



EDITING YA FICTION 101

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LESSON #3

Smoothing Out Content the YA Way

You make the way of life smooth for those who are right with God.

Isaiah 26:7

Even as you clean up text in any basic copyedit or line edit, it's important to pay special attention to the flow of content in YA material. The YA reader won't put up with hiccups or speed bumps in the narrative, so the storyline and its language need to move along smoothly and seamlessly.

Bible Verses with Brevity

Although the importance of copyright info for Bible verse reprints was discussed in the previous lesson, the reality is that you probably will not encounter much reprinted Scripture in Christian YA fiction. Many Christian publishers are leaning away from overt religious-speak within the context of YA content to avoid being perceived as preachy—and in some cases to distribute material that also appeals to the mainstream market.

Christian YA readers usually appreciate the subtlety of values-based messages in the fictional books they read for pleasure (and there are *many* teen devotionals in the nonfiction market for the young adults who want to access their share of Scripture-driven content). Christian YA fiction embodies Christ-centered values and sometimes includes church-related scenes and other spiritually driven content. But Scripture reprints, if included, are trending toward Bible passages inserted only when they can be carefully dropped into the narrative without feeling forced, and they are often paraphrased, which is perfectly acceptable.

You've likely noticed that Scripture reprints throughout these lessons usually include acronyms to cite appropriate sources (CSB, ESV, NIV, etc.). But let me point out that it's rarely necessary to include Bible citations within the context of Christian YA fiction. Exceptions to this might include Scripture that's reprinted as callouts or in sidebars, and in such instances, *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style* recommends sources be referenced in parentheses.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16 NIV)

But in the narrative portion of a YA fiction manuscript, you should expect to see Bible verses—if even introduced *at all*—placed predominantly in dialogue or through conversational-style narration, in which case the parenthetical references are not required or necessary. I recommend that editors refer to the section titled “Quotations from the Bible” in *CWMS* for standard guidelines on Scripture reprints. Three *CWMS* rules related to reprinting Bible quotations are especially applicable to the tidiness editors strive for in YA fiction, falling under the following subheads in the stylebook as reprinted here (page numbers are in parentheses):

Familiar Phrases (333)

The tendency in past decades has been to over-reference quotations from the Bible, but this tendency should be avoided where appropriate. In fiction and dialogue, it is generally not necessary to annotate a Bible quotation with a parenthetical reference.

Such citation details are distracting to the reader and disruptive to story flow and so, from an editorial standpoint, should not be included in the running text of a YA fiction manuscript. Citing the correct Bible version on the copyright page, often a requirement of the translation’s commercial rights holder, is usually an adequate notation to inform any YA reader who is interested to know which translation is used.

Noting Repeated Changes in Style (334)

The author may wish to change a particular word or words of a given translation throughout an entire manuscript. For instance, an author may want to replace the words *thee*, *thou*, *thy*, and *thine* of the King James Version with *you* and *your*.

The above rule is commonly applied also to issues related to the author’s preference as to gender-specific pronouns, as well as whether or not the author prefers to capitalize pronouns referring to God or Jesus. If you are making consistent changes to verses reprinted from a certain Bible version, *CWMS* recommends including a note in the book’s front matter to inform the reader of any repeated changes to the original translation.

With Ellipses (334)

Introductory words such as *And*, *Or*, *For*, *Therefore*, *But*, *Verily*, and so on may be omitted from a Bible verse without inserting an ellipsis. The reader is probably already aware, without the aid of an ellipsis, that other words precede and follow any given quotation.

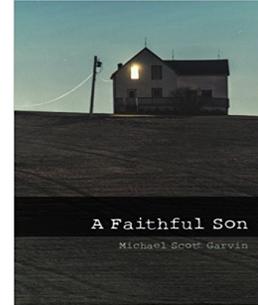
It’s usually ideal in YA fiction to reprint Bible verses concisely as possible, so it’s often preferred and acceptable to include Scripture in an abbreviated format that slightly alters its complete original version. *CWMS* rules do advise using ellipses and brackets when omitting or inserting words from the interior part of Bible verse reprints, but it’s fine (and preferred) to take editorial license in the case of YA fiction. Ellipses and brackets, just like parenthetical Bible references, can trip up the cadence of a good fictional narrative, so they are not necessary as long

as the original intended meaning of the Scripture is intact in the reprint. Following are examples of Scripture used effectively in YA narratives.

A Faithful Son, by Michael Scott Garvin (CreateSpace/2016), seamlessly inserts Scripture in the storytelling, as Matthew 6:26 is mentioned here in dialogue:

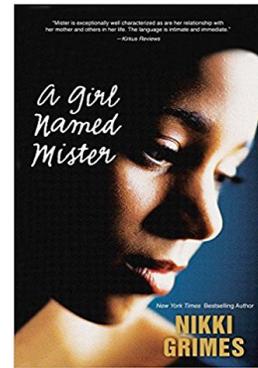
Driving home one afternoon, I asked Momma how I could be certain God loved me.

“Baby, if God has his eye on the littlest sparrow, you can be certain his eye is watching you.” She squeezed my shoulder, smiling like she knew a secret I’d know someday. I believed her every word because Momma didn’t lie. “You’re safe and sound, baby, in the righteous arms of the Holy Ghost.”



Note how eloquently—and without editorial distractions—Matthew 19:26 is paraphrased to lead this piece of narrative prose from *A Girl Named Mister* by Nikki Grimes (Blink/2017):

All things are possible with God.
The truth of it falls on me like rain. I slowly drink it in, then lift my arms, surrendered.
“I am yours, Lord.
Do with me as you will.” He wraps his light around me.

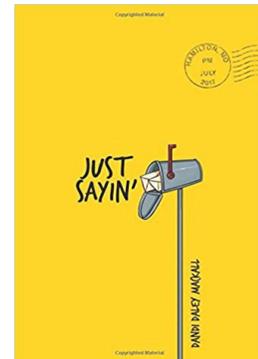


Just Sayin', by Dandi Daley Mackall (Tyndale/2017), which is told in a series of written correspondence between the story’s characters, uses a casual writing style and authentic voice to cleverly convey Scripture. A letter the main character writes to her youth pastor incorporates conversational language to effectively reference Matthew 5:37 and Proverbs 22:6:

A couple of months ago when you were giving a sermon about swearing (but I’m not sure that was what you were really talking about because Nick was sitting next to me, and he kept writing funny notes on the church bulletin), you read a verse that said, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.” Well, they said yes, and I don’t think they should be able to say no now. You’re the boss of the church, aren’t you? So don’t let them get away with this!

Isn’t there something in the Bible about parents taking care of their children? You might be interested to know that my mother has left me in the care of my grandmother, who is way too old to take care of me. “How old is Gram?” you ask. I’m pretty sure Gram was a waitress at the Last Supper.

I’m just sayin’.



Get Still and Be Chill

Before veering from the subject of Bible verses, let's emphasize the helpfulness of prayer and meditation in your professional environment. As you begin any editing job, it's wise to ask for God's guidance in moving through the YA manuscript, choosing any prayer that inspires you. I keep the following Psalm taped next to my desk, and I recite it before I edit. I then ask that He bless the work of my hands, followed by a few minutes of stillness to connect with the Holy Spirit.

*Show me your
ways, Lord,
teach me your
paths.*

*Guide me in your truth
and teach me, for you are
God my Savior,*

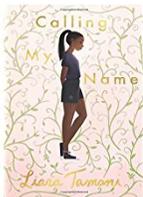
and my hope is in you all day long.

Psalm 25:4–5 (NIV)

Point of View . . . Perfected

The perspective from which a story is narrated is its point of view, and editors need to ensure POV is accurate throughout the manuscript. Sounds simple, right? Not always, since POV in today's YA fiction can be tricky, as shifting and multiple POVs are creating a current trend in books for the teen demographic. Listed here are the standard forms of POV for fiction writing.

1. First-person singular (“I,” “my”)



Sunday morning in March, before God picks up the sun, the Gulf of Mexico is like a ghost. After driving over an hour from Houston to get to the ocean, I can't even see it except for nine diagonal lines cast by the pier's light posts. Even then, I only see the parts that move: tiny waves, twinkling.

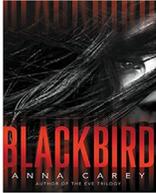
Calling My Name by Liara Tamani (Greenwillow/2017)

2. **First-person plural** (“we,” “us”)



We searched for answers. But the threads we followed led us farther from the space rock. The ploy of the barn worked. It was better than a fort. We grew preoccupied with other play. Our universe returned to revolving around what it had before the drawings were discovered: us.
First We Were IV by Alexandra Sirowy (Simon & Schuster/2017)

3. **Second person** (“you,” “your”)



You don’t hear the kids laughing. They don’t see you there, lying at the end of the tracks, where the tunnel disappears into darkness. It is the vibration that finally wakes you, your eyes fluttering open, the curved ceiling coming into view above. There’s a heavy throbbing at your temples.

Blackbird by Anna Carey (HarperTeen/2015)

4. **Third-person limited** (“s/he,” “him” filtered through a single character’s focus)



Now that he was closer, Karolina saw that the stranger was neither a little boy nor an old man, but somewhere in between. Still, Karolina imagined that if he picked her up, she would stand only a little taller than his hand, which was speckled with the same pink paint that now coated Karolina’s fingers.

The Dollmaker of Krakow by R.M. Romero (Delacorte/2017)

5. **Third-person omniscient** (“s/he,” “they” with knowledge of all characters’ thoughts/actions)



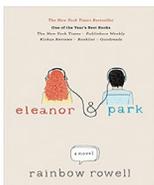
Wren couldn’t wait for all this college stuff to start. She and her roommate— Courtney—had been talking for weeks. Courtney was from Omaha, too. The two of them had already met and gone shopping for dorm-room stuff together. Cath had tagged along and tried not to pout while they picked out posters and matching desk lamps.

Fangirl by Rainbow Rowell (St. Martin’s Griffin/2013)

6. **Shifting POVs** (any combination of the narrations demonstrated above)

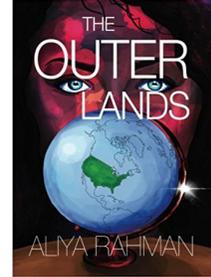


Best. Night. Ever. by multiple authors (Aladdin/2017) is narrated in first-person singular but from the points of view of seven characters, each written by a different author.



Eleanor & Park by Rainbow Rowell (St. Martin’s Griffin/2013) is told

Some authors incorporate shifting tenses in alternating blocks of text. In *The Outer Lands* by Aliya Rahman (CreateSpace/2017), the first-person singular narrative is told predominantly in past tense but applies present tense only during the narrator’s intermittent dream sequences, which are set in italics.



I feel automatic comfort. This is where I’m meant to be—I know it. Softness surrounds me, and a gentle beat throbs against my ear. A beat so familiar, I recognize it immediately. I don’t know why; I just do. I stop flailing and crying almost instantly. I no longer remember what had unsettled me to begin with.

“I think she likes you.” I hear a voice laugh. Though I understand the individual words, I can’t make any sense of their collective meaning.

“I would hope my own daughter likes me.” The person I’m lying against giggles, her voice vibrating through my body, lulling my eyes closed.

“So...what’s her name?” “Annie.”

“Annie!” A voice yelled.

I jolted up, feeling my face and then the tattered blanket on top of me. It was just a dream—another dream that I couldn’t make sense of. But there was something different about this dream—something I couldn’t quite put my finger on.

“Annie, are you awake yet?” my mother’s voice called.

Books told in alternating tenses or from multiple points of view require editors to be alert and have to “shift gears” right along with the shifting perspectives, so be keen on that when editing such books.

Rock-Solid Sentence Structure

The YA reader appreciates steady and seamless cadence in a story, and extraneous content results in drag in the beat of a narrative. Featured below are some editing techniques that effectively tighten sentences for a more captivating story flow.

Whittle While You Work

As a copyeditor or line editor, you can easily trim and tidy YA content simply by chipping away at unnecessary wordiness. Below are some examples of sentences edited to pick up the pace of the narrative by leaving the “meat” but remove the “fat.”

Original sentence: She looked at him and smiled.

Edited sentence: She smiled at him.

Original sentence: I saw a muscle in his jaw twitch.

Edited sentence: A muscle in his jaw twitched.

Original sentence: The sound of her cry made his ears hurt.

Edited sentence: The sound of her cry hurt his ears.

Original sentence: “Hey, dude!” I heard Joe holler as he approached me.

Edited sentence: “Hey, dude!” Joe hollered as he approached me.

Original sentence: I felt Jimmy nudge me, and then he gestured toward the door.

Edited sentence: Jimmy nudged me and gestured toward the door.

Original sentence: When Terrance looked at Janelle, Janelle felt his gaze pierce her like a steel arrowhead.

Edited sentence: Terrance’s gaze pierced Janelle like a steel arrowhead.

Original sentence: “Yeah, that’s what I figured,” she said, thoroughly disappointed.

She spun around on her heels and trudged slowly back inside.

Edited sentence: “Yeah, I figured as much.” Thoroughly disappointed, she trudged back inside.

Original sentence: Noah, who was staring at the person that had just walked in, looked irritated and then let go of my hand. “Your boyfriend is here to see you.”

Edited sentence: Noah, irritated, let go of my hand. “Your boyfriend is here to see you.”

Some authors, especially if inexperienced, might create extraneous text by explaining characters’ insignificant actions, such as turning doorknobs, in trite detail. If content does not support the story or move it forward, it should be eliminated or condensed to eliminate drag and keep up the momentum in the narrative.

Original sentence: The driver held the rear door open for both of them and then climbed into the driver’s compartment and drove the short distance to the house.

Edited sentence: The drive was a short distance to the house.

Also avoid the use of the terms *began to* and *started to* as these are usually unnecessary. This is an example:

Original sentence: The left engine **began to turn** over, and the assembled troopers **started to jog** into the belly of the plane.

Edited sentence: The left engine **turned** over, and the assembled troopers **jogged** into the belly of the plane.

Combat “That” and “There”

That is a word often used unnecessarily, so I recommend deleting it wherever appropriate. Keep in mind, however, that sometimes its inclusion is necessary to support a sentence. What’s the best way to figure out whether to include or exclude the word *that*? Simply remove *that* from any

sentence, and if the phrasing and sentence structure work without it, it can be eliminated. Here is an example:

Original sentence: I reminded the coach **that** the Sugar Grove Shoo-ins have made it to state championships for over fifty years and **that** we remain the best dang team in the frigging county.

Edited sentence: I reminded the coach the Sugar Grove Shoo-ins have made it to state championships for over fifty years and **that** we remain the best dang team in the frigging county.

Take note that I removed the first *that* in the original sentence above since it is unnecessary, but I left the second *that* since the first part of the sentence is dependent on it. Removing the second *that* (as in the example below) would incorrectly turn it into a compound sentence since “we remain the best” is part of what the narrator is explaining to the coach:

Incorrect sentence: I reminded the coach the Sugar Grove Shoo-ins have made it to state championships for over fifty years, and we remain the best dang team in the frigging county.

Similarly, the word *there* is also often not necessary, particularly when it leads a sentence, slowing down the pace of a narrative. This is an example:

Original sentence: **There** is a whirl of rustling and whistling noises outside the house **that** has me in a state of terror.

Edited sentence: A whirl of rustling and whistling noises outside the house has me in a state of terror.

Be Passive Aggressive

Passive statements also should be avoided, so restructure such sentences to be active.

Original sentence: I was greeted by **the smell** of hairspray and perfume—an odd combination. **The thick aerosol mist** that lingered in the air **was lit up by the morning sun** shining through the only window in the room.

Edited sentence: **The smell** of hairspray and perfume—an odd combination—**greeted me**. **The morning sun**, shining through the only window in the room, **lit up the thick aerosol mist** that lingered in the air.

Have You Heard the Word?

When you come across a string of text and you’ve heard that phrase before, it usually means you’re encountering a standard run-of-the-mill cliché or a catchphrase. Or perhaps the author has used a word or phrase—even if clever and original—redundantly throughout the manuscript.

Repetitive content is a big no-no in any work of literature, but this is of extreme importance when editing YA fiction. Make notes to the author if you spot clichéd content or redundancy in language.

Away with the Cliché!

Below are examples of content that comes off as cliché. Each time you come across a clichéd phrase in YA content, add a comment bubble with a note recommending that the author revise. For example, you might insert in a comment bubble, “This phrasing comes off as cliché and has been applied repeatedly throughout the manuscript. Consider reworking for cleverness and originality.”

By the time they are done washing the car, the kids are soaked from head to toe.

It’s so true that laughter is the best medicine.

She broke the ice, easing his discomfort.

He slept like a baby after the movie.

Tears roll down her face as she reads the letter.

The chatter coming from the dining room is music to his ears.

Cindy’s heart skips a beat, and she’s unable to muster a response.

Although he barely slept a wink, Sam was up and about by the crack of dawn.

Be a “No Redundancy” Pundit

Watch for redundancy in words or phrasing. I’ve rarely met a manuscript—even if written by an experienced author—that doesn’t have a few words or phrases the author mindlessly dropped into the narrative over and over (and over and over and over). If you are working on a YA manuscript whose author has overused certain words or phrases, make notes of this in comment bubbles and also in an editorial letter or style sheet if appropriate. This is an example of a note in an editorial letter to point out redundancies to the author:

Throughout your manuscript a few words and phrases are overused, such as “side by side” and “God-fearing,” which I either deleted or marked for rephrasing. Also, some passages, not many, are coming off as cliché, so I marked those as well, with recommendations that you consider rewording for cleverness and originality.

The final lesson in this course features a sample of a complete editorial letter, which can be used as a loose “fill-in-the-blanks” template for editors to customize and revise for each edit job.



LESSON #3 ASSIGNMENTS

To earn a Certificate of Completion you must complete both assignments.

Assignment #1: Bible Briefing

Edit the following pieces of Scripture, based on *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style* guidelines reviewed in this lesson, as they pertain to YA material.

Familiar Phrases

Assuming its manuscript has a Scripture citation on the copyright page, edit the verse in the following block of text to best flow with the narrative in which it's placed:

Shannon decided it was appropriate, since she was in algebra class, to do some Jesus math in her marble notebook. She bit into her pencil eraser and pondered Jesus's mathematical formula for forgiveness. She had it memorized from Bible study: "No, not seven times," Jesus replied, "but seventy times seven!" (Matthew 18:22 NLT) Shannon did the multiplication by hand and nearly gasped. How was she supposed to forgive her dreadful ex-BFF a whopping 539 times?

Noting Repeated Changes in Style

Again assuming a notation as such has been made on the manuscript's copyright page, edit the King James Version of Ruth 2:13 to replace its antiquated pronouns with derivatives of *you* and *your* to make the content more "YA friendly":

Everybody knew Kara was stoked to be playing the part of Ruth in the church play, so it was no surprise when she showed up a half hour early for dress rehearsal. "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord," Kara recited, even though the boy who was playing opposite her as Boaz hadn't arrived. "For that thou has comforted me, and for that thou has spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." Kara delivered her lines, clueless that Bobby Cooper secretly watched her from behind the curtain at stage right.

With[out] Ellipses

Edit the following original NIV Scripture verses simply for the sake of brevity and beat, being sure the original meaning of each remains intact:

Sam read the message on the poster: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* A surge of what

felt like an electrical jolt of certainty coursed from his chest to his head, and in a flash he was energized with eyes-on-the-prize stamina.

Diversius was treated with extreme reverence as he was honorably inducted into the knighthood. He bowed before the royal court, and the minister of knights began the words of induction from the ancient holy texts. “Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God.” Diversius glanced at the vacant heavy-metal suit that awaited him.

Kirk is embarrassed to admit it even to himself, but he was one of those neighborhood bullies who gave smaller kids the verbal smack-down on the playground. Now he always thinks of that line in the Bible that says, “...the kindness...of...our Savior appeared.” It reminds him that hate’s toxins can be eradicated in every decision to be kinder.

Assignment #2: Trim, Tidy, and Tighten

Edit the following lines of text the YA way . . .

1. Chelsea sat next to her father on the faded brown-plaid couch. She wanted to say something to lighten the mood, but she can’t really think of anything meaningful.
2. Dahlia turned away from the two boys and back to Therese and asked, “What are you doing?”
3. The wrestling match was intense from the start. As I watched I saw that already his opponent had him in a half nelson.
4. Brad took a chair and went to the rear of the assembly and sat down against the wall to the right.
5. The kids began to thump tables to keep time with the music. The beat started to quicken, and the singing voices picked up speed along with it.
6. She sometimes worries that she’ll spaz under the pressure of all the extracurricular activities that she’s involved in.
7. There were almost a hundred people in attendance for this meeting—the largest family gathering in many years.
8. The cadets started stripping off their shoes. Three went into the coach and came out with armfuls of gear, and then they were replaced by another trio.
9. Sita squared her shoulders and prepared to open the door and blast Ben for his rudeness in disturbing her evening. Opening the door, she snapped, “What is it?”

10. It was just a dream—another dream that I couldn't make sense of. But there was something different about this dream—something I couldn't quite put my finger on.