

Andrew Pudewa and Excellent Writing

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It is said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. Flattery, yes, but modeling and walking in the footsteps of masters, both forms of imitation, are also effective tools of instruction. When I was a music major in undergraduate school, I listened to my favorite artist play the classics. My 33-1/3 rpm record albums of Jean-Pierre Rampal playing Bach and Debussy were well worn. The premise was simple: listen to the masters playing the masters, and then learn to play accordingly. (Going from flute major to law school to homeschool momma is another story of sitting at the feet of the ultimate Master—Our Lord!)

Andrew Pudewa believes the art and skills of excellent writing are learned in a similar fashion. Many of us learned to write with a less structured approach, with the emphasis placed on creativity. When we prepare to teach our children, we naturally might take the same approach. I can remember buying writing workbooks from a teacher's store. They were adorable, with cute graphics and borders and story starters like "When I look at a daffodil, I feel . . ."

Given this type of assignment, the child first must think of something to write about. Then he must remember, from somewhere in the recesses of his brain, all the mechanics of writing. Imagine the child struggling with coming up with ideas and then executing the process with little or no guidance. And we wonder why our kids don't write well!

Mr. Pudewa's system gives students both a model and a system; it takes the guesswork out of learning to write. Once the skills are learned, the young writer has his writer's tool kit and is equipped to really write—creatively and well.

In the Institute for Excellence in Writing (IEW) workshops, students are given a piece of text to work with. There are many options to choose from, ranging from Aesop's Fables to the Bible. The writer then learns to take key-note outlines and use the outlines to rewrite the source text in his own words.

The first course is called *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* (TWSS) and covers nine units of instruction designed to teach the teacher. After that, you might choose to take your child through the *Student Writing Intensive* (SWI). With the instruction directed to the students, this series is grade-specific (A for grades 3–5, B for grades 6–8, and C for grades 9–12).

Next, there is a *Student Intensive Continuation Course* (SICC), also offered in three grade levels. This picks up where SWI left off, covering more advanced stylistic techniques. I purchased the *Advanced Communication Series* (ACS) for myself and have benefited from the instruction in public speaking. It also contains an advanced note taking component and instruction in writing a college-level paper. A brand-new product is their

High School Essay Intensive, which is designed to prepare the student to write opinion-based essays, such as those required by the SAT.

The starting point for IEW writing instruction is the source text. This could be text from an encyclopedia or another type of resource. The Institute for Excellence in Writing also offers a variety of text forms for use in your instruction, including a course titled *Bible-Based Writing Lessons*. Other source texts in the areas of history, literature, and science are available. The Institute for Excellence in Writing also offers some great grammar resources, such as *Fix It! Grammar and Editing Made Easy with the Classics*, in which students hunt for and correct errors in actual pieces of literature.

Picture young piano students being coached in proper performance practice for a Mozart concerto. If they have not heard, analyzed, and understood the classical genre, they cannot even come close to a proper interpretation. Similarly, classically trained artists learn their craft by painting like Rembrandt or Renoir. Once technique has been mastered, students can develop their own styles.

To throw a blank canvas or an empty piece of staff paper in front of a student and expect him to compose something of excellence is unrealistic and unnecessary! The art of writing can be taught step by step by imitating good writing and making it your own. This is the logic behind the old-school idea of “copy work.” Even prior to studying composition, children who are allowed to simply copy pieces of worthwhile writing are laying foundational blocks for good writing.

The Institute for Excellence in Writing materials are *not* self-teaching materials. A series of instructional videos essentially teaches you how to teach writing. With gentleness, wit, and wisdom, Mr. Andrew Pudewa demonstrates nine models of writing: note taking, summarizing, summarizing narrative stories, summarizing references and writing reports, writing from pictures, writing reports with multiple sources, creative writing with structure, essays, and critiques. The instruction is specific, not general. In addition to learning these forms of writing, the student learns to make his writing more interesting and colorful with the use of what Mr. Pudewa calls “dress-ups.” This includes specific instruction in the effective use of *-ly* words (adverbs), strong (not overused) verbs, quality adjectives, accurate adverb clauses, and more.

You might wonder, does it stifle a child’s creativity to have such rule-bound writing? To the contrary; if a child does not know what to write or how to write, there can be no creativity. The specific instruction gives life and meaning to creativity, because it gives the muse a platform for expression.

A major question for some homeschooling parents is whether or not their children will learn grammar with this course of study. A study of grammar is sure to put even the most engaged student to sleep! An abstract study of grammar has no meaning for a child. Mr. Pudewa says it’s like lecturing a child on how to ride a bicycle. He doesn’t need to know the physics and mechanics of it; the child just wants to ride the bicycle and be let loose to pedal into the wind.

Therefore, instruction in IEW contextualizes the study of grammar. Mr. Pudewa's courses do it surreptitiously, eliminating the need for boring drill-and-kill grammar workbooks. In one technique, for example, the student learns to use words like *when*, *while*, *where*, and *since*. Does he really need to know that he is writing a subordinate adverbial clause? This information might be of passing interest for the grammar addict, but it is completely irrelevant to the child who is learning to write. Taught in the context of how grammar is *used*, the student will learn to successfully apply grammar skills in his writing.

My son, age ten, is a reluctant writer, perhaps even compo-phobic! The solution for us? When we can, we give him source texts that are highly meaningful to him, such as excerpts from books about *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings*. When he is able to compose a piece about Gandalf, complete with illustrations, the assignment is a source of great interest and great pride.

This might be a way to begin to motivate your child, but what about sustaining that interest? Mr. Pudewa emphasizes the need for an audience. For the young child, hanging an example of his work on the refrigerator might provide enough affirmation. A family newsletter could become a showplace for your family's writers, rather than the typical Christmas brag-fest. The growing writer might enjoy a writing club or class, made easy to administer because of IEW materials! Your student writer also could write articles for church or homeschool newsletters. I know one child who composed an entire website about his current passion: spiders! There are also magazines that solicit the work of young writers. (Do a Google search for "young writers market guides" and you will find a wealth of publication possibilities!) Finally, IEW recently began publishing a magazine of student writing called *Magnum Opus*—a lovely showplace for their prize pieces.

As parents, what is our job? Our job is to provide specific instruction, to be that first enthusiastic audience, to encourage, and to praise, praise, praise! The Institute for Excellence in Writing can equip you to be the writing teacher you wish *you* had been given!

Biographical Information

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Christine Field and her husband, Mark, have graduated two homeschoolers from high school and have two more to go! They live and work in Wheaton, Illinois, where Mark is chief of police and Christine maintains a limited law practice. She is the author of several books, including Homeschooling 101, Homeschooling the Challenging Child, Life Skills for Kids, and Help for the Harried Homeschooler. Christine is a frequent conference speaker, often along with her husband. and is available to speak on a wide variety of

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