would love to mention here that I have a talk, I think it's available, called Paper and Pen—What the Research Says. And one of the really landmark studies, and it truly went viral because it was so significant, that students remember more when they're taking notes on paper as opposed to when they're typing notes into a laptop in class or whatever. And why is that? And that would be a great talk for anyone to listen to.

But one of the principles is that if you write fewer words You have to listen more carefully. And so this stick and branch system, I learned it accidentally, not from a college class, but from an extracurricular class I had to pay extra money to take, way back when I was a freshman in San Francisco. And of all the things I did that year, that is the single most valuable thing that I ever did connected with a school and that I can reflect on, particularly as an older student. So I wanted to be sure everybody had a chance to learn that, but my fear was that in teaching that one single class, people would watch it, say, oh, great idea, and then just not practice. If you don't practice it a little bit, it's not going to become a skill. So that's why we embedded several sessions. And I thought it was very nice because we had guests come in, give a mini lecture, and then I would take notes in the stick and branch method on the board, and the students could either look at what I was doing and copy that, or they could kind of try to do it on their own and then compare how they did it with what I did it. And it was just a perfect sequence of modeling that skill. I'm so excited. And I think if nothing else that alone would make this course worth the cost and time of doing it.

Julie Walker: Yes. And we cover that, like you say, pretty comprehensively. We actually have the students do that exercise four times. The first time, and I'm just kind of explaining it, the first time we had a guest lecturer, our own Nathan King, come up and tell us the story of The Tortoise and the Hare, which, of course, you know that story, but you did it first as a key word outline. And then that's how you showed the students how this is different. And so Nathan, Mr. King, Professor King, gave that lecture again, and you could see the difference of how it worked. And then another time, I actually came in and gave a lecture on how to ace an interview, whether it's a college interview, an employment interview, and what things you could do, how you can dress, how you prepare. And you had never heard that before. And so you were able to, just cold, write your notes on the board. And, it's kind of like intrinsic value while these students are taking notes. I'm secretly hoping...

Andrew Pudewa: We will sneak some good content in here.

Julie Walker: And then we had another lecturer come in and talk about the organ and the history of the organ. And this would be something like you would get in a music appreciation class or something like that. So we tried to make it real. And then there's another one then that I won't go into, but it was also like a college professor class, but then you gave a final one. So now there's no model for them to imitate. So this is the fifth time, and you basically give the lecture to students of how to be successful in life. So, I love that.

Andrew Pudewa: really? I gave a lecture on how to be successful in life. I got to listen to this. I might learn something

So for me that is the highest immediate value thing that you could take into university classes. But, obviously, this is much more than that because we wanted to expand on our basic essay models and what are some of the refinements that you can use.

So while this course does not require anyone to have done any other IEW structure and style stuff, it's presuming no previous experience, it's simultaneously a great way to expand the sophistication and the higher level organization of the essay models for academic collegiate writing. And that includes the TRIAC paragraph, which I think we mentioned in the TWSS and do we do it in the SSS 1C?

Julie Walker: The Level C classes, we do that.

Andrew Pudewa: But this is such an incredible tool and it's funny as I reflect on it, I like to give credit where credit is due, but I couldn't really figure out who invented this thing. I remember years ago, I was having dinner with someone, and they drew this on a paper napkin in a restaurant. And I thought that fits perfectly as a way to further refine paragraph organization because we do topic-clincher paragraphs in Unit Four with everybody, and that's a starting point. And practice that till you can do a good clincher, till you feel like it. But then what do you do in the middle, and how do you improve the sequencing of ideas? And there are, of course, lots and lots of ways. But kind of the Swiss army knife of paragraph models, I think that's what I called it.

Julie Walker: Yes, you did.

Andrew Pudewa: The Swiss army knife of paragraph models is the TRIAC, and it stands for topic and then a restriction. So you take what you're going to talk about, try to shrink it a little bit. And when you shrink it a little bit, it gives the reader a sense of focus and direction. And anyone teaching writing is probably talking about focus, right? Don't vomit all over the place. narrow things down so we can really look at what you're trying to say. So topic, restriction, and the I would stand for information, or I liked illustration because another buzzword idiom that teachers use, right? Don't tell, show. Okay, well, so don't just give facts, paint some pictures with those facts, and that will stick in the imagination, stick in the memory of the reader better. And then the A stands in a kind of a broad sense for analysis. And that's where you have those questions like, okay, what's the significance, what's the value, what's the impact, what are some of the causes or problems. There's a list of questions that we give the students to apply to that A part. And then the C would be for concluding sentence or in our vernacular clincher sentence. So topic, restriction, illustration, analysis, clincher. And I tell you, you could just, any subject in the world, and I think the first time I did this at Biola, I used the cafeteria at Biola because I had been sentenced to that or something.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't think it was very polite,

Julie Walker: Actually, I think you enjoyed it.

Andrew Pudewa: oh did I?

Julie Walker: I think it was kind of a unique thing, but that was in the product that we have since discontinued.

Andrew Pudewa: But I was trying to prove you can take any random topic, apply the TRIAC model, and it will help you invent content. And if you know what you're talking about, it will help you invent, organize, and present that content in a much more logical and

effective way. So the TRIAC, I would look at as being probably the second most useful tool that students will gain from using this course.

Julie Walker: And then you talk about different types of assignments. And we actually did some research to find out what writing assignments students are actually getting. And one of the things that we camped on for a little while was this idea of a precis, a summary.

Andrew Pudewa: A summary.

Julie Walker: Yeah, and you spent some time teaching students, and that's, of course, where the TRIAC came in, but what is a precis

It's a summary. How much do you need to actually summarize? And we had some guidelines on what to include in a precis. You had some ideas of how to structure a precis.

Andrew Pudewa: How do you spell precis?

Julie Walker: P R E, with the little thing over it, C I S, precis.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay. So for Latin, you'd say Pecis, if you're using ecclesiastical pronunciation. I don't know if it's Latin or not, but I do know that most content teachers in a university view the skill of summarizing as being very important. And I don't think that's being taught very much in high school. Like I said, you get this, this literature and response to literature, literary analysis, you get historical writing, they want the kids to immediately start thinking into something without the skill of being able to re-present it initially. And of course, summarize includes prioritize, and that's where we get into this concept of what's interesting, important, or relevant. I remember reading an article by a professor at UCLA who said, If students would come into my class with the skill of summarizing, I could teach them so much better, but they don't. And I have to do that, and that takes time away from the content that I'm trying to teach. So, I think we all underestimate the value of summarizing as a basic skill that everyone should have.

Julie Walker: Right. You also taught this acronym that we kind of came up with almost on the spot, D. C. at sunrise or D. C. at sunset. And this was a way to organize a longer essay, not, so the TRIAC is one paragraph within the essay, but then you have this D. C. at sunrise.

Andrew Pudewa: D. C. A. S. is the acronym.

Julie Walker: So, division,

Andrew Pudewa: Comparison.

Julie Walker: application, significance,

Andrew Pudewa: Division. Comparison. Application. And Significance. This is, of course, loosely based on the common topics that began way back, I think, with Aristotle and were used through all of the ancient classical medieval education. And I think I told the students if you want to go deeper into this idea, study the common topics. So we're not trying to replace that, but to take a hapless, innocent, little nineteen, seventeen year old kid and throw all the common topics at them and try to explain that all in one class, you'd fry their brains. So, that's why we chose this simpler abbreviated introduction to the common topics. But again, it

works on anything. What are the divisions of something, the things about, the aspects of, right? What are those things like or unlike, and that tool of comparison that allows us to understand both things better by making the comparison. I remember a book I read not long ago that was called *Reading for the Long Run*. And this woman who wrote the book was comparing her life as a long distance runner with teaching a student to read, a child who had very difficult visual problem and using that constant analogy. And by the end of the book, I thought, wow, I understand running better because I've worked with struggling readers. And most people are going to understand reading better because everyone's done, maybe not long distance running, but that thing you have to work through and all the elements. It was brilliantly done so that,

Julie Walker: Nice comparison

Andrew Pudewa: Tool of comparison,

Julie Walker: And the application

Andrew Pudewa: That's what we really lack in our thinking today is how is that significant in the world? The world, how do we use and apply this information? Sometimes we see people promoting ideas because you're just supposed to believe it's intrinsically good. What's the actual impact that that idea will have, good or bad? And then of course the significance is an extension of that long term.

So, I think it's a great tool, and we did come up with it because DCAS doesn't sound too good, but DC, it's not a place I would particularly want to go most of the time, but it would be better, probably more tolerable on the banks of the Potomac at sunrise or sunset, so.

Julie Walker: It's beautiful,

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah. And then of course, we have to get into the somewhat fuzzy and problematic and constantly changing world of citations and looking at MLA and APA. I guess the message I tried to communicate is don't learn how to do this and memorize it and think it's always going to be this way because the next round of changes is going to come out. Be familiar with the differences. Learn how to follow a style guide, but don't have anxiety about it.

Julie Walker: Yes, and well, I love that we did some of the assignments, most of our assignments were done in MLA, but you did introduce APA and even how to do an annotated bibliography and how book titles, (currently, who knows how it's going to change or not), are not in title case in one of these style guides. And it's just basically just know you have to follow these rules that came up with the Modern Language Association or the Association of

Andrew Pudewa: Psychological, Psychological Association. How they got into the business, I don't know. And then you take some classes, you go to a seminary and you study Philosophy or Theology, you still may use Turabian or Chicago. So, having a familiarity and a flexibility with that is more important, I think, than having memorized all the rules, because you can't. And the frustrating thing, I talked to one student who, very good writer, and could whip out a paper, a good paper, an A paper, and he said it took more time to format the thing according to the style guide than it did to write the paper to begin with, which is kind of sad, but I'm sure many college students have, experienced that.

Julie Walker: I think there's so many more tools available today that might not have been available. You just put in the ISBN number and boom, you've got the citation available.

Andrew Pudewa: it is that that's, that's a positive use of technology right there. Yeah, absolutely. We finished up with on demand essays, I think.

Julie Walker: Well, and I actually was going to mention this. I wanted to do a topic-clincher, but we do do a topic-clincher in this course where you start out giving them a prompt. They could actually choose whichever one there were two different prompts and you just said 20 minutes go.

Andrew Pudewa: oh, so we did a before and after. Like, like we did in most of the SSSs.

Julie Walker: well, and we actually used that prompt to do another homework assignment within the course. So there was, yes, that opportunity, not just to do the prompt assignment, like you've got, as you say, on demand, you don't give them any strategies at the beginning. But the last class, because we never want to assign any homework after the last class because you're not going to look at it. But then you have them do an on demand essay, completely different prompt, and you gave them some strategies at the beginning. Plan this much time to do this. Use this much time. Be sure you save time at the end. You won't be able to bring in a smart watch, but there will be a timekeeping device. Watch and be sure that you allow time to reread your assignment.

Andrew Pudewa: And, and although the SAT and ACT don't use that on-demand prompt-based writing assessment anymore, it still is used, particularly say in the AP, Advanced placement exam world. And there could be other situations, and you could apply all those principles to stuff like your college application or I think when you apply for a master's program, you have to write some essays and all that.

So there's a lot of cross application.

I'm curious though, did we get any kind of comments from the kids that were in the video or their parents? What do you remember from that?

Julie Walker: Well, one, one student in particular that I know well, I'm friends with their family, she is taking college classes and she has had no problem at all getting through the essays. And that feedback that we often hear from people that have gone through our program and I think it will be even more so with this course. The professor asked me, "Where did you learn to write like this? This is the best paper I've ever seen." And so she got that exact wording from her college professor. It is wonderful.

Andrew Pudewa: and I think there may be a good number of professors and college teachers out there who might be willing to take the same strategy that Dr. Webster used, right? Because if we go back to the very beginning, James B. Webster, Ph. D., professor of history at Dalhousie University in Nova Scotia was teaching African history, which is a pretty content-rich, high-level, course. He had several of course, but he found that the students had substandard writing skills. He didn't see how he could teach history to people who couldn't write well enough to do history. Much like we said in a podcast not long ago, that writing really forces a crystallization of thought that you don't get if you just read something or talk about it. And so what he did was he would take the first part, I don't know, 20 minutes or so, I guess, of each history lecture class and teach something about how to write. And what did

he teach? Dress ups, openers, topic-clincher, basic essay models. And of course, word got around Dalhousie University that if you wanted to learn to write good papers, don't mess with the English department, go take African history because that guy will teach you stuff that will be useful forever.

And so I'm hoping that among the people who are interested in this program, there may be some college teachers who would say, Oh that's not so bad. There's these 12 lessons, and I've got this semester course I could extract from this and give to my students these tools. It's going to take away from my sociology lecture or whatever, but it's worth it. That's what I'm hoping for. Rather than, "oh well, they don't write well and it's not my job." Which, well, is a temptation anyone could take.

Julie Walker: Of course, you know, I am excited about this course. And I do think that a lot of students will benefit from this. I do think indirectly, or maybe directly as you're indicating, college professors will benefit from students who have taken this course.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and I should mention that we did do a little bit of that "how to spy on your professor and imitate his writing style." I took that idea and I've applied it in various courses over the years that we've made the new student courses. So we took a couple well known authors and analyzed what makes that author sound like that and what makes this other author sound like that, and then rewrite something in the style of those authors.

Julie Walker: And thank you for not mentioning the authors. This was one of the surprise things that you read the paper, and the students, you were kind of testing their literacy. Do you recognize who this author is? And it was really fun to watch that. I love that little bit of mystery intrigue.

Andrew Pudewa: Okay, well we won't mention it, but that idea of being able to imitate a particular style really does cross apply, not just in figuring out how your professor writes and trying to sound more like the professor, but when you move into the real world, you enter a culture, right? And you get a job and there's things that you do that represent that organization to the world. And one of those is the writing style. And so, if you acquire the capacity to imitate several different styles, well, it's not cheating. It's not imitating because you don't have skill. It's actually expanding your repertoire of ways to say things, and that's what makes the best writers.

Julie Walker: *University-Ready Writing*, another, I think, stellar product that is coming out of the Institute for Excellence in Writing, and I'm looking forward to a lot of people giving us some great feedback on it.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, and all thanks to you and your marvelous curriculum editing developing team. And I don't think that Any one person could have done this on their own. I mean, it would have taken a long, long time to do it, but the combined efforts of all of our best minds is really, I think, something to be profoundly proud of.

Julie Walker: And the guy that's willing to stand in front of a camera and say things that are...

Andrew Pudewa: That's like the easy part of the job.

Julie Walker: I find that hard to believe. So, well, thank you, Andrew.

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, Google podcasts, 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.