

# News & Events

from the  
*Institute for Excellence in Writing*

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## Marking & Grading

### A few thoughts about a sticky, tricky subject

As soon as people get serious about the business of teaching writing, certain beasts inevitably raise their ugly heads: namely, how to “correct” papers in a way that will be truly helpful, and how to decide on a grade for the paper. We must consider then, how we, as parents and teachers, can create a culture of cooperation which will nurture and encourage students while ensuring that they acquire basic abilities and an attention to detail that will serve them throughout life. So let us discuss meeting these goals, beginning with establishing effective composition habits, then addressing how to develop editing skills, moving on to how we can establish a standard of excellence, and finally undertaking the problem of grading.

#### No Erasing Allowed

Of all ideas for teaching writing, one of the most instantly effective for young children—and sometimes for older students as well—is to establish the discipline of “no erasing” while composing. Although this is seemingly a small thing, one significant result of this approach is to eliminate perfectionistic tendencies, while creating freedom to change, add, move, or strike words or whole chunks of prose. If your writing culture includes: “There is no such thing as a first and only version...” then the tedium of making changes by erasing and trying to get everything perfect the first time is eliminated. Furthermore, when using a checklist of style techniques (or a rubric of any sort), revising to meet that checklist becomes a way of working, and the habit of reading, thinking, and changing things becomes natural.

Additionally, this freedom from neatness shifts the emphasis from writing something that “looks nice” to creating a piece that “sounds good.” When children grasp this at a young age, it can make a huge difference in motivation as well as in the quality of the finished product. An additional result of requiring this “sloppy copy” is that when a teacher, parent, or editor does mark on a paper, there isn’t the sense of being “wrong” so much as there is a feeling of “continued refinement.”

Hundreds of parents and teachers have tried this, some skeptically at first, but later reported that the culture of “no erasing” made a huge difference in motivation as well as in the quality of the final product.

#### Learning Editing Skills

In truth, successfully proofreading your own writing is perhaps the hardest editing task. Why? Because when we think something and write it down, it makes perfect sense to us. When we then read what we wrote, it still makes perfect sense, because that’s the way we thought it initially. Since it seemed to be correct, made sense, and felt right to begin with, it still does when we look at it again later. In truth, the best way for most of us to effectively edit ourselves is to read out loud what we’ve written—or better yet, have someone else read it out loud to us, so we can run it through the native-speaker auditory language filter in our brain. Then there is a better chance that we will detect that awkward phrase, that error in number or tense, or that confusing syntax we wouldn’t have noticed without the increased objectivity that listening provides. One thing is true for everyone, children and adults alike: it is much easier to find and fix someone else’s mistakes than one’s own.

Therefore, if our goal is to teach editing skills, we will have much greater success if we begin by having students learn and refine their proofreading and editing skills on something other than their own compositions. Understanding this, many

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**We are Grateful!** For the fifth consecutive time, "Andrew Pudewa Writing Seminars" has won First Place in the Practical Home Schooling Reader Awards for the writing/composition category! And for the first time, our "Phonetic Zoo" spelling program has also won an award—Second Place in the spelling category! Many thanks to the PHS readers who took time to vote!



**This Newsletter** is free, and is generally mailed once or twice a year to everyone we've heard from within the last five years, and everyone who has purchased something from us within the last seven. Gradually we are purging our list. If you wish to continue receiving bi-annual mailings from us, be sure to keep us advised as to your current address or, better yet—buy something every few years. If you would like additional copies for members of your school or group, just ask.

**Our Catalog** from 2006 is still valid—no price changes!—and will be distributed at conventions along with the enclosed 2007 supplement. If you never received one, or would like another copy (or several), just drop us an email or give us a phone call. We'll send it right out. (Note to our price-conscious friends: we have not raised prices in 10 years, but it is likely that we will do so in 2008, so if you're waiting to purchase one of our programs...don't wait too long.)

**NEW Products** flyer should be enclosed with this newsletter. We are very pleased to announce several exciting new products for this season:

◀ **Medieval History-Based Writing Lessons** ▶

Another in the series from Lori Verstegen, this set of lesson plans is ideal for students Gr. 5-8, and provides composition assignments and practice exercises for all nine of the IEW structural units.

◀ **Character-Based Writing Lessons** ▶

Similar in format to our popular Bible-Based set, these lesson plans are designed for students Gr. 7-12, and use source material from the lives of Francis of Assisi, Abraham Lincoln, and Mother Theresa. There are assignments for all nine units, with checklists at three different levels.

◀ **FIX-IT! Grammar and Editing Made Easy with Classics** ▶

Based on the "sentence-a-day" approach to learning editing skills, these stories range from serious to satire, and can be used with students in upper elementary through high school. Short selections with embedded errors are provided, together with the corrected version for the teacher; student text is also provided on a CD-Rom for easy printing and duplication. An extensive grammar and editing appendix rounds out this truly fantastic teaching tool!

◀ **Teaching with Games** ▶

Lori Verstegen, master of fun games, provides an entire book full of dozens of teaching games for those teaching either individuals or classes large and small. Her seminar for teachers on DVD brings these games to life, and is guaranteed to help you be a more fun teacher!

◀ **Tricks & Tips for Teaching Through the Nine Units** ▶

A new video seminar by Andrew, this DVD provides new insight for those teaching the TWSS syllabus of Structure & Style, which will enlighten both experienced IEW teachers, and those new to the program this year. Handouts are provided on the DVD-Rom portion of the disc.

**Do we have your email** along with your postal address? If not, you may miss knowing about one of our events. Increasingly, we are using only email to promote our seminars and classes in local areas. Be sure we are able to notify you!

**Bonus Discs!** Customers who purchase materials at conventions this year will receive a bonus disc with loads of fascinating and helpful information, audio files, and top-secret stuff—be sure to ask!

**Paper Grading** is not a service we offer at IEW, but we do have a network of qualified and enthusiastic teachers who offer paper marking and grading for a fee. Although we can offer these referrals, we can't provide details as to the individual teacher's procedures and fees. If you are interested in finding a professional writing teacher to grade your child's papers, check out some of our friends who do this at <http://www.writing-edu.com/links>

**Our Website** has again been updated, with more resources and links, audio and video samples, a "Clearance" section with discounts for damaged or discontinued items, new product information, the most current listing of live seminars and events, and of course all our past newsletter articles:

- Six Traits Writing Assessment Comparison
- Imitation: A Common Sense Approach
- The Four Deadly Errors of Teaching Writing
- What? or That! - Reflections on Reports
- Convert to the True Way: Pens vs. Pencils
- Motivation! • To Assay the Essay
- The Madness of Multiple Choice
- One Myth and Two Truths • Prompt Success!
- Encyclopedia Dad • But it's so...so...Awkward!
- Good Writing vs. Great Teaching • What About Grammar?
- Classic Literature (Andrews) • Multi-Age Classrooms

For permission to reprint these articles in local newsletters, contact Andrew directly at 800-856-5815 or [iew@earthlink.net](mailto:iew@earthlink.net)

**The IEWfamilies Email Loop** is active and growing! Now with over 2,500 members and averaging a dozen messages a day, this is a readily available resource for any and all IEW-related questions; members ask and advise each other on everything from what materials worked best for them to technical grammar questions. A dose of daily encouragement, this loop is carefully moderated and boasts an extensive selection of files available to members, including lesson plans, student samples, charts and forms to help speed you on your way to IEW success. So whether you're a home-schooling mom or experienced teacher looking for new ideas, this group has a lot to offer everyone. Read more about it and click through to sign up at <http://writing-edu.com/support>



**Are You Teaching Classes** using IEW materials and want to let more folks know about it? We have added a referrals section to our web site, and if you would like to be listed, please email our webmaster with your name, location, contact information, and general offerings.

**IEW Expands Internationally!** We are very pleased to announce that our network of representatives has significantly expanded to serve homeschoolers and teachers in many other countries! We now have resellers in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Africa, and United Kingdom! For contact information, check our website, and let your overseas friends know! In 2008, Andrew will be traveling to most of these countries for conventions or workshops.

**Magnum Opus Magazine is here!** After a long preparation period, we are ready to go with our student showcase magazine. The first issue is free...and if you want to subscribe, it's only \$14/year. You should have received a copy with this newsletter; if not, just call our office and we'll send one. Magnum Opus is specifically for the work of homeschool students, and submissions not published in the print version will be available on our web site, [www.MagnumOpusMagazine.com](http://www.MagnumOpusMagazine.com).

Teachers interested in a similar opportunity for their students can check out [www.GreatNewAuthors.com](http://www.GreatNewAuthors.com), a publishing venture also designed to showcase student writing.

# Spring/Fall 2007 Schedule

Andrew Pudewa will be teaching or presenting at the following events:

TWSS = *Teaching Writing: Structure & Style*

A seminar for Teachers, Parents, Tutors, Collegians

Two Days: Day 1 - Basics of Structure & Style, Day 2 - Advanced Models & Techniques

SWI = Two day *Student Writing Intensive* with day 3 & 4 on DVD

(Grades: 4-5, 6-7, 8-10+, 2¾ hr. class, limited to 24 students)

HSE = *High School Essay Intensive*

(For high school level teachers and students, limited to 100 participants)

Detailed descriptions of these seminars can be seen at: [www.writing-edu.com/seminars](http://www.writing-edu.com/seminars)

CON= Invited Speaker at Convention



| Dates           | City              | Event        | Contact/Registration  |
|-----------------|-------------------|--------------|---|
| April 20-21     | Pasadena, TX      | CON          | Houston Area Roman Catholic Homeschoolers <a href="http://www.arch-homeschool.org">www.arch-homeschool.org</a>      |
| April 23-24     | San Antonio, TX   | HSE/ST       | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| May 5           | Santa Maria, CA   | CON          | Central Coast Home Educators 805-937-7099   |
| May 24          | Winston-Salem, NC | HSE          | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| May 26          | Orlando, FL       | CON          | Florida Parent Educators Assoc. <a href="http://www.fpea.com">www.fpea.com</a>                                      |
| June 1-2        | St. Paul, MN      | CON          | Minnesota Catholic Home Educators <a href="http://www.mnconference.org">www.mnconference.org</a>                    |
| June 7-9        | Richmond, VA      | CON          | Home Education Assoc. of Virginia <a href="http://www.heav.org">www.heav.org</a>                                    |
| June 14         | Denver, CO        | CON          | Christian Home Educators of Colorado <a href="http://www.chec.org">www.chec.org</a>                                 |
| June 15-16      | Great Falls, MT   | CON          | Montana Home Educators <a href="http://www.montanahomeschoolconvention.com">www.montanahomeschoolconvention.com</a> |
| June 21-22      | Columbus, OH      | CON          | Christian Home Educators of Ohio <a href="http://www.cheohome.org">www.cheohome.org</a>                             |
| June 23         | Chino Hills, CA   | CON          | So. CA Catholic Home Educators <a href="http://www.scchehomepage.com">www.scchehomepage.com</a>                     |
| June 27         | Baltimore, MD     | HSE          | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| June 28-30      | Baltimore, MD     | CON          | Catholic Family Expo <a href="http://www.nache.org">www.nache.org</a>   |
| July 9-14       | Grouard, AB       | BSS*         | Blended Sound-Sight Program <a href="http://www.blendedsoundsight.com">www.blendedsoundsight.com</a>                |
| July 17-19      | Lancaster, PA     | CON          | Veritas Academy Teacher Training <a href="http://www.veritasacademy.com">www.veritasacademy.com</a>                 |
| July 28         | San Antonio, TX   | CON          | San Antonio Home Ed. Resource <a href="http://www.sahero.org">www.sahero.org</a>                                    |
| August 10       | Temecula, CA      | CON          | Eagles Peak Inland Empire <a href="http://www.eaglespeakie.com">www.eaglespeakie.com</a>                            |
| August 16-18    | Woodlands, TX     | CON          | Texas Homeschool Coalition <a href="http://www.thsc.org">www.thsc.org</a>   |
| August 25       | Clarkston, MI     | HSE          | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| September 18-22 | Modesto, CA       | TWSS/SWI/HSE | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| September 26-29 | Boise, ID         | TWSS/HSE     | Vineyard Christian Homeschool Coop 208-377-1477   |
| October 3-6     | Hudson, MN        | TWSS/SWI/HSE | IEW 800-856-5815 <a href="http://www.writing-edu.com">www.writing-edu.com</a>                                       |
| November 1-3    | Nanaimo, BC       | TWSS         | NCHL - Tentative  |
| January 8-12    | Kenya, Africa     | CON          | Tentative   |

Note: This schedule does not include school in-services or seminars not open to the public. No seminar in your area? You can host an event in 2008 or 2009—Call now; slots fill quickly. Many people ask, "Are you coming to our convention?" If you think that Mr. Pudewa might be a good speaker for the event in your city or state, please feel free to make that suggestion to the convention chairman or speaker committee for conventions in '08 or '09. Your help is greatly appreciated! In addition to the events listed above, we will have representatives at the following events April - August:

|          |                 |      |        |                   |      |        |                  |      |
|----------|-----------------|------|--------|-------------------|------|--------|------------------|------|
| APACHE   | Peoria, IL      | 4/13 | CFS    | San Diego, CA     | 5/11 | MCHE   | Dearborn Hts, MI | 6/15 |
| MACHE    | Rochester, MN   | 4/13 | H&H    | Arlington, TX     | 5/11 | CHEF   | St. Charles, MO  | 6/18 |
| Heritage | Seattle, WA     | 4/13 | TEA    | Searcy, AR        | 5/18 | RMCHE  | Denver, CO       | 6/21 |
| NCFHSF   | Gainesville, FL | 4/14 | MTHEA  | Nashville, TN     | 5/18 | CHEACT | Austin, TX       | 6/22 |
| IDEA     | Fairbanks, AK   | 4/19 | FEAST  | San Antonio, TX   | 5/18 | CHEF   | Birmingham, AL   | 6/29 |
| SWIHE    | Evansville, IN  | 4/20 | FWAHS  | Fort Wayne, IN    | 5/19 | OCEAN  | Portland, OR     | 6/29 |
| MPE      | Overland Pk, KS | 4/20 | ICHE   | St. Charles, IL   | 5/24 | SMHEA  | Knoxville, TN    | 6/29 |
| APHEA    | Chugiak, AK     | 4/21 | NCHE   | Winston-Salem, NC | 5/24 | CHEA   | Long Beach, CA   | 7/12 |
| IDEA     | Anchorage, AK   | 4/23 | CHEA   | Oconomowoc, WI    | 5/24 | HERI   | Jacksonville, FL | 7/12 |
| IDEA     | Soldotna, AK    | 4/25 | LIGHT  | Eugene, OR        | 6/1  | CHEK   | Louisville, KY   | 7/13 |
| CHEA     | Santa Clara, CA | 4/27 | TPA    | Wichita, KS       | 6/1  | NVHEC  | Chantilly, VA    | 7/13 |
| MASSH    | Worcester, MA   | 4/27 | TEA-NW | Springdale, AR    | 6/2  | AFHE   | Phoenix, AZ      | 7/20 |
| GMCHE    | West Allis, WI  | 4/27 | CHFEA  | Fresno, CA        | 6/8  | CSTHEA | Chattanooga, TN  | 7/20 |
| GHEA     | Brooks, GA      | 5/3  | NICHE  | Des Moines, IA    | 6/8  | VHE    | Modesto, CA      | 7/27 |
| INCH     | Lansing, MI     | 5/4  | MHEA   | Memphis, TN       | 6/8  | OCEAN  | Beaverton, OR    | 8/1  |
| OCHEC    | Okla. City, OK  | 5/4  | SETHSA | Houston, TX       | 6/8  | HEEA   | Atlanta, GA      | 8/3  |
| CHAP     | Harrisburg, PA  | 5/10 | WHO    | Puyallup, WA      | 6/15 | NTHEN  | Plano, TX        | 8/17 |

teachers will create their own stories—often silly ones—that contain embedded errors similar to the ones that the students themselves are likely to make in their writing. The effect is almost magical. Now no longer the chore of “revising” one’s own paper, editing becomes a game of tracking down all the mistakes. If the story is entertaining or humorous, all the better. One program using this teaching approach (*Grammar with a Giggle*) suggests that the story be presented in small chunks—a few sentences a day—so that the student will look forward to the editing practice, wanting to know what happens next. To be effective, however, this method requires solid grammar knowledge and additional prep time, things that many of us lack. Other workbook-based programs offer whole paragraphs or pages at a time, but can sometimes seem like busywork or meaningless copying. Fortunately, Pamela White has produced an almost perfectly balanced program that fits right in between these two differing approaches. (See page 7 for an extensive review.)

Although some teachers do claim success with peer editing, this usually works most effectively in a mixed-grade classroom, where children don’t suffer from the enforced presumption of equality making it “uncool” for someone to be “better” at something than someone else in their own “grade.” If it’s okay to have an older, more advanced student “edit” the work of a younger or less experienced student, then both will benefit, and no hard feelings will ensue. Usually, however, it requires a very skilled teacher to pull off successful peer editing without someone feeling criticized, hurt, or misunderstood by a classmate who didn’t have the experience to offer truly helpful corrections and suggestions. Even then, there’s no control of error for the “editors” themselves; therefore many “mistakes” may be missed and true editing skills not efficiently developed.

In short, editing skills will be most effectively taught by using materials containing embedded errors similar to those the student might make, with content that has some charm or natural appeal to the child, presented in a way that makes it a game rather than a chore or a test.

### Striving for Excellence

The whole idea of “correcting” can itself be problematic. The word “correct” implies wrongness, whereas in writing there can be sentences which are awkward but perfectly legal, as well as usages that are technically “illegal” but very effective. Therefore, we should all carefully consider the purpose of marking on students’ papers before we inadvertently discourage and demotivate them. Thinking back, how many of us looked at all those red marks on the paper we turned in and thought, “I’m so grateful for the time that teacher took to mark this paper... I’m going to study and reflect on every one of these comments so that next time I can do better and improve my grade!” No. Most of us saw all those marks and likely thought, “I’m dumb...I’m stupid...I’m not good at this...I wish I didn’t have

to do it.” It is so easy for us as teachers to get trapped into “ex post facto” teaching, where we take what the student turns in and then, verbally or in writing, tell them everything they should and could have done better. So often the student isn’t really hearing what we’re saying; to them we sound like the adults in the old Charlie Brown TV shows...

Instead, consider Anna Ingham’s motto: “Teach at the point of need.” This means that we must design our lessons based on what the students need to know, when they need to know it, and not give a lesson just because it is on the next page of the workbook, or because it conforms to someone else’s schedule. Textbooks and institutions are the enemies of individualized education. Although we are all forced at one time or another to follow some external curriculum or calendar, virtually every teacher—public, private, and homeschool—will agree that personalized instruction and coaching is almost always more effective than group instruction. “Teach at the point of need” means discovering what the students’ challenges, weaknesses, or misunderstandings are, and then finding or designing activities that will address those problems. Therefore, the first step towards motivating students to do their very best is to keep them motivated to try, and to learn, and to try again. “Ex post facto” teaching very seldom does this.

So what should we mark on a student’s paper? Well, edits and suggestions are useful only if the student will have a chance to use those corrections and ideas to produce a more perfected version of their paper. If we simply mark up a paper, put on a grade, and throw it in a file, we have just wasted our time and lowered the confidence level of the student. If there’s no chance for a rewrite, there’s no need to mark the paper with anything but positive, encouraging comments. But if we do intend for the student to rewrite, then comments, corrections, and edits are helpful...as long as there’s no lecture attached. You see, the difference between a Mom and an Editor, is that the editor will fix up the article for you and hand it back with a smile—no lecture attached. A mom tends to sit you down and explain all the changes, falling back into “ex post facto” mode. But is this necessary? No. When the student recopies or types the changes into his draft, he or she will internalize the corrections as grammar “facts,” and probably won’t learn any more by suffering an explanation of the “reasons” that make it so. The other difference between a Mom and an Editor is that Moms are free; Editors get paid.

One of the Seven Keys of Great Teaching from *A Thomas Jefferson Education* is “Quality, not Conformity.” How can we nurture a striving for quality in students? Although there is no simple answer, the strategies discussed so far will very often help effect such a change. If we can maintain the cooperative attitude of an “editor” rather than the authoritarian position of “instructor”, the child will be much more likely to take ownership of the correction process. Kids should know that every good writer has a good editor (or two or three), and that in the real world, good writers are not always good editors, nor are good proofreaders always good writers. As a writer striving

to produce an excellent story, the student should be encouraged to get editing help; it is, in fact their responsibility to do so. In the real world we work with others, and although independence and individualized mastery is important, the final product is almost always the result of a synergy between people and their talents; in writing, it is a product of cooperation between a writer and his editor. It's okay for students to know this; it is right and proper for them to find themselves an editor and get the help they need to produce the most excellent compositions they can. That's what writers do.

### Grading

Again, we must ask, what is the purpose of grading? Presumably, it is to communicate to the student how well they did in fulfilling the given task, or how well they have learned and can apply the information presented. However, in the institutional world it is more likely used as a way to compare students, and in many cases ends up creating either an unhealthy competition or an unwarranted sense of failure. In addition, this traditional grading structure allows for "laziness," and mediocrity and it's no wonder that a "C" also means "average." That a "C" is a "passing" grade simply reinforces the idea that it is acceptable to *not* learn thirty percent of what you are trying to learn. If we return to the basic principle of what a grade should be—a way to communicate to the student how well they accomplished what they set out to do—then we will realize that our first job is to convey to the student as precisely as possible exactly what is expected.

Thus, rubrics and checklists are critically important, especially in the subjective world of writing, which many consider to be not only a basic skill, but an "art" as well. To be fair, if we are going to grade writing, we should really only give a grade based on one criterion: "Did the student do what he or she was asked to do, and meet all my requirements?" Therefore, in an ideal environment, the only two possible grades one could get on a writing assignment would be "A" (for Accepted) or "N" (for Not Finished Yet). Now, some might object, noting that two students, having written papers of very different quality, might get the same grade of "A." Yes, they could, but who's to say that the student whose paper wasn't as sophisticated or refined didn't work as hard or harder than the student who has a natural aptitude for writing? If you want to use grades to compare one child with another, then give B's, C's and D's. But if you want to motivate a child to do their best, make it possible—not necessarily easy, but possible—for them to always get an A. You will discover that this is far more encouraging, and brings out far more effort than the artificial and ineffective motivation of "competition." This is especially true when teaching writing.

With the structure and style program, we can present excellent composition skills using structural models and stylistic technique checklists. With the right kind of editing help, coaching, and grading, we can teach excellent composition habits. The two are inseparable and indispensable, and as

## An Inspiring Testimonial

### (Enter Some Essay Contests!)

*I know we corresponded last year when my daughter JoAnna won the 6th Grade Daughters of the American Revolution essay contest for the State of Texas, but I wanted to make sure and thank you again. Her essay last year went on to win the South Central Division, which encompasses six states. Although she did not win national, we were absolutely thrilled to have those two levels!*

*This year she has repeated. She has won the 7th grade level and so her essay will move on to the next level. However, we have to wait until April-May to hear on the results there. We'll let you know!*

*The best part this year was that my son Michael who is in 9th grade won the Columbus Essay Contest. For this contest, they combine 9th-12th grade together. So he not only competed against other 9th graders, but all high school grades.*

*We have great hopes for both of their papers! We truly hope that we HAVE to go to Washington D.C. twice this year!*

*Although I'm not as consistent as I should be, the page of the Stylistic Techniques is VERY helpful. And the principles of the keyword outlines is SOOOOOOO good. Thanks for putting it all together.*

*I'm attaching both of their essays for your enjoyment.*

*Blessings,  
Ellen from Texas*

*P.S. I wrote an essay last year for a "women's issues" contest (within DAR) and it ended up being 3rd place Nationally! And I used many of the techniques you have for the children. This program REALLY works. Thanks!*

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Note: If you are interested in finding essay contests, please visit our link page: [www.writing-edu.com/links/contest.php](http://www.writing-edu.com/links/contest.php), or if you know of contests which we could add to our listing, please email us at: [info@writing-edu.com](mailto:info@writing-edu.com). We'd like to build our listing of opportunities for young writers to have their talents acknowledged.



©2005, Todd Wilson (See his stuff at [www.familymanweb.com](http://www.familymanweb.com))

# What About Grammar Indeed? a rebuttal by Robin Findley

I had the privilege of meeting Andrew Pudewa at the MACHE convention in Baltimore, MD. We had been on each other's "radar" because Analytical Grammar had been recommending IEW to our customers and it turns out IEW reps had been recommending Analytical Grammar to theirs! Andrew showed me his Spring 2006 newsletter and said, "You may not be happy with what I wrote about grammar! But please write a rebuttal if you want." I told him I'd give the matter some thought—and here is the result.

## Kids Aren't Getting It!

Andrew bemoans the fact that kids, after studying grammar for years, "are not able to find the verb in their own sentence." I couldn't agree with him more! But that's not, in my judgment, the fault of grammar but with the way in which the grammar is being taught. If a student had studied algebra for four years and couldn't solve a simple equation, that's not algebra's fault; he's not being taught correctly.

First of all, I think most grammar programs start too young. The little guys (grades 1 through 3) have other "fish to fry," such as getting their reading, writing, and vocabulary skills solid. It's fine to discuss initial capitalization and end punctuation, but leave the analytical part of it until they're cognitively ready, which I believe is around 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Grammar is actually a very small body of knowledge. I maintain that I could teach anybody (who will actually listen to me!) everything there is to know about grammar in 17 weeks. It's linear, logical, sequential, and actually quite "math-like" in that it has a beginning and an end.

So I believe you should teach grammar as math has always been taught, because the way we put words together in a sentence is quite systematic, just the way math is. When you teach a child math, you have to sequence the skills in a certain way so that each new concept makes sense with what the child already knows. Also, when you teach math, you build the review in so that the child is using all his skills as he goes forward.

When you teach grammar in this "math-like" way, you can get through it much more quickly and the child understands it at a deeper level, because he understands that it's a system, a logical and integrated holistic body of knowledge, not 47 seemingly unrelated definitions and names.

## It's Taking Too Much Time!

Grammar "workbooks," such as you see on the market everywhere, are designed to take a school year to complete. And, since "kids aren't getting it," they start over every year with the same things they covered the past year.

Since grammar isn't that big a body of knowledge, the workbook writers must "stretch it out." They do this by inserting, from time to time, other language arts skills, like paragraph writing, business letter writing, and dictionary

skills. All this does, in my opinion, is interrupt the child's train of thought and make it more difficult to put that logical system—called grammar—together.

So I advocate teaching grammar in a "season" out of the school year. Sequence the skills carefully (it took me 12 years in the classroom before I got them in the perfect sequence!) and allow the student that "season" to concentrate on putting the system together in his head.

During the "off-seasons" you have time to read books, do writing projects, study vocabulary and/or spelling, read a play, or any one of many Language Arts activities my customers tell me they never used to have time for! But periodically, the student needs to do a "reinforcement activity" to make sure he doesn't forget the skills he learned in his "season."

Stay with this "season" approach, with reinforcement activities in between, until the entire body of knowledge is covered, including punctuation, capitalization, and usage.

## The Bicycle Analogy

Why do children need to know how they talk when, according to Andrew, "They've been speaking English, pretty much perfectly, since the age of six or seven"? It's like making a child listen to a lecture on how you ride a bike, when they already know how to ride a bike. That's a pretty compelling analogy, but I have a problem with it.

Lance Armstrong might argue with me here, but I don't think there's such a thing as riding a bike ELEGANTLY. Once you ride a bike, you ride it. But learning to talk, as far as kids are concerned, means you can communicate pretty effectively with "Yep!" "Nope!" and "Cool!" But we want more than that for our children; we want them to be able to write clearly, using a wide variety of sentence types. To do that, they need to understand how those sentences are put together. That's grammar.

## So What About Grammar and Latin?

Andrew maintains in his article, "It's pretty clear that knowledge of analytical grammar does not make one a good writer (although ignorance can be a handicap)." I would counter that with this observation: just "doing" grammar won't make you a better writer, but KNOWLEDGE of it will! To obtain that knowledge, however, takes the right curriculum.

It's true that many people learned their grammar by studying a foreign language. But learning grammar via foreign language doesn't help with English punctuation or usage. In Spanish, for example, the double negative is perfectly correct. And I don't believe the old guys in the togas punctuated anything! So, in my opinion, a thorough understanding of grammar is an important piece of a good education. But that doesn't mean it should take years of repetition, nor does it mean that grammar should "crowd out" the other important aspects of a good Language Arts program (such as IEW!).

If you're interested in learning more about Analytical Grammar, visit our website:

[www.analyticalgrammar.com](http://www.analyticalgrammar.com)

# Important Notice:

**The IEW Teachers' Conference  
(announced in the last newsletter)  
has been postponed to 2008.**

**However, you can join  
Dr. Webster & Andrew Pudewa  
in Grouard this summer!**

**Blended Sound-Sight in Canada**  
[www.blendedsoundsight.com](http://www.blendedsoundsight.com)

Go to the source! Meet Mrs. Ingham! Learn Dr. Webster's newest ideas on Creative Writing and Essays! It's not unreasonable to consider traveling to Canada this summer for the complete Six-Day Blended Sound-Sight Course. Participants choose to focus on either the Reading Program for primary grade teachers, or the Webster Writing Program for upper elementary and secondary teachers. Take a trip North; you'll never regret it. For specific questions, call Andrew at 800-856-5815; to register, see contact info below:

## **BSS Summer Courses 2007**

### **July 9-14, 2007 + Grouard, Alberta**

Anna Ingham, Shirley George, Bertin Webster,  
Bev & Brian Rempel, Andrew Pudewa & staff  
Northern Lakes College (780)523-6690  
[panasiukl@yourfuture.ab.ca](mailto:panasiukl@yourfuture.ab.ca)

Download a registration form from:  
[www.northernlakescollege.ca/pdf/Blended\\_Sight\\_Sound\\_2007.pdf](http://www.northernlakescollege.ca/pdf/Blended_Sight_Sound_2007.pdf)

### **Aug. 20-24, 2007 + Three Hills, Alberta**

Betty Wiebe & staff  
(403) 443-7925 or [betty@structureandstyle.ca](mailto:betty@structureandstyle.ca)  
[www.structureandstyle.ca](http://www.structureandstyle.ca)

### **Aug. 20-24, 2007 + Kelowna, B.C.**

Doug Sader, Bertin Webster & staff  
Contact: [dcsader@silk.net](mailto:dcsader@silk.net)  
[www.blendedsoundsight.com](http://www.blendedsoundsight.com)

**My personal and sincere apologies** to anyone who was inconvenienced by this second postponement of the IEW Teacher's Conference. My decision to be in Grouard with Dr. Webster & Mrs. Ingham has made it impractical to do both events this year. All efforts will be made to really and truly have a teachers' conference in 2008. If you have already made travel arrangements to San Diego for this next August, please let me know, as I would like to personally apologize to you. I thank you in advance for your understanding of this change, and I promise it won't become an Aesop's variation, "The Guy Who Cried 'Conference' ." --Andrew Pudewa.

Introducing...

## **FIX-IT!**

**Grammar and Editing Made Easy with Classics**  
by Pamela White

One of the great challenges for teachers and homeschooling parents is to find a way to impart the essential points of English grammar to their students in a meaningful (and bearable) way. Countless tears have been shed over grammar workbooks, as students try to internalize unfamiliar and seemingly irrelevant information by sheer force of will. Over the years, many parents and teachers have asked if we offer or recommend a specific grammar program. At last we have found an approach which we can recommend. *Fix-it!* is a very comprehensive program, covering many aspects of grammar, punctuation, and usage, in a way that is not only bearable, but enjoyable for both teacher and students.

*Fix-It!* offers a delightful and effective way to teach grammar and vocabulary and to reinforce understanding of Excellence in Writing style. Each day, the parent or teacher presents a short segment of a story with embedded errors, which the student hunts for and corrects. Rules of grammar and punctuation are taught at the point of need, and thus are immediately relevant to the student. In addition to the game-like challenge of trying to find all the errors, students are motivated by the cumulative unfolding of the story over the course of days and weeks. With four passages to correct each week, for thirty-three weeks, each of the stories included in this program offers a year's worth of learning and enjoyment. Targeting different age groups from third grade through high school, the five stories incorporate multiple levels of difficulty. Easily adapted to the home or to the classroom, *Fix-It!* reinforces what you teach your students through their writing.

## **The Stories**

- ♦ **Tom Sawyer:** Adapted from Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, this abridged and paraphrased version covers the major events of the original story and is divided into chapters with specific objectives. Grades 3-6+
- ♦ **Frog Prince, or Just Desserts:** A humorous remake of the classic fairy tale about a princess who is forced to keep her promise to a frog who befriended her. Includes advanced concepts. Grades 4-8+
- ♦ **The Little Mermaid:** Hans Christian Andersen's beloved tale, abridged and edited for modern grammar but faithful to the original. Includes advanced concepts. Grades 6-9
- ♦ **The King and the Discommodious Pea:** A humorous remake of "The Princess and the Pea," about a king's search for a suitable wife. Grades 7-10+
- ♦ **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight:** An abridged translation of the medieval adventure and morality tale about a knight of the Round Table whose courage and honor are put to the test in unexpected ways. Grades 9-12+

Finally, another IEW Newsletter! We are excited to present the first issue of *Magnum Opus Magazine*, a showcase for homeschool students' best writing. Also you'll find an inspiring story, along with several articles discussing grammar, editing skills, and how to best teach them. Our 2007 schedule is packed, and you can find out where we'll have representatives during this convention season. In addition, we are delighted to announce several new products:

[www.writing-edu.com](http://www.writing-edu.com)

- Updated Seminar Schedules
- Printable Registration & Order Forms
- Detailed and Updated Product Descriptions
- RealAudio of The Phonetic Zoo
- Excellence in Spelling Placement Test
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- Past Newsletter Articles
- Video Seminar Samples
- Online Shopping & More!
- Downloadable Lesson Plans for the SWI and SICC courses!



◀ *Medieval History-Based Writing Lessons* ▶

◀ *Character-Based Writing Lessons* ▶

◀ *FIX-IT! Grammar and Editing Made Easy with Classics* ▶

◀ *Teaching with Games* ▶

◀ *Tricks & Tips for Teaching Through the Nine Units* ▶

Visit [www.MagnumOpusMagazine.com](http://www.MagnumOpusMagazine.com) for more student writing and details about subscribing to the quarterly journal!

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Did you receive an extra newsletter? Do you not want to receive one at all? Help us save paper and postage by reporting such situations. Call toll-free: 800-856-5815 or email: [info@writing-edu.com](mailto:info@writing-edu.com) Thanks!

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