



How to Make Out

Brianna R. Shrum

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Sixteen-year-old Renley needs three thousand dollars for the math club's trip to New York City, and she knows exactly how to get it: she's going to start a how-to blog where people pay for answers to all of life's questions from a "certified expert." The only problems: 1) She doesn't know how to do anything but long division and calculus. 2) She's totally invisible to people at school. And not in a cool *Gossip Girl* kind of way.

So, she decides to learn to do . . . well . . . everything. When her anonymous blog shifts in a more scandalous direction and the questions (and money) start rolling in, she has to learn not just how to do waterfall braids and cat-eye makeup, but a few other things, like how to cure a hangover, how to flirt, and how to make out (something her very experienced, and very in-love-with-her neighbor, Drew, is more than willing to help with).

As her blog's reputation skyrockets, so does "new and improved" Renley's popularity. She's not only nabbed the attention of the entire school, but also the eye of Seth Levine, the hot culinary wizard she's admired from across the home-ec classroom all year.

Soon, caught up in the thrill of popularity both in and out of cyberspace, her secrets start to spiral, and she finds that she's forgotten the most important how-to: how to be herself. When her online and real lives converge, Renley will have to make a choice: lose everything she loves in her new life, or everyone she loves in the life she left behind.

How to Make Out Details

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Aditi ~ •A Thousand Words A Million Books says

AS SEEN ON: A THOUSAND WORDS A MILLION BOOKS

I received a review copy from the publisher, in exchange for an honest review. All thoughts and opinions are entirely my own.

Picture This.

A Party with a bonfire, beer and teenagers. And instead of partying, ALL THE TEENAGERS are on their phones, READING A BLOG.

And this was legitimately a scene in this novel.

How To Make Out – a book I forced myself to finish purely by the great method of skimming usually reserved for my coursework books – was filled with such unrealistic scenes and characters.

Things That Got On my Nerves:

1. Renley: THIS GIRL CANNOT MAKE UP HER MIND. You don't
A) ditch your best friend and New York for a STUPID prom,
B) You don't ask the best friend who is in love with you to make out with you for your blog and then, after it got so heated that clothes got taken off, START GOING OUT WITH ANOTHER GUY.
C) Also, be nice to your parents. GOD.
D) Date another guy WHILE HE HAS A GIRLFRIEND
E) DON'T DITCH YOU FRIENDS FOR YOUR BOYFRIEND PERIOD.
F) Also, just. Don't. YOU MAKE ME MAD.

2. THE BLOG: If I want to know how to do something, I GOOGLE. I'm not paying some idiot on the internet a dollar for a bunch of answers I could get for free. WHAT? I also SERIOUSLY RESENT the fact that Renley blogged drunk or just "put few words together" and SHE WAS INTERNET FAMOUS. We bloggers work hard at what we do, and GAAAH.

Also, Renley got from bookworm to OMG YOU'RE THE HOTTEST EVER, I THINK I'M TURNING BI in like two seconds. WHAT EVEN.

I have nothing more to say. I would not recommend this book.

Rê says

2.5 "Unrealistic blogging experience" Stars

ARC via Edelweiss

Thank you, Sky Pony Press!

Well, this was the “unlikable characters in YA contemporary” weekend here. After Aubree from “Wanderlost”, we now have sixteen-year-old Renley, who acted like a thirteen-year-old the entire book.

“How to Make Out” has a fun premise involving the blogging world and a love triangle with one of my favorite tropes: falling for your best friend. Unfortunately, neither the blogging experience feels realistic nor the main character is likable enough to carry the story and add a different angle to the love triangle.

Renley is introduced as a student who’s really good with numbers, a daughter with a troubled relationship with her divorced parents, and the girl who knows her best friend has the hots for her but isn’t willing to be with him because he’s a man whore. All valid points. Until Renley’s actions paint a not-so-pretty and guilt-free picture of her life.

When the opportunity to go to NYC arises, Renley needs to make plans to earn money for the trip. She can’t really count on her parents for that, so she needs to take matters into her own hands. All good, right? Except the solution the author finds is completely unrealistic. Look, we know how blogging works and there’s just no way I can believe Renley created a blog with a “How to” theme and suddenly turned into this super blogger who’s making tons of money overnight by having people pay her to give information they can find online for free. It just doesn’t work like that. Even if I ignored that, it still wouldn’t have happened as quickly as it did. It takes years and lots of work to build a following, and it certainly takes much more effort than Renley put on her blog to start making as much money.

The whole blogging thing fell flat, and as consequence it hurt the rest of the story, because Renley’s turned into this horrible character because of a blogging experience that wasn’t even believable.

Let me just say that Renley wasn’t all bad, but I can’t exactly solely blame the blog for what she turned into.

See... Renley’s relationship with her parents was beyond complicated. Her father had cheated on her mother and married (or moved in?) with his lover, with whom Renley now lived. Her mother left her cheating husband (good for her!) and her daughter (WTF?), remarried and never looked back. Renley obviously missed her mother and tried to keep in touch with the woman, but she wanted nothing to do with her. It was sad. Very sad. And it helped explain some of Renley’s actions, but it didn’t give her a free pass to be stubborn, selfish and not care about her friend’s feelings.

The thing is: Renley was a horrible friend. Horrible.

First, she was horrible to April. The way she treated her “best friend” when she started hanging out with the popular kids was just wrong. She called April names no friend should, she ditched her for no good reason, she broke promises because she felt like it, she kept unnecessary secrets and she completely forgot about a huge event in April’s life. In the beginning of the story, April and Renley had the kind of friendship that made me smile and laugh out loud, but then Renley changed and turned into this really sucky friend. I don’t think I would’ve forgiven Renley as quickly had she done all those things to me. Let’s just say April was a much better person than either of us.

Then there was Drew. He was Renley’s neighbor and best friend, and they had this kind of weird relationship because they slept on the same bed, but never kissed or touch despite the fact that Drew made it clear that he

was in love with her. I was willing to go with it because it looked like Drew didn't want to change what they had no matter how hurt he was by having her near and not being able to touch her. But then I still wanted Renley to feel a little more self-conscious about lying half naked next to the guy who was crazy about her when she didn't feel the same about him. I don't mean that she should've stopped being his friend or anything like that, but maybe if she wasn't so worried about herself, she could've seen that she was hurting him and maybe needed to preserve his feelings? Just maybe?

Enter Seth, the cute and popular guy Renley and the rest of the school crushes on. The thing is, Seth has a freaking girlfriend, but Renley doesn't seem to mind that because she keeps flirting with him and doesn't think twice before hooking up with him a day after he breaks up with his girlfriend. I mean, really? Really? Is this how a likable character is supposed to act? Nope. At that point, I was ready to slap her.

Things just went downhill from there because Renley made out with Drew because of her blog, then ditched him to date Seth, then slept next to Drew when she was dating Seth, then acted like April didn't exist, then did the most stupid things because of her blog, then then then... you get the picture.

I'm sorry, but I just couldn't relate to Renley at all. I didn't understand her and I didn't think she did anything to deserve the ending she got. Sure Drew wasn't the nicest guy around (he was a man whore and he knew it), but he was a much better friend and person than Renley, so I think he deserved better. So did April.

As to Renley's parents, I believe that was the story that needed to be explored but wasn't. Nothing happened to her cheating father. Nothing happened to the mother who abandoned her. Things ended exactly how they started.

The book was well written and there were great scenes between April, Renley and Drew, but unfortunately Renley's personality made it impossible for me to enjoy it as much as I normally would.

Sophie says

I was immediately drawn to this book when I first saw the synopsis on Goodreads. It seemed, to me, like the perfect book, and I started my copy as soon as it arrived. Unfortunately, I severely disliked the book, and had a ton of problems.

Firstly, the book is about Renley, a girl whose mom left when her dad had an affair, and moved to New York to start a new family. When the maths club decides on a trip to NYC, Renley decides she'd do anything to get there, even though it would cost \$3,000. Her solution, start a help blog, that will start to charge once her readership goes up. Quickly she has loads of subscribers, and the money starts rolling in. But as it does, so do the uncomfortable questions, and she finds herself changing in order to earn money. Her best friend, and neighbour, Drew, initially helps her, but his unrequited feelings for her soon grow in the way, and she is drawn to the school's hottie, Seth.

Renley, as a character, was awful. I couldn't connect to her, at all, and as the book progressed, she got worse and worse. I found myself wanting to scream at her, and, honestly, I have no idea why I finished the book. TBH, none of the characters were that good, and Drew's whole 'friend-zoning' act was ridiculous, as was Renley for putting him on.

The way she got hundreds of views, shares, and a ton of money so fast, was also unbelievable. She found herself reaching her target, and more, in little time, and then didn't even want to go on the trip. Her complete 180 - neigh on a lobotomy - was annoying, and the ending even worse. There was just an overload of angst, and cliches, and fantasy, that for a contemporary book, I wish I had never read it. I'm so glad I waited for a library copy, and didn't waste my money on a hard copy. Definitely would not recommend.

Kelly Hager says

I am on a roll with excellent books!

This one is about Renley. She needs to earn money for a school trip and decides to start an advice blog. The questions start out pretty lighthearted but quickly get more serious (how to get over a hangover, for example, but there are also sexual ones).

The book is hilarious, especially at first. As the blog questions get more interesting, though, the book gets much more serious. Ultimately, Renley has to figure out what she wants and what kind of person she wants to be.

I am absolutely Team Renley and loved spending a few hours in her company.

Highly recommended.

Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

Chapters read: 9

I was semi-tempted to finish this, since I'm about a third of the way through and it's short. But I'm better off spending my time on other things.

How to Make Out tries really hard to be voicey but it stumbles over unclear characterization, an unrealistic premise, and the occasional offensive line.

Renley needs to earn money for a math trip to NYC, so she starts a "How to" blog and begins charging people for her answers to random questions. She puts up a couple free "how to" posts, doesn't do anything to get her blog out there, and she somehow gets people asking her questions FOR MONEY. Yeah, no. There are millions of blogs out there and traffic does not just come to you like that. Especially if you're charging money. Jesus.

Renley and Drew could be a cute ship, but Renley's motivations are so weird and unclear that it's hard to fathom why they are the way they are. Drew's clearly into her and she's clearly into him. She doesn't trust him not to cheat on her if they were together, but she sleeps over in his bed all the time, something both their parents are fine with. It worked in Catching Jordan, but it's not convincing here at all.

Really I should have quit on the first page when the book opened with this horrific joke in paragraph two.

Mr. Cole harrumphs as he hurries past me. Like he's afraid if he lingers, my cooking-AIDs will

infect him and he will be banished to the wood shop forever.

Cooking-AIDs. I feel sick just looking at this attempt at humor. I hope to hell they took that out of the finished copy.

I quit after this text exchange:

April, I'm in Seth Levine's living room.

Ooooooooooh. Have you gone into his BEDROOM yet? ;) ;) ;)

You are such a slut.

I'm not the one in Seth Levine's bedroom.

I roll my eyes. I write, **NEITHER AM I.**

There are so many better friends to lovers romances out there. The AIDs joke and slut-shaming are just a couple examples of why you'd be better off with Catching Jordan.

Eri says

This book was truly a mess. The main character was thoroughly unlikable and made some truly deplorable decisions, in addition to treating most of the other characters in a terrible manner.

The only part I did not dislike, being quite frank here, was Drew, who deserves better, and the make-out scenes which I admit were done rather well.

Thank you to Edelweiss and Sky Pony Press for the review copy.

Valentine Pumpkins says

<https://merlin-brocoli.blogspot.fr/20...>

Je l'ai dévoré ! La thématique et son traitement sont originaux, les personnages imparfaits et réalistes, l'humour est bien présent, une lecture drôlement chouette !

rachel says

Review copy provided by the publisher for an honest review.

I read Shrum's debut *Never Never* last year and had rather mixed feelings about it. The plot was all over the place, the characters were hard to relate to, the writing was a little juvenile... and I had the exact same problems with *How to Make Out*, tenfold.

The characters were a little ridiculous. Not only was Renley a brat who deserved to have some sense slapped into her, but as a whole the cast felt completely one-dimensional. I really couldn't stand Renley. She was selfish, thoughtless and sexist/ridiculous contradictory. Worse still, she had very little character development! It might have been tolerable if she had realised how stupid she had been and moved on/learnt her lesson, but she didn't. It was so damn frustrating! And I felt so bad for her "best friend" April - she was struggling to keep things together and then Renley turns into a jerk of the century and abandons her? I just wanted to give her a hug! Good thing she was so feisty and knew not to mollycoddle Renley about the little shit she was being. The only truly tolerable character was Drew. He definitely deserves better IMO!

There was a love triangle... and I didn't ship any of the ships or feel *any* chemistry between the characters, whatsoever. Sean had so little personality! He cooked. Full stop. He had nothing in common with Renley. They barely knew each other. He didn't even know her best friend's name. She never asked about him or his life either. They just... cooked together? Yawn. I wasn't on board with their relationship at all, especially because it started (kind of) when he had a girlfriend. Cheating = not okay.

The parental situation was just unbelievable. I don't think that every single parent would care so very little about their kids. It was unbelievable! They knew nothing about their kids' lives? And I get that not all kids/parents are close, but it just felt like an excuse for the whole "absent parent" trope. I didn't buy it. There wasn't a single adult/kid interaction that I genuinely thought would happen in real life, and I didn't like it.

The blogging aspect. Here's the thing about making an MC of a book a reader or a blogger - we can call your bullshit. We know what's realistic because - plot twist - most of us are readers and bloggers too. We know that you don't just decide to make a blog one day, put minimum effort into to keeping it alive/make no real effort to advertise or interact with viewers and somehow wind up a massive viral hit with all the money pouring in overnight. We know that's not how it works... so the whole blogging aspect of this book was a fail. Renley barely did anything but post the most random crap on her site, and yet she had a large following (which was never really touched upon, except to say that her stats had "gone up"). And the actual premise of the blog - while cute, in theory - was pretty stupid. Who is honestly going to pay for some random to answer their question? 1) They had to pay to ask the question *and then pay again* for the answers, and 2) all of the questions could be Googled for free... why would so many people waste their money? Renley didn't even answer all of their questions - and people had paid for her to answer them! It makes no sense!

There was probably a few other things that annoyed me, but you get the point - I'm disappointed. I really hope that contemporary romance would be more of Shrum's thing, but I guess not. I found this book rather annoying, to be frank. The MC drove me insane, and I couldn't care about the nonsense love triangle/plotline. I wasn't a fan and definitely wouldn't recommend this one.

Grace {Rebel Mommy Book Blog} says

Review

This was a really cute high school book that was a little (or a lot) predictable. Our main character Renley lives with her dad and stepmom after her mom left them. She is dealing with the abandonment of her mom and spends of her time with her neighbor and best friend Drew and her other best friend April. When a

trip to New York for her math club comes up she needs to come up with a way to make some money fast. She decides to start a blog to help answer people's questions as an expert and charge the for it. As the blog gets popular so does Renley, leaving April and Drew kind of behind. But is this really what Renley wants?

The book overall was cute and a quick read. I liked the general idea of it all - needing to come up with a way to get money, family issues, a weird friend/love relationship with the cute but also troubled neighbor. Nothing groundbreaking but good none the less. I did really love Drew. He was adorable and honest and seemed to try and be the best for Renley as he could be. April her other best friend was weird and quirky and I love that. Renley, however, was kind of selfish and whoa is me a little too much at times. She definitely wasn't there for April when she needed to be and did treat Drew or her new popular boyfriend Seth appropriately. I think she got really wrapped up in her own stuff, which is understandable but not necessarily endearing.

While I liked the whole idea of her using a blog to answer questions for people as part of the story, what I could not wrap my mind around how she would actually make money off of it. Who would pay money for these answers that are easily free by googling or YouTubing them??

Also while there were complicated family issues - her living with her dad and stepmom, who she doesn't really like, and not really hearing from her mom - I don't think they were properly explored or wrapped up at all. It seemed like there could have been so much more done with it all in a more meaningful way.

Overall, it was an ok book but could have really dived a bit deeper into some topics to beef it up. Still, it was quick and cute and could be perfect in the mood for something on the predictable side. This review was originally posted on Rebel Mommy Book Blog

Sarah says

(Source: I received a digital copy of this book for free on a read-to-review basis. Thanks to Skyhorse Publishing and Edelweiss.)

“You’re right,” I tell him. “I love a challenge.”

This was a YA contemporary romance story, about a girl and two guys.

Renley was an okay character, although she seemed a bit dense at times. I really struggled to understand why she didn't want Drew, especially when they had such chemistry, and the way she hurt Drew and her best friend April was pretty shocking.

The storyline in this had an absolutely huge hole in it. Renley decided to start a blog, and charge people to ask her questions, which seemed a bit of a poor idea given the google is free and does a better job. Not only that though, she somehow managed to get thousands of followers by doing absolutely nothing! In fact she sometimes didn't even check the blog for a couple of weeks, yet still somehow got masses of page views and followers, which is totally unrealistic in my opinion.

The romance in this was also a bit frustrating, when Renley one minute seemed to be starting something with Drew, and then the next minute was making out with Seth!

The ending to this was okay, and things did work out okay in the end, I just wish that the book hadn't had such a flawed storyline.

6 out of 10

Shelly says

A wonderful cute read! I liked that Renley made her own mistakes, and had to accept that any terrible decisions she made were her own. Some readers will probably consider her unlikeable because she makes mistakes (some that have me cursing) but I like that they are her mistakes to make (if that makes sense?). A coming-of-age story that features a complicated love triangle, a blog and a swoony romance.

Jaime Arkin says

This was probably a 2.5 star read for me. I was kind of hoping for something light and fun when I read the title and saw the cover, but this was actually a bit heavier than I was expecting... and I did have a couple of issues with the plot.

Renley is in a pinch... she wants to go join her math club on a trip to New York but in order to do it, she needs \$3000. Something she can't ask her dad for, and she certainly can't talk to her mom about it. So her big plan? Start a "How To" Blog... but when the topics go from 'How to do a waterfall braid' to things a bit more risqué things start to unravel. This is the part where I had a huge issue... who in their right mind is going to pay someone for information they can easily google? I feel like the whole premise of her blog was kind of ridiculous so that really caused an issue for me. Add to the fact that she really put no effort at all into it and yet gained a massive following in just days/weeks ...well, that just didn't work at all. Thankfully that's not all that this book is about and some of the other plot points managed to save things a bit.

Like I said, this wasn't as light as the summary might make you think... there's a lot of inattentive parents, missing parents, bad choices and things that make this seem a whole lot heavier than expected.

Renley isn't well-known at school, but when Seth, the hottest guy in school starts paying attention she suddenly is way more invested in this guy than she should be. He doesn't know about her blog though, and when she needs help with it she leans on her best friend and neighbor Drew. Drew, who has crushed on her for so long and hasn't kept it secret. But Renley isn't willing to lose him as a friend on the chance that a relationship maybe would work between them. It doesn't help that Drew is the biggest player around and she is worried she'd just be another notch in his bedpost.

Renley also has abandonment issues she has to work through. Her mom up and left for NYC after divorcing her dad, and she now has a new family and no time at all for Renley and at her age, a girl just sometimes needs her mom. Her dad's girlfriend isn't someone she wants to lean on either.

Ultimately, I felt bad for Drew and he honestly was the only one that I really ended up caring about in the end. I liked him and wanted better for him, and I really didn't think that was Renley.

Like I said, there's a lot of things going on in this story. There is a dreaded love triangle so be warned about that if you try to stay away from those, and the many issues all seem to weave together well for a somewhat enjoyable ending.

Odette Knappers says

Echt geen verkeerde contemporary. Ik had alleen minder standaard fluff en standaard voorspelbaarheid verwacht, en meer wiskunde en nerdyness.

Ik heb tot 1/3 gekomen, en ik heb spierpijn in mijn ogen van eyerolls. Never mind, life is too short for books like this. Sorry not sorry.

Laurie Flynn says

There is a ridiculous amount to love about this book. It's hilarious and heartfelt, romantic and quirky, and the inventive format-- a "how to" blog where main character Renley answers questions ranging from basic to risqué-- makes it feel fresh and unlike anything else on the YA scene.

Sixteen-year-old Renley wants to save money for the math club trip to New York, so she starts up said blog and charges for the answers. When she starts dating Seth, the cute, crushworthy boy in her cooking class, her blog takes a sharp turn-- and so does her life. Her feelings for her best friend and neighbor Drew are in a tangled-up knot, and she makes plenty of mistakes that hurt the people she cares about. Some people might think this makes her "unlikeable," but I think this is what makes her feel extremely real.

I totally devoured this book and feel lucky to have had the chance to read it early!

Abbie says

(I received a copy from Edelweiss, In exchange for an honest review.)

Actual rating - 2.5

I can't say I liked the main character in this. She was pretty annoying.

This wasn't an enjoyable read for me unfortunately. The characters annoyed me, the "how to's" were silly, and the whole thing just dragged for me. I was relieved when it had finished.

Overall, Not an enjoyable read.

