

CHAPTER 14 – The Editor's Chair

14.1 Using AI Across the Full Range of Professional Editorial Functions

Most fiction writers have never sat across a desk from a professional editor. The traditional editorial relationship — the kind that exists between an author and a publishing house — is invisible to the majority of working writers, especially those who self-publish or are early in their careers. They know editing exists. They may have had a friend read their manuscript, or exchanged pages in a critique group. But the full architecture of professional editorial services, what each function addresses, what it produces, and what it costs to hire a human specialist for each, is territory most writers never map.

This matters because AI can approximate every one of those functions. Not replace them — the distinction the guide has made throughout still holds here. But approximate them with enough precision that a writer who understands the editorial landscape can deploy AI with surgical intention rather than vague hope.

The difference between asking AI "what do you think of my story" and asking it to perform a specific editorial function is the difference between asking a surgeon to take a look at you and asking them to evaluate a specific set of symptoms using a defined diagnostic framework. The tool is the same. The precision of the request determines the quality of what comes back.

What follows is a working map of professional editorial functions, what each one does, what AI can do inside that function, where its edges are, and a prompt you can use immediately to put it to work on your manuscript.

14.2 The Developmental Editor

The developmental editor works at the highest altitude. Structure, character arc, thematic coherence, pacing across the full manuscript, the emotional promise of the genre and whether the story keeps it — these are developmental territory. A developmental editor reads your manuscript and asks whether the story works as a whole before anyone looks at a single sentence.

This is where AI analytical capability is strongest, because developmental questions are structural questions, and structure is pattern, and pattern is exactly what AI is built to recognize. It can identify where your three-act architecture sags, where character motivation becomes muddy, where a subplot vanishes for sixty pages and returns without earning its reappearance, where the emotional stakes of the climax haven't been properly built from the opening. It can map your protagonist's arc from wound to change and tell you where the connective tissue is missing.

The limitation here is the same one that runs through every AI editorial function: it cannot feel what a human reader feels moving through your story. It can recognize the patterns that typically produce emotional responses. It cannot tell you with certainty whether your ending will devastate the right reader in the right way. That judgment remains yours.

Prompt example: *"Act as a developmental editor. Analyze the structure of this manuscript focusing on character arc, pacing, thematic coherence, and whether the emotional promise of the genre is fulfilled. Identify the three most significant structural issues and explain the craft principle behind each one. Do not rewrite. Diagnose only, with specific references to the text."*

14.3 The Structural and Content Editor

One level below developmental work sits the structural and content editor, who moves through the manuscript scene by scene rather than at whole-story altitude. Where the developmental editor asks whether the story works, the structural editor asks whether each piece of the story is doing its job.

Does every scene create change — in a relationship, a belief, a power dynamic, a piece of knowledge? Does cause and effect hold across chapters, so that what happens in chapter seven is a genuine consequence of what happened in chapter four? Are revelations arriving at the right moment, not too early to undercut tension and not too late to feel withheld rather than earned? Is the midpoint actually a midpoint, or has the story been drifting since the opening act?

AI handles this function well when you feed it focused portions rather than demanding a full manuscript analysis in a single pass. A chapter cluster, an act, a defined section of the story — these are the right units for structural and content work. The output is diagnostic, scene by scene, with specific identification of what is and isn't functioning and why.

Prompt example: *"Act as a structural editor. Examine these chapters scene by scene and identify whether each scene creates meaningful change, whether cause and effect holds across the sequence, and whether any reveals arrive too early or too late. Flag scenes that are decorative rather than narrative. Be specific about which scenes and why."*

14.4 The Line Editor

The line editor works at the prose level. Not grammar, not punctuation — those belong to the copy editor. The line editor is concerned with sentence rhythm, word choice precision, image clarity, tonal consistency, and whether the voice of the narrative remains alive and specific on every page.

This is where AI requires the most supervision, because its default behavior when working at the line level is to smooth. It normalizes rhythm. It replaces unusual word choices with more familiar ones. It tidies images that were deliberately rough. Left without instruction, it will edit your voice out of your manuscript while making it technically cleaner, and it will do this confidently and invisibly.

The solution is to front-load the session with your voice markers before asking for any line-level work. Provide samples. Ask AI to identify your stylistic fingerprints first — your sentence architecture, your characteristic diction, your metaphor patterns. Then instruct it to work within those markers, diagnosing problems without rewriting, flagging weak images or rhythm breaks without replacing them with its own preferences. Line editing with AI works best as

identification rather than revision. You make the changes. It tells you where to look.

Prompt example: *"Before any line-level work, analyze these writing samples and identify my stylistic markers across sentence rhythm, diction, and metaphor patterns. Then examine the attached passage and identify where the prose weakens — rhythm breaks, imprecise word choices, images that don't land — without rewriting anything. Flag the issues and explain each one. Preserve my voice as the standard against which problems are measured."*

14.5 The Copy Editor

The copy editor is concerned with correctness and consistency. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, adherence to a chosen style guide such as Chicago Manual of Style or AP, and the internal consistency of the manuscript's own established rules — character name spellings, place names, hyphenation decisions, whether a particular term is capitalized throughout.

This is the editorial function where AI is most reliable, because the rules are largely objective. It knows Chicago style. It can track whether you've been spelling your protagonist's name two different ways across three hundred pages. It will catch the sentence that lost its subject somewhere in revision. It can apply a style guide consistently in a way that would take a human copy editor hours of careful work.

The output of copy editing is a corrected manuscript and, in professional practice, a style sheet — a document that captures every

consistency decision made during the edit. That style sheet becomes the reference document for the book going forward. More on this shortly.

Prompt example: *"Act as a copy editor following Chicago Manual of Style. Review this manuscript for grammar, punctuation, spelling, and internal consistency. Flag every instance where a character name, place name, or established term is spelled or formatted inconsistently. Note every style decision you make so we can build a style sheet from this session."*

14.6 The Continuity Auditor

Most writers have never heard this title, because continuity auditing is often folded into developmental or copy editing rather than offered as a standalone service. But it is a distinct function, and it is the one where AI has the clearest structural advantage over a human working alone.

Continuity is the internal logic of a long manuscript held consistent across every page. A character who was established as left-handed in chapter three should not be throwing a punch with her right hand in chapter nineteen. A timeline that places an event on a Tuesday should not reference that same event as having happened on the weekend two chapters later. A town that is called Harrison on page forty should not become Henderson on page two hundred and twelve.

Human editors catch these errors through careful reading and good notes. AI can hold the entire manuscript in working memory simultaneously and cross-reference details across the full text

without fatigue or drift. For a novel with a large cast, a complex timeline, multiple locations, and an intricate plot, continuity auditing is one of the highest-value editorial functions AI can perform. The output is a report of every detected inconsistency, organized by type — character details, timeline, setting, established rules of the story's world — with specific page or chapter references for each.

Prompt example: "Act as a continuity auditor. Read this manuscript and track every named character's established physical details, behavioral traits, and stated history. Track the timeline of events. Track place names and setting details. Identify every inconsistency you find across the full text, organized by category, with specific chapter references for each instance."

14.7 The Voice and Tone Editor

Voice and tone editing is a specialized function concerned with whether the narrative voice remains consistent across a long project. A novel written over eighteen months is rarely written in a single sustained mood. The chapters drafted in the first month may have a different rhythm, a different emotional temperature, a different relationship with the reader than the chapters written a year later when the writer's life had changed, their influences had shifted, or exhaustion had set in.

Voice drift is one of the hardest problems for a writer to self-diagnose, precisely because it happens gradually and the writer is inside it. Reading chapter three and chapter twenty-two in the same sitting is not how most writers work. AI can do exactly that — compare early and late sections, identify where sentence rhythm has

changed, where the characteristic metaphor density has thinned or thickened, where the emotional register has shifted from the tone established in the opening pages.

The output of voice and tone editing is not a corrected manuscript but a diagnostic report that shows the writer where drift has occurred and what the nature of the drift is. The revision decisions remain entirely with the writer.

Prompt example: *"Act as a voice and tone editor. Compare the opening three chapters of this manuscript to chapters fifteen through eighteen. Identify any drift in narrative voice, sentence rhythm, metaphor density, emotional register, or tonal consistency. Describe the nature of each drift specifically — not just that it exists, but how the voice has changed and what the likely cause might be."*

14.8 The Style Sheet

A style sheet is a document produced during the editing process that captures every consistency decision made about the manuscript. It is one of the most useful editorial deliverables most writers have never encountered, because it exists primarily in traditional publishing workflows where a copy editor produces it as a matter of professional practice.

A thorough style sheet contains a character roster with distinguishing details, a settings index, a chapter-by-chapter timeline summary, a word and style consistency list covering every decision about hyphenation, capitalization, spelling variants, and punctuation preferences, and additional notes flagging craft

concerns that fall outside strict copy editing territory. It becomes the canonical reference document for the manuscript — the single source of truth that any collaborator, including AI in a future session, can be given to establish context instantly.

For a self-publishing writer working without a traditional editorial team, a style sheet is an act of professional self-respect toward the manuscript. It prevents the kind of quiet inconsistencies that readers notice without being able to name, the ones that create a vague sense that the book wasn't quite finished even when they can't point to a specific error.

AI can produce a style sheet from a completed manuscript in a single session. It will not be identical to what a certified human editor produces after weeks of careful work — Eve Aroyo's style sheet for *Tommy Blue*, with its 89-character roster, chapter-by-chapter timeline summaries, and craft notes, represents significant professional labor and judgment. But an AI-generated style sheet is a genuine working document, and for a writer who has never had one, it is a revelation about the level of internal consistency their manuscript has or hasn't achieved.

Prompt example: *"Generate a style sheet for this manuscript. Include a character roster with each character's name, role, and distinguishing physical and behavioral details as established in the text. Include a settings index. Include a chapter-by-chapter timeline summary. Include a word and style consistency list covering every spelling variant, hyphenation decision, and capitalization choice. Flag any continuity issues you encounter in the process."*

14.9 Putting It Together

Understanding these functions as distinct changes how you use AI at every stage of a manuscript's life. Early drafts benefit most from developmental and structural work. Middle drafts need continuity auditing and voice checking. Late drafts call for line editing and copy editing. The style sheet can be requested at any stage, but it is most useful when the manuscript is substantially complete.

A writer who knows how to ask for each of these functions specifically will get more from a single AI session than one who asks for general feedback on an entire manuscript. The editorial chair has many positions. Knowing which one to sit in, and when, is itself a craft skill — and one that AI has now made available to every writer willing to learn it.