

Why Do I Hate Editing?

ISBW S17 Ep10

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SPEAKER

Mur Lafferty

Mur 0:30

It is I Should be Writing number, Season 17, I got my lightbox over here. Season 17 Episode 10. And welcome to the live stream, and welcome to the podcast if you're listening later. I'm streaming to both Twitch and YouTube today, which is why I was a little late because apparently I needed a YouTube thumbnail. And I know YouTube thumbnails are very important. And I did not have time to make a good one. So I made a crappy one and wrote best thumbnail ever underneath. Because hanging a lantern on the fact that you're half assed is legit. Totally legit. But today I wanted to talk about editing because people ask me that in the discord a lot, and it is no secret that I absolutely hate editing. Hate it. But I do want to talk about a couple of other things before I get started. I have been working this week. I'm trying a little bit more structure to my day. And for two days now, I have been writing first thing in the morning. Even yesterday when I had a dental appointment. So I wrote, and then I went to the dentist so I was very proud of myself for that. But I have been trying not to despair because even though I'm proud of myself for writing first thing in the morning, I have, it's taken me a lot longer to edit this piece than I thought it would. So far, it's taken about four hours to edit the thing I thought would take one hour. And so that was a bit frustrating. But I'm still, I mean I got to edit it so luckily they gave me more time than I thought I would need so that's good. So, I'm getting work done. It's getting there. That's a happy thing.

Mur 2:34

Also, I'm still working on how to make the time to do this, but somebody on Twitter suggested a transcription app that I've been testing out. And it's really good. But transcription still can't, you know, figure out punctuation. And while, if you stumble over a word when you're talking, it sounds natural but if you're actually quoted as stumbling or stuttering it sounds like you're either not smart or you've got something to hide instead of just you're talking like most people talk. Just started a transcription freelance job. What a coincidence. Are you free? Not free as in money but we should talk. If you've got any room in your freelance schedule. So yeah, I'm trying to be, I'm trying to be more accessible, but it is while, I mean it is amazing that the app I found because it actually spelled my name right. So, I am looking forward to doing that but I still have to take the time to play the file for my phone to listen to and then edit it. So, that's still slowing me down a little bit. The reason why I'm streaming to YouTube now is because I want this podcast to be on YouTube. But I can't, I don't have the time to edit the video and

upload it. So, that's not where I want to be spending my time, especially now that I find the transcriptions more important than the video. So, these are two very time intensive things to tack on to my podcast that, yeah, I'm gonna need to figure that out. But, um, anyway, so today I'm talking about editing. As I mentioned, I was editing this morning and I really thought that it would take me a couple, you know, an hour for a 20 page script. And granted, the first script needed a little bit more work than I hope the following ones do. On the other hand, because it was the first one I was editing and the first one needed a lot of work it creates ripples through the subsequent scripts. So, people have asked me why I hate editing. My friends, Adam Christopher and Chuck Wendig, they love editing. They hate writing. They think that editing is the time that you really, really make something of your work and you make it shine and it's awesome. And the actual raw rough creation of the story is what is work to them. Whereas, when I'm writing I kind of feel like a kid running down a hill. When it's going well.

Mur 5:48

It's just the, the words come and I just throw them out there and I'm delighted. And it might be rough and it might not be Chariots of Fire. But it's mine and it's fun. When it comes to editing it, I realized that I have to -to continue with the metaphor- clean up my running, my running stride and not run with my arms straight out like I'm flying, and maybe edit out that stumble I made, and make the grass a prettier shade of green. Or, I don't know the metaphor is falling apart here but it's not as fun. But I have to do it. Editing is my ditch digging. Exactly, Katwood. Thank you. I'm making a note here. So, but people are asking me how, if I could go over how to edit. So first I'm going to go over editing your own draft. And, the, when I write I try to make notes of things I want to change. I try not to go back too far. I tell beginning writers never to do that. Never go back and fix page three when you're working on page seven because, I've told the story before my friend who was working in the coffee house I was- I was working at and he would come in with his laptop every night. And when I finally asked him what he was working on he showed me a very, very well written first paragraph. I'm not kidding. It was shocking. It was a really good first paragraph, but I still remember like, a lot of the visuals, but he spent nights, nights and nights on that. So that's why I tell beginning writers. Don't do that. Don't get stuck trying to make page three perfect when page seven isn't done. So I try not to do that either because I like the flow of running downhill with my arms stuck out like a superhero. Actually, you don't see superheroes doing that, do you? I'll go back to the kid metaphor.

Mur 8:11

So the first thing I do is-is take those notes and make them neater. So I can look at them because my handwriting is terrible. And then I'll go through and do a spellcheck and grammar check. And often what that will do is, when I grab, like a really close shot of a paragraph when it's telling me that I misspelled something, I'll, it also gives me a sense of how that, how the story is flowing in that area. So I can make notes there too if I catch something out of place. And it takes a long time for spellcheck to edit a book. But it's important. So I try to do that and it helps me realize when names are misspelled. After that, I, this is well after I've written it. You know, I've written it. I've given myself a little bit of space. I'll go-I'll go through and read it. And I'll make more notes that will help me figure out, spot in consistencies and figure out if a certain place is weak and I can take the notes that I made the first time around and see if they still hold up. I mean there's so many moving pieces and so many story specific things it's hard to describe this but sometimes I'll think, I mean, this is a very, very simple example. And usually, you know, in reality, it would be something more complex but say, I have somebody's shirt as green in chapter four and in chapter seven, they're wearing the same shirt, and it's pink. Then I would make a note saying, realizing that the shirt needs to be pink for whatever reason. So, make the shirt pink now, that's the note I'll write. And usually use Scrivener as note taking, actually. That's what I was using on

my last prose project so it doesn't work, doesn't matter. I keep jostling the desk. I'm sorry. It doesn't matter that my handwriting is terrible, because I make the notes in Scrivener. Yay Scrivener. I am not sponsored by Scrivener. I just use it and love it. So I'll make the notes there and then I'll go through and sometimes I'll be going through and again, very simplistic description, I'll realize no the shirt should have been green the whole time. And then I'll have to make a note to make things better later on.

Mur 10:52

But I'll go through and I won't edit, I'll just make the notes of what I think needs to be fixed. And then I will copy those notes down on another piece of paper as... For some reason, writing analog helps me, even though my handwriting is terrible. If you started, Patreon supporters, if you started getting Postcards from me you'll know my handwriting is wretched. If you've gotten a postcard and you can't read it, it's from me. Then I'll go through and start making the changes, and here's where I get panicky because, as I said earlier, it's a ripple effect. You've got, you change something in you know, as simple as a name. You got to make sure that you catch it every other place, and as was played for a joke in the office, you've got to make sure you don't misspell it everywhere because then search and replace can't find it. If you haven't seen the episode, somebody was writing a movie script and had put their very stupid person in the movie named after somebody at work. And then he did a search and replace but he misspelled the name once. And so, it showed up in the script.

Mur 12:13

So after that, I go through and make sure it, make the changes and hope that I catch everywhere the ripple effect is going to change things. For example, in something, in what I was working on today, I had people visiting two places before they got to their final destination. And I realized to make it more tense, because they really need to get that final destination, they should really only visit one place. And so I needed to make sure that any description I had, any mention I had of that second place, that second scene that I cut out entirely, was either removed, or edited to where another character had just come from that place, so I can reference that place there but not as a place my main characters had visited. And so I had to make sure that all those mentions were either removed or fixed. Which wasn't that hard in a 20 page script, but in a novel it becomes much larger. Because you could have, 'Hey remember when we were back at that place', and somebody reads that in chapter 18 going, 'When did that happen?'. But luckily, this is why self publishing makes me nervous because editors catch that. Editors are very good at catching that. So yeah, I'm always nervous about that, of course, one thing I never, nobody has ever mentioned this, ever. And as I said, it's my best selling book. But there's a chapter in Six Wakes that has no title. And it's a chapter that comes right after a section break so you get the section title and then you turn the page and there's a chapter. And I think in my head I was going, well I've already named this part. So I'm just gonna start writing, whereas every other chapter has a name. Except for this one. I gave it one in the audio book and nobody on, nobody at orbit said anything. But for the print, there's no chapter head. So editors don't catch everything. And that was me and copy editor and main content editor.

Mur 14:54

So then we send it off to the editor who you really really hope will think is perfect. It's never perfect, but instead of fighting directly against the six year old in my head who believes perhaps I can create something perfect. I've decided to work with the six year old in my head. And when I get the edit letter back, I will scan it to see how it is. Which has gotten me in trouble before, I'll say. I will scan it and then let it sit for a day or two. Unfortunately, last time I scanned an edit letter, I took the wrong impression from it and was angry for a day. So there's not the best way of going about things but I'm just saying

that's what I do. I let my six year old get it's pouty time. And then she can have her pouty time and then I go back to work as a professional and address it. So what I do is I read the letter and then I start making notes. Again, it helps me on an analogue basis to take what they've given me and write it down again as a sort of list on a piece of notebook paper. I don't know why, it's just the way I work. So, I can make myself a list of things that need to be fixed. Now sometimes I will go through and mark places in the text that correspond with areas that the editor has mentioned. Sometimes I don't. I think that would be more responsible. And since I'm doing better, a little bit better with productivity right now hopefully I can, I can take the time that's allotted to me and do a careful edit like that, because I think it would be better to read it and go through again what needs to be done and maybe start thinking about ways to fix it.

Mur 17:08

But often then I'll just take those notes, and start going through and editing. And here is actually, I don't like all of that fiddling work up. Here is where it kind of feels like writing again when you're fixing things because if you have to fix things, if you have to fix a lot of things and there's a lot of fresh writing to do. And that's fun. But then you got to make sure that the new writing you do has, fits in with the other parts of the book. Either you've got to put in foreshadowing if it's a major event or you've got to do, just make sure everything's consistent. And so, after you do your edits you need to go through again and make sure that it flows. Here is where you might be getting absolutely sick of these words in this order. So if you have the time, maybe step back. If you have a friend who needs something to read, maybe give it to them and just say, 'I just need to know if it's consistent and it fits'.

Mur 18:22

So then you send it back and hope that they think it's, they think it's perfect enough. Usually they'll come back with like a couple more but a lot fewer, far fewer comments just to get it a little bit closer to what they were wanting. I will say that, I had a very funny moment in *Six Wakes*, where the editor had said.... I don't argue with editors because I think if-if their suggestions are good then I'm eager to take their advice. I don't believe my words are perfect little jewels. Notice I say I hope they found it perfect. I don't think it's perfect. But, you know, if they have an idea to make something better, I'm eager to make it better. But there was one time where I finally pushed back, pushed back and argued, where the editor said, 'This is unclear to me. I don't see how this character would understand this'. And if you've read *Six Wakes* you know that there's some memory hacking stuff going on. Tish, I won't spoil too much for you. Tish says she's reading *Six Wakes* now and can't put it down. First sci-fi mystery or sci-fi anything. Yes, it is sci-fi mystery. I think people see the space and think sci-fi first and mystery second but it's a murder mystery. And I tried to make that scene a little bit clearer and then comments came back again saying, 'I still don't see how if she doesn't remember this, why does she assume she did it?' and I'm like, if I wake up from an alcohol induced blackout and I'm, my hands are burned. And I smell like kerosene. And the house up the street has been burned down, I think I can figure out who did it. Even if I don't remember actually doing it. Tell her to finally write all of that, that scenario in the sidebar because I was, I really thought I had done an okay job at explaining this without going to, you know, hanging that much of a lantern on it, and that was frustrating but really that's like the only time I've pushed back on an edit and that's just...

Mur 21:04

I've been accused by- not accused that's too strong a word- but editors have called my writing too on the nose before, and I tried to be a little bit more subtle. And then, people say they don't understand. Like, which one do you want? Do you want me to be subtle? Do you want me to be on the nose? I,

sometimes I have trouble finding that happy medium. I don't know. But my husband does not hold back his opinion of my work, which I'm grateful for. He's not a jerk. But he's honest with me and so I knew when I asked him if he understood that scene, he would tell me. And he did tell me that he, and he got, that scene was pretty clear to him so I felt better about that. But otherwise the editor was great. I loved working with her. Was very sad when she left orbit, but it was, that was a fine time when I had to push back on an edit. And then, as I said on Tuesday with the lifespan of a novel, edits will come back. Often, like the copy editors edit which will have clarifications or tightening of sentences. Sometimes not tightening sentences. Sometimes copy editors, do not work with what you intend. I've had a lot more problems with copy editors than actual editors who have say over the content of my books. Copy editors wanting to reword sentences or completely rearrange words or something is-is baffling to me. There are many good copy editors out there. I will do a 'not all copy editors' thing but I have had a few they're just baffling. And also some-some copy editors believe that if they don't know what a word is nobody else will know. And so if you use a word that you're familiar with and you're pretty sure people will be familiar with, most of the people reading will be familiar with. Sometimes you'll get back I don't know what this word is, I don't think anybody else is going to know and that's frustrating as well. And this is not meant to be a podcast about copy editors and editors and stuff, but that's how it kind of came out to be. I think that's pretty much it.

Mur 23:30

And then when you get your book, your final book, you will open it up and immediately see a typo, or some mistake that nobody noticed, and that is the way of things. Mary Robinette Kowal, I think one of her first books, the first printing lacked like, the first paragraph. Like, it was just gone. And she was very upset, obviously upset about that and, you know, trying to come up with creative ways to combat this. I think she gave out stick, she-she mailed people stickers, with the paragraph on it. I think she might have given out bookmarks with the paragraph on it I don't remember, but that was. Yeah, that was a pretty bad editing blunder. But yeah, that's pretty much what I have to say about editing.

Mur 24:26

If you want to learn more about me, murverse.com, is how you do so. Yeah, I'm on Twitter at mightymur, Instagram mightymur2, that's a numeral two. That's how you find me. That's how you support me. Also, my books. You know, there's-there's middle grade, there's a Star Wars book, there's a standalone science fiction, there's all sorts of stuff. Yeah, find out all of that at murverse.com and check out my other podcast called Ditch Diggers that I'm going to be recording very shortly with Matt Wallace. Not recording live, but check it out. We talk about the business of writing. It's called Ditch Diggers. And I think that's everything I need to say. Thank you to my Patreon supporters. Thank you to those of you watching live. And thanks to everybody watching later. So I will see you on Monday, is my Ask Me Anything at 12:30EST. And Tuesday will be the next episode of I Should Be Writing at three o'clock Eastern time. Take care.

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