



Breaking Into the Young Adult
Market
From Draft to Query

Defining Young Adult

- Teenage Protagonist
 - Typically 16-18 years old
 - From 9th to 12th grade
 - Pre-college summer okay, but generally not college age
 - Some YA skews younger, but you must be mindful of Middle Grade territory and themes

Defining Young Adult

- Voice
 - Many industry professionals emphasize the importance of capturing the teenage voice in young adult writing
 - But what is voice?
 - Word choice? Sentence structure? Realistic dialogue?
 - Which of the following excerpts are considered young adult?

Defining the YA Voice

1. This was getting old. Once again, Casey and Jessica were making complete fools of themselves, shaking their asses like dancers in a rap video. But I guess guys eat that shit up, don't they? I could honestly *feel* my IQ dropping...
2. Creamy and leggy, with long azure hair and the eyes of a silent-movie star, she moved like a poem and smiled like a sphinx. Beyond merely pretty, her face was vibrantly alive, her gaze always sparking and luminous, and she had a birdlike way of cocking her head, her lips pressed together while her dark eyes danced, that hinted at secrets and mysteries.
3. I hate the vamp jobs. They think they're so suave. It's not enough for them to slaughter and eat you like a zombie would. No, they want I to be all sexy, too. And, trust me: vampires? Not. Sexy.
4. She bites my lips and I taste blood, heightening my lust – pure animal need. She pushes me hard and I stagger back onto the bed. She climbs on top of me as everything starts to spin into a black fog.
5. I think I killed a girl who looked like this once. Yeah. Her name was Emily Danagger. She'd been murdered in her early teens by a contractor working on her parents' house. Her body was stuffed into the attic wall and plastered over.

Defining the YA Voice

- The Answer???
 - All of them
- Moral of the story?
 - Writing does not have to sound juvenile or young to be considered YA

Defining the YA Voice

1. This was getting old. Once again, Casey and Jessica were making complete fools of themselves, shaking their asses like dancers in a rap video. But I guess guys eat that shit up, don't they? I could honestly *feel* my IQ dropping... *The D.U.F.F.* by Kody Keplinger
2. Creamy and leggy, with long azure hair and the eyes of a silent-movie star, she moved like a poem and smiled like a sphinx. Beyond merely pretty, her face was vibrantly alive, her gaze always sparking and luminous, and she had a birdlike way of cocking her head, her lips pressed together while her dark eyes danced, that hinted at secrets and mysteries. *Daughter of Smoke and Bone* by Laini Taylor
3. I hate the vamp jobs. They think they're so suave. It's not enough for them to slaughter and eat you like a zombie would. No, they want I to be all sexy, too. And, trust me: vampires? Not. Sexy. *Paranormalcy* by Kiersten White
4. She bites my lips and I taste blood, heightening my lust – pure animal need. She pushes me hard and I stagger back onto the bed. She climbs on top of me as everything starts to spin into a black fog. *Original Sin* by Lisa Desrochers
5. I think I killed a girl who looked like this once. Yeah. Her name was Emily Danagger. She'd been murdered in her early teens by a contractor working on her parents' house. Her body was stuffed into the attic wall and plastered over. *Girl of Nightmares* by Kendare Blake

Defining the YA Voice

- Voice = the teenage experience
- So what is the teenage experience?
 - High school
 - Coming of age
 - First love
 - Fitting in
 - Finding your identify
 - Achieving independence from authority figures

Defining Young Adult – Other Thoughts

- Word count
 - Some flexibility in YA word counts, but most are around 60k to 80k
- Subject Matters
 - YA includes nearly every genre (contemporary, fantasy, sci-fi, steampunk, horror, thriller, etc.)
- Content Matters
 - Violence, language, and sex are all okay but must be handled with care
 - Violence is an easier sell than sex
 - Degrees of tolerance for language and sexual content vary by publisher

How to Break In

- Read, read, read
 - You must read current young adult titles
- Be aware of – and avoid – trends
 - Pay attention to current trends in new titles (vampires/angels/demons = bad idea)
- Study the Market
 - Engage with the industry through online networking sites such as twitter and blogs
 - Agents and editors will often state what types of titles they are currently seeking
 - For example, sci-fi and horror is hot
 - Be aware of the publishing time line. Books on the shelf today were bought up to 2 years before

How to Break In

- Write a good story
 - Story trumps everything
 - You *can* sell a vampire novel right now if it's a really, really good one
 - However, you would do better to write a story outside of the current trends
- Revise, revise, revise
 - You must rewrite, revise, and edit your work. Find good critique partners and beta readers who will give you honest, constructive feedback
- Revise, revise, revise – again
 - Yes, I really mean it. Even when you think you're ready, wait and revise again

Finding an Agent

- Once you have written, revised, edited, revised again, proofread, etc, it's time to start querying agents
- Research EVERY agent you plan to submit to online
 - Know what they're looking for
 - What they've sold
 - How they want to be queried
 - Most agents want electronic queries
 - 99.9% of the time, agents will NOT open attachments; post sample material directly into the email.

The Query Letter

- The query letter should contain the following elements:
 - The novel pitch
 - This should read like the blurb on a back of a book. It should be brief and exciting. Make the agent excited to read the book
 - Word Count and genre identification
 - Comparison titles
 - Very brief bio containing only RELEVANT information
 - Personalized content for specific agent, if honest and professional