



EDITING YA FICTION 101

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LESSON #4

Rounding Out a Realistic YA Stage

The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.

John 6:29

Just as the YA audience demands smooth cadence in its narratives, so does this readership expect content that is realistic, authentic, and believable. As a copyeditor or line editor, you can—and should when necessary—make minor text tweaks or suggestions to the author as related to voice, settings, scenes, characterization, and dialogue.

Because a lighter touch to the manuscript is expected, a copyeditor or line editor should not make major revisions (remember the “four-line rule” from the previous lesson?). But as a professional editor, you may appropriately point out glaring issues in a manuscript by making notes to the author.

Editorial Letter or Style Sheet?

Aside from the comments you’ll likely insert into the YA manuscript as you edit, it’s usually necessary to also draft a separate document—an editorial letter or style sheet—to address any major or ongoing issues you’ve encountered during the editing process.

Copyedit = style sheet

Typically, a detailed style sheet is often necessary when completing a copyediting job. Know, however, that if you’ve copyedited a YA manuscript and believe an editorial letter is also needed to fully communicate any issues to the author, by all means, draft a letter.

The style sheet should address any *style inconsistencies* you spotted, along with your suggestions on how to fix those, as well as any *style deviations* from standard stylebooks to which you’ve agreed to conform, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and the reasoning behind those (such as author preference). For example, you might note that an author’s preference is to incorporate “okay” rather than “OK” throughout his or her manuscript, and so you might insert an explanation of this into the style sheet:

Your manuscript sometimes applies “OK” and other times “okay,” and *CMOS* guidelines indicate that both are acceptable. However, for the sake of editorial consistency, I edited to apply the latter “okay” throughout your manuscript. If you prefer “OK,” you can reject my changes in those instances or do a search-and-replace to the document.

Consistency in treatment of text is always more important than conforming to any one style guide. As a reference, I am including at the end of this lesson a sample style sheet.

Line edit = editorial letter

An editorial letter is customarily drafted to accompany a line edit, to detail any ongoing issues you’ve identified during the editing process. The editorial letter should address a general overview and critique of standard elements of a narrative, such as *point of view*, *plot flow*, *tone of voice*, *characterization*, and *dialogue*.

If you’ve come across issues related also to *style*, *grammar*, and *punctuation*, address these within the editorial letter, or create a separate style sheet to accompany the letter. I’ve included at the end of this lesson a sample editorial letter (“Sample Editorial Letter”), which you can use as a chassis for drafting your letters to authors.

Authentic Tone of Voice

I cannot stress enough the importance of authenticity in language as it is presented in fiction written for a YA demographic. While many different writing styles are effective in YA fiction—some very casual and conversational, others more formal or traditional—as noted in previous lessons, it’s crucial that the tone in a fictional narrative wholly connects with the YA reader. That having been said, copyediting and line editing require a light hand as compared with a macro-level edit.

Often, an author’s awkward or clunky writing voice is easily smoothed out with consistent tidying of text as instructed in the previous lesson, so strive to focus on tightening too-loose content. The line below, for example, is spiffed up when extraneous wording is eliminated and the fragment is pulled into a complete sentence:

Original sentence: Once I made it to the concert venue, it was just as I had expected it to be. Packed!

Edited sentence: The concert venue was just as I had expected—packed!

Avoiding the Annoying Pause

Similarly, there is no need to insert unnecessary commentary about characters' pausing, as this causes the YA reader's thought flow to pause in tandem with the story's stilted unfolding, which greatly disrupts the steady beat of a narrative. Sentences such as the ones below, for instance, should be revised to keep the story in motion:

Original sentence: Alexis paused to debate her plans for the night, wondering if Jasper was ready to learn her secret.

Edited sentence: Alexis debated her plans for the night, wondering if Jasper was ready to learn her secret.

Original sentence: She paused for a few seconds and then gazed at Ryan, with her captivating grin. "You should come with me."

Edited sentence: She gazed at Ryan, with her captivating grin. "You should come with me."

Original sentence: Kara paused to think of a response. She needed more time to process this new turn of events. Peyton coming for a visit at this time was unexpected.

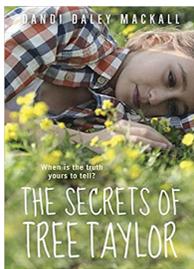
Edited sentence: Kara processed this new turn of events. Peyton coming for a visit at this time was unexpected.

Original sentence: Stewart looked at Grant and paused for a minute, reflecting on the last few hours. He leaned back in his chair, waiting for a response.

Edited sentence: Stewart looked at Grant and reflected on the last few hours. He leaned back in his chair, waiting for a response.

It's Not Right to Be Trite

Also, advise YA authors to avoid all variations of phrases that might be considered trite or clichéd, such as "raised his eyebrows," "the finishing touches," "stars were twinkling," "in spite of himself," "ran her fingers through her hair," "clenched teeth," "lucky for her," "gazed at the sky," "nodded in agreement," and "beautiful blue eyes," which are unoriginal and fall flat.

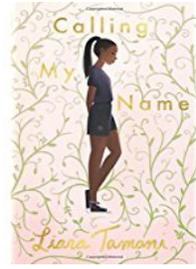


Author Dandi Daley Mackall is a reigning queen of authentically voiced YA content, as demonstrated here in this excerpt from her novel *The Secrets of Tree Taylor* (Yearling/2015):

The morning the gun went off, I was thinking about Tolstoy and the Beatles, and maybe, if I'm being honest here, a little about Ray Miller and how his eyes were perfect little pieces of sky.

In *Calling My Name* (Greenwillow/2017), author Liara Tamani opens her YA novel with prose-like content that isn't flowery or long-winded but incorporates a swift rhythmic quality:

There's something moving inside the walls of my body. It's tiptoeing across the high arches of my feet, break-dancing on my kneecaps, running figure eights around my hips as if they're orange cones at recess, skipping up my sides, and climbing up to my shoulders' peaks before swinging across my chest, back and forth, to a steady beat.



Note that in the above passage, had I been the editor on that manuscript, I would have further edited the lead sentence as such:

Original sentence: There's something moving inside the walls of my body.

Edited sentence: Something is moving inside the walls of my body.

Realistic Settings and Scenes

I always tell authors to use their words to paint vivid pictures of detailed settings and scenery. The YA audience appreciates content that is enriched with specific elements, such as type of décor, makes and models of vehicles, hairstyles and other fashion trends, titles of streaming songs, and so on.

As a copyeditor or line editor, you do not need to thoroughly overhaul content with details, but if you spot areas where specifics can easily be dropped into the narrative, it's helpful to make suggestions to the author. Take this line, for example, from *Calling My Name*, in which the main character is studying herself in a bathroom mirror:

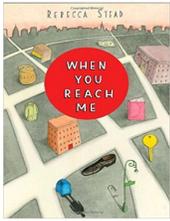
I lift my faded Snoopy nightgown above my breasts—same flat chest—and notice my breath raising my brown skin.

The simple addition of “faded Snoopy” turns an average nightgown into something much more visual and relatable to the YA reader. Likewise, a plain wallet becomes pink and vibrant with the insertion of “Hello Kitty” in this line from *American Panda* by Gloria Chao (Simon Pulse/2018):

After Xing waved my Hello Kitty wallet away and paid for both of us, we strolled through the introductory hallway in silence, reading about the discovery of Qin Shi Huang's tomb.



Note that authors should, however, be mindful when inserting trademarks and brand names, which should be checked on a case-by-case basis. It's typically fine to insert product names for their descriptive quality, but avoid bashing any products in print. Also, see the chapter titled “Brand Names and Trademarks” in *CMOS*.



Including a modifying clause in the following passage, from *When You Reach Me* by Rebecca Stead (Yearling/2009), adds punch to the rote action of opening a door—and an editor could easily add even more layers of imagery by suggesting adjectives to describe the mother’s heels and the tile floor:

Mom unlocked the lobby door, which is iron and glass and must weigh three hundred pounds, and she pushed hard to swing it open, her heels slipping on the tile floor.

In the opening scene of *Best. Night. Ever.* (Simon & Schuster/2017), the author draws the reader in by detailing familiar scents:

Usually Lynnfield Middle School’s gym smells like sweaty socks and armpits.

But tonight everything is different.

Tonight, the gym smells like perfume, hairspray, and the pizza that everyone devoured right away. And instead of getting pelted in the face during a vicious game of dodgeball or doing a million jumping jacks, my friends and I are about to make history when we perform our band’s hit song, “Hear Us Roar.”



A Note about Song Lyrics

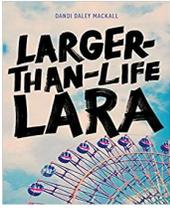
While familiar song lyrics in a YA narrative might indeed add an air of authenticity to some scenes, the music industry typically maintains tight copyrights on its intellectual properties. “Fair use” does not apply to songs, so reprint permission from the copyright holder is likely required if an author wishes to reprint more than a line or so of lyrics.

Even when appropriately requested, permission is *not* always granted, and if it is, this often comes at a monetary cost that might run into the thousands of dollars. I edited a book by an author who is the subject—by name—of a Beatles song, and even she was not able to legally reprint those lyrics in her memoir due to challenges in obtaining permission.

Always advise the author to thoroughly research the copyright status of a song’s lyrics—and the same goes for poetry reprints. This does not, of course apply, to music in the public domain, such as many traditional hymns that are more than one hundred years in print. It’s also fine to mention a song title without the lyrics: “Savannah felt the breakup blues as she hummed to the tune of Taylor Swift’s ‘Back to December.’”

Strong Characterization

A strong cast of interesting and believable characters is crucial to a good YA narrative. The YA reader expects characters that are very realistic and relatable. Of course, again, as a copyeditor or line editor, your hands are somewhat tied as far as providing lengthy input related to well-developed characterization, but consider some key elements as you move through the manuscript and get to know the story’s cast.



This isn't about me. This story, I mean. So already you got a reason to hang it up.

At least that's what Mrs. Smith, my teacher, says. She teaches fourth graders in Paris, Missouri, how to write stories. But I think she'd about a hundred million more times rather be in Paris, France, writing her own stories.

So anyways, she says you got to start with a character when you start your story.

Larger-than-Life Lara by Dandi Daley Mackall (Tyndale/2016)

What's in a Name?

An issue I've come across on more than one occasion is authors giving their characters names that are too similar in pronunciation. For example, I edited a YA fantasy novel that had the main character called Flotzi and another named Florio. Because this resulted in a tendency for the reader to confuse the two, I recommended that the author change the name of one of those characters.

I've also seen narratives that use first and last names interchangeably to identify characters, and this often presents problems to readers in sorting out characters' identities. Similarly, some manuscripts feature characters with nicknames or pseudonyms. Unless an alternate name is somehow relevant to the story's plot (perhaps a spy character who must sometimes be referred to by an alias), it's advisable to refer to each character by predominantly one moniker throughout the narrative. This is a sample comment in an editorial letter to point out such an issue to the author:

All of your characters are terrific, but there is a problem in that many of their names are so similar. Shu, Zhu, Xiu, and Xiulan are far too much alike, particularly for the US reader who is not familiar with Chinese names. But even George, Jack, John, and Ron are close enough in alliteration that it makes for much confusion—and two different characters are named John. Please consider changing characters' names to better distinguish them from one another.

What's in a Face?

It's important also that the reader is able to mindfully develop a clear picture of the physical appearances of characters. Especially in YA fiction, it's helpful to have detailed references to facial features, body types, hair colors and textures, clothing styles, shoes, makeup, and so on. And in an age when diversity is now so deeply appreciated, it is ideal also to have several multicultural characters in a YA book. If, after reading a YA manuscript, you feel characters' physical appearances need to be better defined or more diverse, relay this in a comment such as this one in an editorial letter to the author:

Your characters are, for the most part, likable, vulnerable, and realistic. The reader does not, however, get a clear sense of the physical appearance of many of your characters. Is neighbor Marge elderly? Is she frumpy? Is she frail? Is she robust? Are the twin brothers—Lenny and Frank—clones of each other, or does each have a unique look? I suggest you insert more physical characteristics, but be

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aware that this should be done artfully so descriptive content does not come off as forced or contrived.

What's in the Pace?

Also, be certain that characters are introduced at an effective pace. I've seen YA manuscripts that drop characters into the narrative by name, even though those characters have not yet been effectively introduced. If at any time, as you read through the manuscript, you find that you are not able to follow "who's who" of characters, this is a major problem the author needs to address:

I experienced some confusion in early chapters as far as getting acquainted with the main characters and their many extended family members. I eventually caught on to the familial relations as I moved through later chapters, but I recommend you rework to better describe each character as he or she is introduced to the reader.

Effective Dialogue

Great dialogue in YA fiction not only drives the story but also is a terrific avenue for illustrating and strengthening characters' personalities and relationships. It's important, however, that dialogue keeps up a seamless pace within the main body of the narrative. It's often fine and effective to have frequent verbal exchanges between characters, but note that the dialogue below fails to buoy the narrative, as characters awkwardly ask questions to prod the conversation along, resulting in redundancy and drag:

The captain was stern as he addressed his crew. "Mates, we need to wise up."
"What do you mean 'wise up'?" one crewman questioned.

"I mean exactly what I just said—we need to wise up. I might have overlooked Skipper's foolish move had he been victorious, but it was an unnecessary risk."

"All right," asked another crewmember, "how do we get wiser?" "It's time to get strategic," said the captain.

The above string of dialogue needs to be condensed for better pacing. It's much punchier when edited to simply run in this way:

The captain was stern as he addressed his crew. "Mates, we need to wise up. I might have overlooked Skipper's foolish move had he been victorious, but it was an unnecessary risk. It's time to get strategic."

Buh-bye, Unnecessary Identifiers

"He said/she said" identifiers, which attribute pieces of dialogue to particular characters, are not always necessary in dialogue exchanges. If the YA reader is familiar enough with the characters and how the dialogue fits into the storyline, identifiers can easily be eliminated to maintain the rhythm of a narrative.

This string of dialogue between two female characters, from *The Last Summer (of You & Me)* by Ann Brashares (Riverhead/2007), keeps up better cadence since “she said” is not inserted throughout:

“I wonder if the Podys will enter,” Alice mused as they headed east, along the edge of the surf.

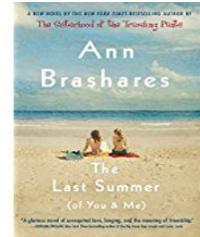
“They suck,” Riley said, galloping lightly along. She would habitually run and circle and weave all around Alice, who tended to walk in a straight line.

“They don’t suck.” “Yeah, they do.” “Well, they beat us.” “Unfairly.”

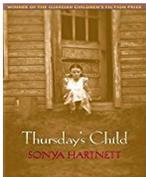
“Jim Brobard sucks.” “That’s true.”

“He’s the one who kicked down Barnacle Tower.” “You don’t know it was him.”

“Yes, I do.” Alice leaned down and picked up a piece of horseshoe crab’s shell and examined it. “Do you want it?” she asked. It was a vestige from past walks when they used to help each other with their collections.



One good way to avoid too many clunky identifiers—and still maintain clarity as to which character has the floor—is to insert characters’ names into the dialogue, as in this passage, which is excerpted from *Thursday’s Child* by Sonya Hartnett (Candlewick/2003):



I saw Da come out of the house and trudge along the path that led to where I was sitting and I tensed because I thought I might be in for another whacking, making it my third for the day, and sure enough he said to me, “Did you call that baby ugly?”

“No, Da, I never did.”

“Harper. Are you telling lies again?” “No, Da!”

He squinted at me. “That baby,” he said. “He’s got a pointy head.” I bit my lip and gazed at him.

“He’s not near as bad as you were, though, the day that you were born. You were the scariest thing I ever clapped eyes on. Face like a dropped pie.”

“Da!” I wriggled with delight.

DOs and DON'Ts of Good YA Dialogue

Here is a roundup of several other elements to keep in mind when editing fictional dialogue in a YA manuscript.

DO suggest that the author use text messaging and e-mail exchanges to relay dialogue wherever that might be appropriate since these are very relatable means of communication for the YA audience (see example below).

DON'T let dialogue lead off with too many interjections such as “oh” and “well” since they rarely do anything to establish personality or emotion, especially if spoken by many different characters.

DO vary tones of voice and vocabulary when different characters are speaking since dialogue needs to be conducive to each character’s personality.

DON’T use dialogue to repeat content the reader already knows. A character doesn’t have to explain events or decisions in detail to other characters when the reader is already aware of this information, so inserting it in dialogue would be redundant.

DO incorporate a lot of slang and contractions (“I’ll,” “that’s”) in dialogue if appropriate since casual language typically comes off as much more realistic and authentic to a YA audience.

DON’T start pieces of dialogue with “I think,” which is rarely necessary, and instead just launch into the character’s statement:

~~“I think~~ I’m gonna pass on the appetizers and go straight for dessert, but thanks anyway.”

The Digital Age

As mentioned above, many YA authors incorporate digital communication as a means of effectively inserting authentic dialogue in their manuscripts, and here is an example from *Winnie the Horse Gentler: Wild Thing* by Dandi Daley Mackall (Tyndale/2002), but note that it is dated in its “you’ve got mail” reference:

The mailbox flag symbol popped up: *You’ve got mail!* It was for me from Hawk. I felt as glad to hear from Hawk as if the message were coming from my best friend.

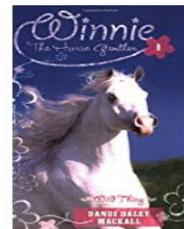
Winnie,
My horse is doing fine. I thought I’d write to see how you’re doing. How’s that Arabian?
—Hawk

Something opened inside me, and I started typing as fast as I could. I told Hawk about losing my temper and about losing my job.

I have to make a lot of money fast! I have to earn enough to buy Wild Thing!
—Winnie

I hit Send and waited for the reply in new mail. It didn’t take long.

You never want to stamp a book with an “expiration date,” so keep in mind when inserting references to technology that the tech universe is ever-evolving.



* * *

LESSON #4 ASSIGNMENTS

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

Assignment #1

1. Edit the following passage from the above example in *Winnie the Horse Gentler: Wild Thing* to give it a steadier beat:

Something opened inside me, and I started typing as fast as I could. I told Hawk about losing my temper and about losing my job.

2. Edit the following sentence to make it tighter:

One day while reading Scripture, I noticed something I had never noticed before and began to ponder it.

3. Edit this passage for better flow:

“Jeremy was on the East Coast when the jewels were snatched.” Zoe paused, as she hadn’t really thought about this subject until now.

4. Insert suggested adjectives or descriptive nouns to further enrich the following line from *When You Reach Me*:

Mom unlocked the lobby door, which is iron and glass and must weigh three hundred pounds, and she pushed hard to swing it open, her heels slipping on the tile floor.

5. Edit the following pieces of dialogue for brevity and beat:

Drake said, “I think if Ellie were to see this posse of princesses, she would want to top all their heads with tiaras.”

“Yes, well, I will be speaking with the other freshmen shortly,” Principal Nicholson said. “OK, eight demerits for being an idiot. You have two demerits left,” the principal warned. “That is all the chance I will give you. Dismissed.”

“Good morning,” Adam said to Molly, unzipping his hoodie. “Wanna get coffee with me?”

Assignment #2: Away with the Cliché, Take Two

In the following sample sentences, highlight the fragments of text that would qualify for this note in a comment bubble to the author: “This phrasing comes off as cliché; please consider reworking to eliminate the clichéd terminology.”

My mother’s unusual interests were the bane of my existence.

Household staffers waited on them hand and foot with expensive food and drink. She had been swept off her feet, in true Hollywood-style.

My father encouraged me to pitch in my two cents.

But through all the pomp and circumstance, the girls could not get out of their heads the blinding fact that they would soon meet Bono.

During our free time, we teenagers were often left to our own devices.

Once the caterer showed up, we were able to indulge ourselves to our hearts’ content.

We marched along in procession with several thousand others, holding our small, lit candles and singing “We Shall Overcome” at the top of our lungs.

We stayed in a tired old country estate set amidst rolling hills, a soft patchwork of varying shades of green that stretched for as far as the eye could see.

Bradley was the real McCoy, and I felt enticed.

I had wanted so badly to turn over a new leaf, but old habits got in the way. I decided to change the direction of my life, as I was truly shaken to my core. I would clean up my act and dedicate my life to God.

[SAMPLE] EDITORIAL LETTER (LINE EDITING)

Book Title
By [Author's Name]

Thank you for the opportunity to edit your manuscript. This editorial letter covers high-level content concerns for you to consider during the revisions process or in the course of subsequent drafts. I'll also point out strengths that can be leveraged for successful placement with a publisher or literary agency. In addition to this letter, I've included comments throughout your manuscript as part of the tracked changes. I might repeat some of those issues here as they pertain to your manuscript as a whole.

I follow *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)*, 16th edition, for grammar, punctuation, and style guidelines, and *Merriam-Webster (M-W)* for spellings and hyphenations. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is a comprehensive writing style guide that is widely used throughout the book publishing industry, and *Merriam-Webster* is the largest, most comprehensive American dictionary.

Because your YA manuscript is faith-based, I also referred to guidelines as outlined in *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style (CWMS)*.

OVERVIEW

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your manuscript, as it is an engaging story that is very well written. The first thing I did to your manuscript was turn off the "track changes" feature before fixing the many double spaces between sentences, which should be single-spaced. For the most part, I edited only to tighten up the beat and cadence of your narrative, condensing too-long sentences into more digestible pieces.

I especially love your use of simile throughout (*She expressed enthusiasm like a child with a good report card*, is just one really good example of many), and you do a wonderful job of painting visual scenes for the reader. Your application of vocabulary is also quite good, but I caution that you should try to avoid using the same words more than once, particularly those that aren't so common (*glower, slake, titian, alacrity, spadework*, and so on) since they tend to "pop" from the manuscript and are glaring when overused.

Your manuscript was in very tight shape when I received it, but I did find it contained a lot of extraneous content that resulted in drag in the beat of your narrative. I specialize in creating content for the YA demographic, so I know that this particular audience appreciates seamless cadence in a story. Note that your word count is considerably shorter after my edit, but please do not be alarmed. I did not remove any large blocks of text but simply chipped away bit by bit at unnecessary wordiness to pick up the pace, leaving the "meat" but removing the "fat." Here is an example:

Original Sentence: "Yeah, that's what I thought," I said, thoroughly disappointed. I spun around and trudged slowly back inside.

Revised Sentence: "Yeah, that's what I thought." Thoroughly disappointed, I trudged back inside.

STRUCTURE/PLOT FLOW

Your story is structured chronologically, which flows quite well. However, because the reader is never given a sense of what era it is, there's a sketchy perception of how much time has passed. Even though you provide some intermittent dates and locations with some of your chapter headings, I found myself having to get my bearings as far as settings in some chapters. I recommend that you include dates and locations consistently on all chapters, and I also suggest that you insert some content that helps place the reader in the appropriate era. For example, if a scene takes place in an early 1980s school environment, describe smoke seeping from the teachers' lounge and female school administrators wearing "power suits" with sneakers. You could provide other elements, such as the TV shows the boys liked to watch, that help give the reader a feel for the time periods, including hairstyles or makes and models of vehicles. Even Jasmine's parents seem to be ageless, even though the story spans across two decades. I never get the sense when I meet them that they are a young couple, and there's no mention of their appearance changing in later chapters, although twenty years have passed in the meantime.

POINT OF VIEW

You swing from first person to second person in the main body of your narrative, and I smoothed this out so it's predominantly told from a first-person perspective since it's awkward and unnecessary to address the reader in the narrative. I'll point out that your third-person introduction needs to be scaled down considerably. It is far too long of an intro. Also your main character, Jasmine, is rarely mentioned by name beyond the introduction. This results in a disconnect between Jasmine who is the character your reader meets in the introduction and Jasmine the narrator of your story—this is particularly problematic due to the shift in POV from a third-person intro to first-person narrative.

CHARACTERIZATION

You have a great mixed-bag cast of characters. Those who are supposed to be liked are, indeed, likable. And those who are made to antagonize are as loathsome as you intend them to be. The underlying theme of protagonists taking risks to follow their personal truths is a good one, and this is very artfully conveyed.

Many of the characters' names, however, are too similar and therefore cause confusion. I frequently got disoriented in the story simply because of names that were too much alike—Jasmine, Jason (aka Jay), and Jake (aka Jazz); Chloe and Celia; and Anna and Dianna. Please consider changing some of the characters' names for clarity.

Note that Jake's character could be better developed. I never quite understand Jasmine's reasons for being so turned off by him, so it might help to create a history between the two. She throws coffee on him without ever having any clear evidence that he's responsible for the assault—and even if she were to have proof, her behavior seems inappropriate in that it stoops to a similar level rather than rising above in grace. I don't mind seeing characters slip into unsavory behavior, but I always prefer to see these issues resolved before the story ends. Jasmine's feelings toward Jake seem unfounded, judgmental, and unforgiving, so at what point does she take a look at her own actions toward him? Why is she unable to establish an amicable

relationship with this boy before it gets to this extreme? Why does she find him so repulsive, and does anyone have the right to label another? Be careful, when expanding on the dynamics of any relationship in the story, that main character Jasmine is not pointing fingers but instead becoming introspective.

TONE AND STYLE

Please avoid use of clichés (*her heart jumping out of her chest*, for example). There are many throughout your manuscript, and I marked each in a comment bubble. Pay close attention to those, and challenge yourself as an author to shift those into phrasing that is more clever and original in its wording. Your writing is very smooth and clean, but to stand out as an author is to showcase a unique writing style.

I also picked up on many patterns of redundancy in word choices. I smoothed out quite a lot of those, but I recommend that you go through and revise even further. The following words and phrases, as well as variations of such, are overused throughout your manuscript: “jolted,” “shrugged,” “smirked,” “sighed,” “scowl/scowling,” “managed to,” “all of a sudden/suddenly,” “furrowed/raised eyebrows,” “sheepishly,” “contorted,” “tugged,” “turned/turning away,” “ran fingers through hair,” “rolled eyes,” “eyes widened/widening,” “balled fists,” “stomach churned/churning,” “eyes squinted/squinting,” “teeth clenched/clenching,” “tilted his/her head,” “crossed arms,” “lips pursed,” “for some reason,” “biting his/her lip,” “rubbed/rubbing chin,” “to say the least,” “couldn’t help but,” “it was then that,” “soon realized/didn’t take long to realize,” “behind me/us,” “I guess,” “I mean,” “sure enough,” “you know.”

Be aware also of inert content that does not drive or buoy the story but instead weighs it down. I deleted many of those, as they were overused and also not at all effective in carrying the narrative along. These are some examples:

He looked at me, waiting for a response. I turned to face him, and he smiled back. I smiled at her and sighed.

That being said, most of the editing I did to your manuscript was simply tidying and compacting content for better flow and tighter cadence. Keep in mind that some details are best left out of a story, as you do not need to inform the reader of every door that is opened and shut, or explain that a character turns toward another every time he or she is addressing someone in dialogue.

DIALOGUE

You do a great job of incorporating dialogue to drive the story, as well as to illustrate your characters’ personalities and relationships. In a similar vein as mentioned above, try to avoid repetitive words and phrasing. During dialogue exchanges, all of your characters were constantly “shrugging,” “nodding,” “smiling,” and “turning.” It is unnecessary to map out every trite detail of characters’ movements and exchanges.

You asked if dialogue is easy to follow without the repeated insertion of “he said” or “she said.” Yes, indeed, your dialogue is effective without those insertions. I tightened up some of the dialogue in places where the conversation was not driving or buoying the story.

I really like the text-messaging sequences, since they break up running copy and add a very relatable element for the YA reader. They’re a great way to insert quick, punchy dialogue. I did not make grammar or punctuation corrections to those so they come off as authentic. I did, however, change the formatting in that I indented them as blocks of text and also knocked the font size down by one point. I think you’ll agree that this works much better in that they now stand out and are easier to follow. Some of your text messages have dates, while others do not. Even if a text message is sent that day in your story, I recommend formatting consistently throughout.

GRAMMAR

Grammatical errors are not consistent in your manuscript, but there was a glaring issue related to punctuation in that there is an overuse of semicolons and commas throughout the document. I removed almost all of them as they are unnecessary and tend to trip up the flow of the narrative. Here is an example of an unnecessary semicolon:

Original Sentence: “Jasmine, it’s a pleasure; any friend of Jay’s is OK by me.”
Revised Sentence: “Jasmine, it’s a pleasure. Any friend of Jay’s is OK by me.”

Unnecessary commas were inserted in many areas throughout manuscript, greatly slowing down the beat and cadence of your narrative:

Original Sentence: They tapped the translucent window, in the upper half of the door, to the school paper’s newsroom.
Revised Sentence: They tapped the translucent window in the upper half of the door to the school paper’s newsroom.

Also try to avoid passive statements wherever possible:

Original Sentence: He was escorted, by a TA, to the principal’s office.
Revised Sentence: A TA escorted him to the principal’s office.

Note also that the word “then” is not a conjunction such as “and,” “but,” “or,” or “so”:

Original Sentence: I gave my clothes to my security, then placed several calls to my contacts.
Revised Sentence: I gave my clothes to security and then placed several calls to my contacts.

I hope these edits and comments are valuable in helping the manuscript achieve your publishing goals. Good luck in your revision, and please let me know if you have any questions or concerns as you move through the revision process.

[SAMPLE] STYLE SHEET (COPYEDITING)

Book Title

By [Author's Name]

Thank you for the opportunity to copyedit your YA manuscript. In addition to this style sheet, I've included comments throughout your manuscript as part of the tracked changes. I might repeat some of those issues here as they pertain to your manuscript as a whole.

This style sheet covers issues related to consistency in style guidelines, as well as grammar and punctuation concerns if any.

I follow *The Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS)*, 16th edition, for grammar, punctuation, and style guidelines, and *Merriam-Webster (M-W)* for spellings and hyphenations. *The Chicago Manual of Style* is a comprehensive writing style guide that is widely used throughout the book publishing industry, and *Merriam-Webster* is the largest, most comprehensive American dictionary. Because your YA manuscript is faith-based, I also referred to guidelines as outlined in *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style (CWMS)*.

STYLE

Spell-caster: In your first chapter, this word is hyphenated and capitalized (Spell-caster) and in other chapters it is not (spellcaster). I typically go with an author's first reference, so I corrected inconsistencies as such, but please choose your preferred treatment, and apply consistently throughout the manuscript.

Underlines: Rather than underlining a word you want to stress, the proper treatment is to italicize. This rule applies also to book titles.

GRAMMAR/TONE

Each other vs. one another: One issue, which was a very simple fix throughout, is that you tend to use "each other" and "one another" interchangeably. "Each other" applies when referring to an exchange between two people, while "one another" applies to more than two people.

Repeated use of "you people" in dialogue: Even though it applies to a variety of ethnic groups, this might be perceived as pejorative.

PUNCTUATION

Brackets: Use brackets rather than parentheses when inserting commentary within quoted material.

No space between initials (E.B. White, C.S. Lewis): Note that this deviates from rules as outlined in *CMOS* rules, which prefers spaces (E. B. White, C. S. Lewis), but the former is the author's expressed preference and so I conformed to such throughout the manuscript.

Song lyrics: I placed song lyrics in italics if they were coming from a radio but enclosed them in quotation marks if they were being voiced by one of your characters. Please be sure to conduct some research into the copyright holder as related to song lyrics, since most require reprint permission.

OTHER CONCERNS

Dashes, ellipses, and hyphens: There is extreme overuse and misuse of dashes, ellipses, and hyphens. You often insert any one of these where a comma or period is appropriate. These are some examples:

Original sentence: While teaching staff may come and go — they leave behind powerfully entrenched imprints in the school's overall vibe.

Edited sentence: While teaching staff may come and go, they leave behind powerfully entrenched imprints in the school's overall vibe.

Original sentence: "We'll adapt... buck up, Buckaroos... let's smash the opposing teams to smithereens this season."

Edited sentence: "We'll adapt. Buck up, Buckaroos! Let's smash the opposing teams to smithereens this season!"

Original sentence: Hunter knew all too well their power, influence, and world supremacy plans — so maybe he was exaggerating, but this was as close as he wanted to get to those elitist kids.

Edited sentence: Hunter knew all too well their power, influence, and world supremacy plans. Maybe he was exaggerating, but this was as close as he wanted to get to those elitist kids.