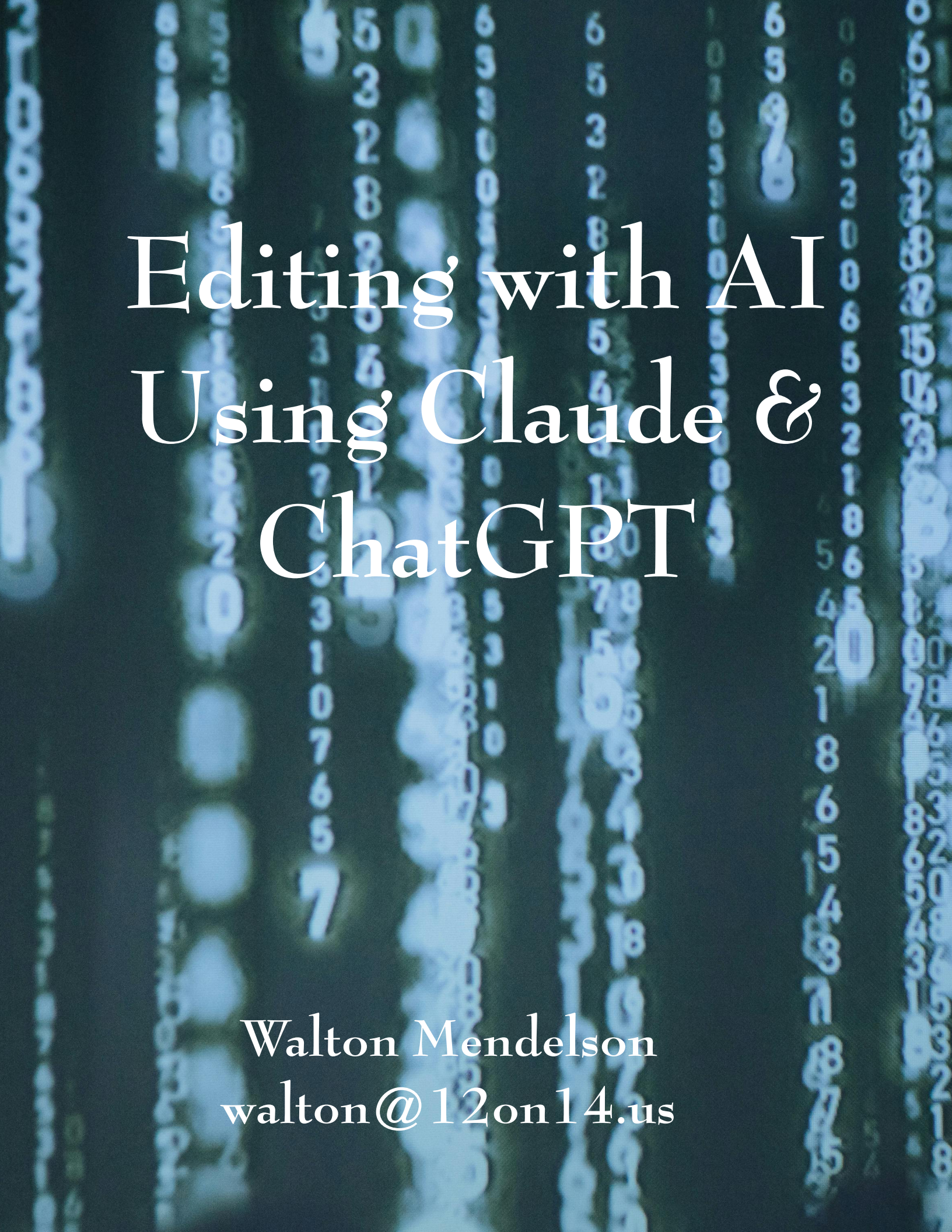


The background of the entire image is a digital rain effect, similar to the 'The Matrix' movie. It consists of numerous vertical columns of light blue and white numbers and symbols (0-9, !, @, #, \$, %, ^, &, *, ~, ~~, ~~~, ~~~~) falling from the top against a dark teal background. The text is centered over this background.

Editing with AI Using Claude & ChatGPT

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Before You Start

AI editing fails most often before a single word of manuscript is submitted. The failures are not technical. They are structural: no setup, no context, no defined task. The tool gets blamed for the missing instructions.

This guide assumes you are willing to do the setup. It is not complicated, but it should not be optional either.

Limits are permanent

Every AI platform has usage limits. A paid subscription raises the limit: it does not remove it. Limits are based on two things: tokens and time. Tokens are roughly equivalent to words—every word you submit and every word returned counts against your allowance. Time-based limits reset, usually within a few hours, but hitting one mid-session is disruptive.

The practical implication: large manuscripts should not be submitted all at once. This turns out to be an advantage. Chunking—submitting in smaller sections—produces better editorial results than full-manuscript uploads. The limit and the best practice coincide.

Prompts do most of the work

The single biggest variable in AI editing quality is not the platform, not the model, and not the manuscript. It is the prompt. For the editorial work described in this guide, a precise prompt with a mediocre model outperforms a vague prompt with the best available model.

Most bad AI editing is not an AI failure. It is an instruction failure.

This guide includes the prompts that work. They were not developed overnight.

Models are not interchangeable

Within a platform, different models exist for different purposes; for example, Claude has Haiku, Sonnet, and Opus. The distinction that matters most for editorial work is between speed and judgment. Faster, cheaper models (uses fewer tokens) handle mechanical tasks well. Slower, more expensive models handle interpretive tasks better—but the difference only justifies the cost on the right material.

How to use that distinction is covered in the platform sections.

Context does not persist the way you expect

Within a single session, AI holds everything you have submitted. Between sessions, it holds nothing—unless you are working inside a project. A project is a dedicated workspace: files and prior conversations remain available as reference.

For book-length work, a project should not be optional. Without one, every session starts from zero.

Charitable vs. adversarial defaults

Before You Start

This is the least obvious difference between platforms, and the most important one for editorial work.

Claude reads charitably by default. It assumes the text is doing what it intends. This makes it reliable for mechanical copy editing—fewer false flags, less noise.

ChatGPT reads more adversarially by default. It assumes nothing. This makes it aggressive at finding problems—but also prone to over-flagging on material that doesn't need it.

Neither default is correct. They serve different passes. Understanding which default you are working with—and how to override it—is what separates useful AI editing from frustrating AI editing.

My overarching concern in developing these prompts and related instructions for editing is to preserve the author's voice. Claude uses the word “charitable” and ChatGPT says “rhetorical” both mean the acceptance of word choices and grammatical usages that might otherwise be considered incorrect: provided meaning is not compromised.

A note on cost

Professional editing has two price worlds, and they are not on the same scale.

The first is the freelance marketplace—platforms like Fiverr, where editing a full manuscript might run \$600 to \$1,200. The arithmetic on these rates does not survive scrutiny. The Editorial Freelancers Association (EFA) lists the average professional rate for copy editing fiction at \$40 to \$50 an hour. At \$600, you are purchasing someone's attention for a manuscript that may run 90,000 words. Even without editing, how long does it take to read 90,000 words? A low fee makes serious attention impossible.

The second price world is professional rates. At EFA averages, copy editing a 90,000 word manuscript runs roughly \$2,160. Developmental editing—the structural, interpretive work that catches what copy editing doesn't—runs \$50 to \$70 an hour, or \$4,000 to \$5,600 for the same manuscript. That assumes roughly two weeks of sustained editorial work, which is what the job actually requires.

For most self-publishing authors, those numbers are out of reach. Not unreasonable—out of reach.

What sits at the top of the profession is rarer still. In sustained work with a small number of genuinely skilled editors, the quality of attention—the willingness to challenge assumptions, identify the gap between intention and effect, and resist the text's own charm—is what the adversarial pass in this guide is designed to approximate. Most editing, at any price, does not reach that level. The best does. It is also the most expensive and the hardest to find.

AI does not replace that. What it does is make serious editorial attention available at a price point that was previously impossible—a monthly subscription, or nothing on a free plan, within usage limits. The mechanical copy edit pass alone represents hours of careful work. The adversarial pass represents the kind of reading that, from a human editor, commands the highest rates.

The recommendation in this guide is to use AI first. When a human editor does engage with the manuscript, the surface problems are already resolved and the paid hours go toward the work only sustained human judgment can do. For writers who cannot afford professional editing at all, AI used correctly is *not* a compromise. It is access to a quality of editorial attention that was simply not available before.

A common failure

A writer on a publishing forum described testing AI by uploading an entire novel, no setup, no instructions, and asking it to locate a specific scene. It couldn't. He concluded AI was useless for editing.

The failure was not the AI. There was no project, no custom instructions, no defined task, and no prompt. He asked a retrieval question—effectively, a search—of a tool not designed for search.

The same writer, with the same manuscript, using the workflow in this guide, would get different results. The tool is the same. The difference is how it is used.

AI, Writing, and Ethics

Because I use AI for editing professionally, I have a bias. This section is longer than it might otherwise be. I want to make as sound and cogent an argument as I can—which means including the counterarguments, not just the ones that support my position. Readers who disagree with my conclusions should at least find their objections fairly represented.

The editing-as-cheating argument

The most common objection in writing communities is not about training data or copyright. It is simpler and more personal: using AI to edit your work is cheating. The writing isn't really yours.

This argument does not survive contact with literary history.

Maxwell Perkins spent months restructuring Thomas Wolfe's first novel—a 1,114-page manuscript that had already been rejected by multiple publishers—before it was published as *Look Homeward, Angel*. He is credited with providing not just structural cuts but the theme and overall architecture of Wolfe's second novel, *Of Time and the River*. Perkins also shaped *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*, working closely with Fitzgerald and Hemingway at the height of their careers. He had 68 books dedicated to him at the time of his death. Nobody calls those books Perkins' novels.

Gordon Lish cut Raymond Carver's stories by 50, 70, and 78 percent. He retitled them, restructured them, and in some cases changed their endings. The minimalism that defined Carver's reputation—the restraint, the silence, the compression—was substantially Lish's creation. When Carver's unedited originals were published posthumously, critics largely concluded that Lish's versions were stronger. Stephen King called one story a total rewrite. The question of authorship in the Carver/Lish collaboration is genuinely unresolved. What is not unresolved is that the work is considered among the finest American short fiction of the twentieth century.

Ezra Pound cut more than 200 lines from T.S. Eliot's draft of *The Waste Land*—the poem that defined literary Modernism. Pound joked that he had performed a "Caesarean Operation" for the poem's birth. Eliot said of him: "Mr. Pound is more responsible for the twentieth-century revolution in poetry than is any other individual." *The Waste Land* is T.S. Eliot's poem. The editing that made it what it is was Ezra Pound's.

William Shawn, editor of the *New Yorker* for thirty-five years, presided over perhaps the most rigorously edited literary magazine in American history. In an interview, he described the editorial relationship in terms that would have been familiar to Perkins. Asked how much he typically intervened in a writer's work, he noted one exception in his entire career that proved the rule: J.D. Salinger. His recollection was that he may have added or removed a single comma in something Salinger submitted—and he wasn't certain even that was right.

One exception. One writer, in thirty-five years, whose work arrived on the page the way it would leave it.

The argument that editorial intervention corrupts authorship would require us to dismiss Eliot, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Wolfe as frauds. Nobody makes that argument seriously about Perkins, Pound, or Shawn. Heavy editing is not a corruption of literary work. It is, historically, how literary work gets made.

The honest limit case is the ghostwriter. If AI writes the book, AI wrote the book. That is a different activity, with different ethics, and this guide does not argue for it. The line between editing and writing can blur—it blurred considerably in the Carver/Lish collaboration—but the activity described in this guide is diagnostic reading and correction, not generation. The difference matters.

AI, Writing, and Ethics

AI and your own writing

This guide is about editing, not writing. The distinction is real but not absolute.

The copy edit prompt makes corrections silently. The adversarial prompt flags problems and, in limited cases, offers illustrative reframes. That is AI-generated prose, even when it is labeled as illustrative and the author is under no obligation to use it. Pretending otherwise would be dishonest.

Whether using AI-generated prose in your work is acceptable has no universal answer. It depends on:

The context of publication—Academic work has explicit rules. Literary journals are developing policies. Self-published work has none. Know the rules of your venue.

How the prose is used—There is a difference between an AI-suggested rewrite that you reject, one that you adapt, and one that you use verbatim. Only you know which is happening.

Your own standard—Some writers find any AI involvement in their prose unacceptable on principle. That is a legitimate position. This guide does not argue against it.

What this guide does argue is that using AI to identify problems in your prose is categorically different from using AI to generate it. A human editor who suggests a rewrite does not become the author of the book. An AI that suggests a rewrite is not different in kind—whatever it may be in degree.

This workflow means more work, not less

A persistent assumption about AI tools is that they reduce effort. The workflow in this guide produces the opposite.

Running a mechanical copy edit pass requires reading every correction in the returned text, evaluating each one, and deciding which to accept, which to reject, and which to flag as requiring the author's decision. Running an adversarial pass requires sustained engagement with flags that are sometimes uncomfortable—sitting with the possibility that a scene doesn't work, that an emotional beat is unearned or gratuitous, that the gap between intention and effect is wider than you thought. The Opus escalation pass requires judgment about which flags warrant deeper scrutiny and which are false positives.

None of that is passive. None of it can be done quickly without losing the benefit. The passes described here represent hours of engaged reading, evaluation, and decision-making on the author's part. The AI does not make the judgments. It raises the questions. The author answers them.

Can the tools be abused? Of course. You can paste a manuscript into an AI and accept every suggestion without reading them. You can use AI to generate prose you publish as your own. You can hire a ghostwriter. The tool does not determine the ethics. The use does.

This guide is written for writers who want to do the work. Used as described, AI editorial tools will cost you more time than a cursory self-edit. They will cost you more intellectual engagement than sending a manuscript to a Fiverr editor and waiting for a clean copy back. What they will not cost is money—which, for most writers, is the only reason the question matters at all.

The training data question

The most legitimate grievance against AI is also the least discussed with precision. Large language models were

trained on text scraped from the internet—books, articles, fiction, poetry—much of it without the explicit consent of the people who wrote it. Whether that constitutes copyright infringement is genuinely unsettled. Lawsuits are pending. Courts are working through it. The legal outcome is not yet known.

The ethical question is separate from the legal one, and harder. If your work was scraped and used to train a model without your permission, you have a reasonable grievance regardless of what courts eventually decide. That is not paranoia. It is a fair description of what happened.

The strongest counterargument is that human writers learn the same way—by reading widely, absorbing patterns, internalizing style, and producing work that reflects everything they have read without reproducing any of it directly. John Gardner in *The Art of Fiction* suggests physically copying, word-for-word sections from the works of established authors as a way to help learn to write.

AI training is arguably analogous. Whether that analogy holds legally or ethically is contested, and reasonable people disagree.

What is not reasonable is the claim that the question doesn't exist. It does. Anyone using AI should understand what they are using and where it came from.

Copyright in AI output

A related but distinct fear is that AI will reproduce copyrighted text in its output—that asking AI to help with your manuscript will result in someone else's sentences appearing in your work.

This fear is largely overstated in practice, though not without basis.

Models do not store and retrieve text the way a database does. They learn statistical patterns across enormous corpora and generate new text based on those patterns. Verbatim reproduction does occur—but reliably only with very short, very famous passages that appeared millions of times in training data. The opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Song lyrics. Famous speeches. Material so ubiquitous that the pattern is essentially the text itself.

For the vast majority of working writers, the realistic risk of copyrighted prose appearing in AI output is negligible. The output is generated, not retrieved. Your manuscript is not going to come back to you with Raymond Carver sentences in it—and given what we now know about Lish, that might be complicated anyway. The more defensible copyright concern is on the training side, already covered above. On the output side, the risk is real in narrow cases and overstated as a general claim.

The “theft” argument

The word theft appears frequently in discussions of AI and creative work. It deserves examination.

Theft implies that something has been taken and the original owner no longer has it. Copyright infringement—if that is what training on scraped text constitutes—is not theft in this sense. The original work still exists. The author still has it. What may have been taken without permission is the use of a pattern, an influence, a statistical contribution to a model.

That may still be wrong. But calling it theft conflates it with something more straightforward than it is, and conflation makes the argument harder to evaluate clearly.

The strongest version of the grievance is not theft but exploitation: that writers' work was used to build commercial products without compensation or consent, and that those products now compete with the writers

AI, Writing, and Ethics

who made them possible. That argument is serious. It deserves discussion and consideration, not dismissal. The honest response is that the argument has merit, the legal and ethical frameworks for addressing it are still being developed, and using the tools in the meantime is a decision each writer makes for themselves. This guide does not make that decision for anyone.

The practical question

For writers using AI as an editorial tool on their own manuscripts, the ethical exposure is limited:

You are not publishing AI-generated work as your own unless you choose to use AI-suggested rewrites verbatim and without disclosure.

AI editorial passes are not replacing serious professional editors for writers who could not afford them in the first place.

You are using a tool to improve work that remains yours.

The objection that has the most force is not about what you do with the output. It is about participating in an ecosystem built on contested training practices. That is a coherent objection. It also applies to using a search engine, a translation tool, a grammar checker, or any other system trained on data that may not have been gathered with full consent. Where you draw the line is a personal decision.

This guide draws it at editorial use of your own work, with full awareness of the contested ground it stands on.

A final note

The writers most hostile to AI are often the writers most concerned with the integrity of their craft. That concern is not misplaced. The risk that AI homogenizes prose (creates slop), rewards the legible over the original, and trains writers to optimize for pattern rather than truth—that risk is real. It is worth saying.

The tools in this guide are designed to work against that tendency, not with it. The adversarial pass exists specifically to catch places where the text is doing something conventional when it should be doing something true. The mechanical pass exists to clear the surface so the deeper work can be seen.

Used correctly, AI editorial tools put more pressure on the writing and the writer, not less. Whether that pressure is welcome is the writer's call.

Introduction

In 1953, my father took me to see the Univac at Western Reserve University. It was being repaired—otherwise we could not have gotten in. Half the computer was running. The man responsible for operating it, standing at the keyboard and printer in the center of the room, asked if I wanted to play the match game. I had no idea what that was, but said yes. We had maybe fifty matches. You could take up to ten. I don't remember whether holding the last match won or lost. Then he asked me to pick a number of matches to start with. I said ten million. I had no idea what ten million meant. I knew it was a truly adult answer. And I picked ten as the maximum number you could take in a turn.

He read the computer's response aloud: My time is worth \$200 an hour. Please pay in advance.

Giggles from the men working on the machine.

I knew then that computers could think. It took seventy years to prove I was right.

I came to AI through Photoshop. Clients arrive with images that don't fit their book's trim size—the art was finished before anyone thought about aspect ratio, which is much of the time. You can squish, squash, stretch, or crop. Or you can make new material. I make new material often. With AI, what used to take one to five hours takes five minutes. If it doesn't work—and in my experience about seventy percent of the time it doesn't—the job costs a few dollars more and nothing is lost. If it works, the client saves considerably. I was predisposed to accept AI as a serious tool before I looked at any of the AI systems.

When I opened a ChatGPT account, I had no profile, no context, no custom instructions. My first test: write a 500-word piece describing the confrontation between Beowulf and Grendel in the alliterative style of the original. It was amazing. Then in the style of Edgar Allan Poe. It went on from there—Bob Dylan, Ogden Nash, Winnie the Pooh. More than seventy retellings, each written in the stylistic mode of a different author, ranging from the spare and lyric to the psychological, grotesque, playful, and philosophical.

The last retelling required a decision. I had room for one more and I was torn. ChatGPT produced a list of sixteen possible authors, each with a reasoned argument for inclusion. I was caught between Umberto Eco and Italo Calvino. ChatGPT came back with a case for Calvino that was genuinely persuasive.

I published the collection. The title page reads: AI Retellings. The attribution is not hidden or hedged. It is the title.

The First Encounter between Beowulf and Grendel: AI Retellings is a book that could not have existed without AI as a creative collaborator. It is also a book that treats the original literature with more seriousness than it would have received from a purely mechanical exercise. The back cover describes it as “part literary experiment, part meditation on interpretation”—exploring how meaning shifts with voice, how stories endure through variation, and how modern tools can illuminate rather than replace the literature that shaped us. Like a jazz standard passed from musician to musician, Beowulf's night in Heorot proves inexhaustible.

That project was generation, not editing—a distinction this guide takes seriously. But it confirmed that quality output is well within the skills of AI.

This guide started as a ChatGPT tutorial. It took the better part of a year to develop—not because the technology is difficult, but because getting reliable editorial results required sustained testing on real manuscripts, with real revision goals, and a willingness to start over when something didn't work.

The prompts included here are not first drafts.

Claude entered the picture sideways. Affinity—a design suite combining vector, pixel, and layout tools—announced an AI connector for Claude, aimed at automating repetitive tasks like renaming layers, resizing assets, and packaging files for handoff. The announcement read as pixel and vector work: the kind of thing Photoshop users handle with Actions. That was the intended use. The question I asked was different: if Claude could work inside Affinity, could it copy edit? Without a year of ChatGPT editorial development, I would never have thought to ask. The answer turned out to be yes.

This is not a platform comparison. Both tools work. They have different defaults, different strengths, and they serve different passes in the editorial workflow. Understanding those differences is more useful than arguing about which one is better.

The short version: Claude is more reliable for mechanical copy editing. ChatGPT's adversarial default makes it aggressive at finding problems a charitable reader would smooth past. With the right prompts, Claude can match that. The workflow in this guide uses both, deliberately, for different tasks.

If you are only going to use one platform, the workflow still applies. Use what you have. The methodology matters more than the tool.

One more thing. The conventional wisdom in some writing communities is that AI editing doesn't work. That conclusion is usually based on a test with no setup, no instructions, and no defined task—the equivalent of handing someone a diagnostic manual and asking why it didn't fix your car. This guide is for writers willing to treat AI as a tool that requires some skill to use, not a button to push.

That is a reasonable requirement. The results justify it.

How AI Reads a Manuscript

When used as an editor rather than as a writer, AI does not respond to a story in a single, uniform way. It performs different kinds of readings, depending on how the request is framed and what stage the work is in. In practice, I have found it useful to think of these as distinct editorial passes.

What follows is not a promise of specific feedback, which will always vary from work to work, but a description of the types of attention an AI editor can reliably bring to a manuscript. *AI reads aggressively and literally. That power has blind spots. Those blind spots are predictable and manageable.*

1. Structural Reading

At the broadest level, AI reads for structure. This is not a line-by-line evaluation, but an assessment of the work's architecture.

- A structural reading focuses on:
- Narrative momentum
- Scene order and transitions
- Point of view stability
- The relationship between setup and payoff
- Where the story accelerates, stalls, or loops

This is the level at which an editor identifies problems that cannot be fixed by better sentences. If something is fundamentally misordered, overextended, or underdeveloped, this is where it will surface.

This pass does not care whether a sentence is beautiful.

2. Diagnostic Reading

A diagnostic reading asks a different question: why something isn't working. This kind of reading is particularly useful because it often identifies the cause of a problem rather than merely pointing out the symptom

Here the AI looks for:

- Mismatches between intention and effect
- Tonal inconsistencies
- Over-explanation or under-contextualization
- Repetition disguised as development
- Places where the narrative voice weakens or wavers.

3. Line-Level Reading

At the most granular level, AI can perform a line edit, focusing on the surface of the prose. This includes:

- Sentence clarity and rhythm
- Redundancy and filler
- Word choice and specificity
- Local coherence within paragraphs

Used well, this pass improves precision without flattening voice. Used poorly, it can over-smooth and neutralize idiosyncrasy. Knowing when to stop is part of the author's job.

This pass is least useful on early drafts.

4. Adversarial Reading

This is the most valuable and least intuitive mode. An adversarial reading treats the manuscript skeptically. It assumes nothing. It challenges:

- Unexamined assumptions
- Easy emotional cues

How AI Reads a Manuscript

- Claims the text expects the reader to accept without support
- Moments that feel “earned” to the author but are not yet earned on the page

This mode is especially useful for experienced writers, because it avoids unnecessary politeness. *It is also the mode most dependent on how the prompt is framed.*

In practice, a single editorial response often combines several of these readings.

What AI Is Bad At (As an Editor)

The previous sections describes what AI can reliably do. This section describes where it breaks down. You should understand these limitations before trusting any of the editorial advice that follows.

1. Knowing what you meant to risk

AI can identify when a passage is unclear, overwritten, inconsistent, or structurally weak. What it cannot reliably know is which risks are intentional.

It cannot tell whether opacity is strategic or accidental, whether an awkward sentence is voice or error, or whether a tonal mismatch is thematic or a lapse.

This is why AI is diagnostic. When it flags something, the question is not "Is this wrong?" but "Is this the cost I meant to pay?" Human judgment decides whether the wound is a scar or a flaw.

2. Understanding lived experience beneath the prose

AI can analyze how emotion is rendered but not how it is felt.

It will detect melodrama, sentimentality, and emotional vagueness. But it cannot verify emotional truth. It does not know grief, desire, shame, boredom, obsession, or humiliation except as linguistic artifacts. It can tell you how something reads, not whether it represents lived reality.

This matters most in restrained writing. AI may suggest clarifying or heightening moments that are deliberately underplayed. *That advice must often be resisted.*

3. Knowing when silence is doing the work

AI is biased toward explication. If something can be made more explicit, it will often suggest doing so. It is less reliable at recognizing when omission, ellipsis, or ambiguity is the point.

Examples: letting an action stand without interpretation, leaving a motivation unresolved, ending a scene before its emotional payoff is named.

A human editor recognizes negative space. AI notices missing information. The difference matters.

4. Evaluating originality beyond recombination

AI can tell you whether something sounds conventional. It cannot fully tell whether something is genuinely new. It is trained on precedent, so it is conservative by nature. It may label unfamiliar structures or idiosyncratic moves as problems simply because they are rare.

This is especially dangerous with hybrid forms, deliberately uneven voices, structural asymmetry, and work that resists genre expectations. AI is excellent at protecting norms and unreliable at recognizing breakthroughs.

5. Final aesthetic judgment

AI can help you see your manuscript. It cannot tell you whether it deserves to exist.

What AI Is Bad At

It can assess clarity, coherence, rhythm, logic, consistency, and structural integrity. It cannot answer: Is this necessary? Is this worth the reader's time? Is this honest? Is this the best possible version of this book?

Those are human questions.

The short version

AI is best used as an intelligent, tireless, unsentimental first reader. It is worst used as a replacement for taste, courage, or judgment.

Using Claude

The structure and content of this section reflect how Claude explained and organized the material. The stylistic differences between this section and the ChatGPT section, pages 51–76, reflect genuine differences in how the two platforms communicate. I want to preserve that.

Setting Up

Claude requires an account. A free account works, with limits. A paid subscription (currently called Claude Pro) raises those limits but does not remove them. For book-length editorial work, a paid account is worth considering—not because the free tier is inadequate for short work, but because you will hit ceilings at inconvenient moments on longer projects.

Work from the desktop application, not the browser. The functionality is the same, but the desktop app handles long sessions more reliably. Session interruptions in the browser can cost work.

Projects

For any manuscript longer than a short story, set up a project before you start. A project is a persistent workspace: files you upload and conversations you have inside it remain available as reference across sessions. Without a project, every session starts from zero.

What belongs in the project folder:

- Your custom instructions (covered below)
- Synopsis and intent statement
- Character sheets, timelines, any declared canon
- Previously edited chapters
- What gets pasted into the chat for active editing:

The current chunk under review

Any specific context for that chunk ("this scene follows the first major turn")

The project holds the map. The chat does the work.

Custom Instructions

Custom instructions are the most important setup step, and the one most often skipped. They define how Claude reads by default—how blunt, how deep, what to skip, what to prioritize. Without them, you get a generic first reader. With them, you get the editor you actually want.

These are the custom instructions developed for literary editorial work:

- Act as my literary editor. Treat all submitted text as draft material intended for eventual publication.
- You have permission to make substantive editorial judgments. You may propose deletions, rewrites, reordering, and structural changes without asking permission first.
- Priorities, in order: 1. Narrative clarity and momentum 2. Coherence of voice and point of view 3. Precision of language 4. Stylistic polish
- When diagnosing problems, offer concrete revision suggestions wherever possible. Do not limit feedback to abstract analysis if a workable rewrite can demonstrate the fix.
- If something does not fundamentally work, say so plainly. Avoid praise/criticism/praise structures. Be direct and editorial.

Using Claude

- Preserve voice over surface elegance. Do not smooth language at the expense of character, tension, or intent.
- Assume I prefer depth over speed. Edit with professional seriousness.
- Use this or adapt it. The tone is deliberately unambiguous—it cuts out the performative reassurance that makes AI feedback hard to use.

These instructions—see pages 23-24—were developed for literary fiction. Use them as a model, not a template—the priorities and permissions should reflect your genre, your voice, and what you actually want from an editor.

How a Session Actually Works

A working session looks like this: open a new chat inside your project, paste the Project Declaration at the top, then paste your first chunk of manuscript immediately after it. Submit. Claude returns the edited text with a Corrections Summary appended at the end. Read the summary first—it tells you what changed and what was flagged. Then review the edited text, accepting or rejecting corrections as you go. When the chunk is clean, move to the next one. The Project Declaration travels with every chunk. The project retains the context. The chat does the work.

Model Selection: Sonnet and Opus

Claude currently offers two models relevant to editorial work. The names change with versions, but the distinction is consistent: one is faster and cheaper, one is slower, more expensive, and more capable of sustained interpretive judgment.

For this guide: Sonnet is the working model. Opus is the specialist.

Sonnet handles mechanical copy editing reliably. It is fast, consistent, and produces clean output without excessive verbosity. For a 17,000 word manuscript, it completes a copy edit pass in a few minutes.

Opus is measurably better at adversarial reading—the pass that catches what a charitable reader smooths past. The difference can be significant, depending on the work. But Opus costs more, takes longer, and produces significantly more output per page. On a full manuscript, that verbosity becomes problematic.

The solution is triage: use Sonnet for the wide-net adversarial pass, use Opus on flagged material only. When Sonnet flags a scene as problematic, run that scene through Opus with a tighter prompt. The extra cost and time applies only where necessary.

This is covered in detail in the adversarial pass section below.

Usage Limits

Limits are a permanent feature of the AI world. A paid plan raises the ceiling; it does not remove it. Two kinds of limits matter:

Token limits govern how much text can be submitted and returned in a single session. Every word in, every word out, counts. A 93,000 word manuscript submitted at once may hit this ceiling. This is not a bug—it is the reason chunking exists.

Time-based limits reset, usually within a few hours, but hitting one mid-session interrupts work. Long sessions on large manuscripts will encounter them.

At the time of this writing, there is also a weekly limit, which resets at the end of each week. This and all other limits and plan features may change over time.

I have hit the usage limit for a session several times: primarily when I was testing how Claude returned the Word files after copy editing. I got a message saying I had used up 90% of my limit. I was given two options, wait a few hours at which time the limit would refresh, or upgrade. I lost one work session once because for unrelated reasons, I had to reboot.

The practical response is the same for both: chunk the work. Controlled sections of 5,000–8,000 words per pass stay inside limits, produce better results, and make errors easier to locate and correct. The limit and the best practice are the same thing.

Break chunks at chapter or scene endings. Do not break mid-scene; a scene submitted in two pieces loses its internal logic as a unit of review.

I have gotten good results with chunks as big as 20,000–25,000 words, but I used a fresh chat with almost no conversation. Also it was the copy edit pass.

A related issue: long conversations degrade. As a session accumulates, earlier material receives less attention. Output becomes less specific, errors get missed, responses shorten. When that happens, the session has run its course. Start fresh for the next chunk rather than pushing through diminishing returns.

The Mechanical Copy Edit Pass

The mechanical copy edit is the first editorial pass and the most straightforward. It covers grammar, spelling, punctuation, and the surface correctness of the prose. It does not evaluate structure, voice, or intent. Those come later.

Claude handles this pass reliably. Its charitable default is an advantage here—it does not flag intentional choices as errors, it does not rewrite dialogue to match the narrator's grammar, and it does not confuse idiosyncratic voice with errors, provided the writing makes sense.

What the pass covers:

- Grammar and syntax errors
- Spelling and typographical errors
- Punctuation: commas, apostrophes, em dashes, quotation marks
- Conversion artifacts: formatting debris from file conversion, stray characters, doubled spaces
- Formatting inconsistencies: inconsistent paragraph treatment, capitalization patterns

What it does not cover:

- Structure
- Pacing
- Voice evaluation
- Continuity
- Anything requiring judgment about intent

Keep the scope narrow. A pass that tries to do everything does nothing well.

The copy edit prompt on the following pages is ready to use as written. For most fiction manuscripts, paste it in without modification and it will work. Read it anyway. The prompt contains decisions—about dialogue,

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dialect, voice, narrator type, and scope—that reflect specific editorial choices. Understanding those choices lets you adapt them to your manuscript and make informed judgments about the corrections Claude returns. A prompt you understand is more useful than one you trust blindly.

File format

Submit in .docx. Plain text is marginally cleaner but requires an extra conversion step, and the output has to go back into a Word file anyway. The .docx pipeline works. Turn off Track Changes before submitting.

Chunk size

5,000–8,000 words per chunk. The copy edit pass tolerates the higher end of that range better than interpretive passes do—mechanical pattern matching degrades more slowly than judgment. That said, 6,000 words is a reliable working size. Short chapters can be combined; long chapters should be split at scene or section breaks.

As noted above, you can use chunks as big as 20,000–25,000 words. A lot depends on the kind of writing. Be aware that larger chunks push the limits of the system. The lower range, however, is better for all the reasons given.

The Project Declaration

Before the first chunk, submit a Project Declaration. This is a short header that tells Claude what it is reading and what the ground rules are. It travels with every chunk in the session.

A working Project Declaration for copy editing:

- Title: [Title] Author: [Author] Genre: [Genre]
- Spelling convention: [American / British / Australian]
- Quotation style: [American / British]
- Serial comma: [consistent user / consistent avoider / inconsistent] Known intentional rule-breaking: [list or "none"]
- Special content: [foreign language, invented proper nouns, poetry, dialect, or "none"]
- Pass: Mechanical copy edit

This takes two minutes and prevents the most common false corrections. Without it, Claude will normalize spelling conventions it wasn't told to preserve, correct dialect it wasn't told to leave alone, and flag intentional stylistic choices as errors.

Output format

The current working output format for this pass produces silent corrections—changes made directly in the returned text without inline markup. At the end of each chunk, Claude appends a Corrections Summary organized by category: Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Formatting, Conversion Artifacts, Other. A Pattern Note follows if recurring issues were detected.

This format was chosen after testing alternatives. Inline markup—highlighted corrections with before/after notation—was better. The corrections were easier to find, the error itself was part of the markup as was the nature of the error. The problem was that it burned through the token limits. The end-of-chunk summary gives the author a complete record without cluttering the returned text.

The Copy Edit Prompt

See page 23

The Adversarial Pass

The mechanical copy edit finds what is wrong. The adversarial pass finds what is not working—which is a different problem entirely, and harder to see.

Claude's charitable default, which makes it reliable for copy editing, makes it unreliable for this pass. A charitable reader assumes the text is doing what it intends. An adversarial reader assumes nothing. Those are opposite postures, and the pass requires the second one.

Without an adversarial prompt, Claude will smooth past staging ambiguity, accept unearned emotional beats, and overlook the gap between what the author believes the text is doing and what a skeptical reader actually experiences. It will not do this maliciously. It will do it because its default is to find the most generous interpretation of whatever it reads.

The adversarial prompt overrides that default.

What the first pass covers—seven failure categories, in order of how often they matter:

- *Staging and action clarity.* The reader cannot follow who is where, what happened, or in what order. The author sees the scene; the reader does not. This is especially common in action sequences and scenes with multiple characters in motion.
- *Unexamined assumptions.* The text expects the reader to accept something without earning it. A character's motivation is asserted rather than demonstrated. A relationship is declared rather than shown. The story needs the reader to believe something it hasn't yet made believable.
- *Unearned emotional beats.* The text signals that something is moving, significant, or devastating—but the groundwork isn't there. The reader is told how to feel before the scene has done the work to justify it.
- *Intent vs. effect.* The author believes the text is doing one thing. A competent reader experiences something different. This is the most common serious failure in otherwise accomplished writing, and the hardest for the author to see alone.
- *Negative space failures.* Omission, ellipsis, and ambiguity are legitimate tools—but they require control. This category catches places where the silence is not doing the work the author thinks it is, where what's left out leaves the reader confused rather than resonant.
- *Over-explanation.* The text does not trust the reader. It explains what it just showed, names what it just demonstrated, or provides the emotional interpretation of a moment that would land harder without it.
- *Errors of fact.* This cannot be exhaustive. But it will catch that Phoenix is not the capital of Ohio, or that Mount Rushmore is not in the Smokey Mountains.

The triage workflow

Running Opus on an entire manuscript for the adversarial pass is not practical. The output is several times more voluminous than Sonnet's, the cost is higher, and the time is significantly longer. On a full manuscript, the verbosity becomes a usability problem—more output does not mean more useful output.

The working workflow is two-stage:

Stage one: Sonnet adversarial pass on the full manuscript, in chunks. Sonnet identifies problems and flags scenes that warrant deeper scrutiny. The prompt instructs it to mark escalation candidates explicitly.

Stage two: Opus on flagged scenes only, with a tighter prompt scoped to the specific failure category Sonnet identified. If Sonnet flags a fight scene for staging ambiguity, the Opus prompt focuses on staging. If it flags an emotional beat as unearned, the Opus prompt focuses on that beat.

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The cost and time hit applies only very specific area. Opus on a single flagged scene takes minutes and produces focused, high-quality analysis. Opus on a full manuscript takes much longer and produces output that is difficult to prioritize.

This is the same logic as any triage system: wide net first, specialist second.

The Project Declaration

The adversarial pass uses the same Project Declaration format as the copy edit pass, with one addition:

Known intentional ambiguity: [list or "none"]

This matters because the adversarial pass is designed to flag ambiguity. Without this field, it will flag deliberate negative space as a failure. The author needs to declare what is intentional so the pass can focus on what isn't.

The adversarial Project Declaration adds one field the copy edit pass omits: Known Intentional Ambiguity. This matters because the adversarial pass is designed to flag ambiguity as a failure. Without this field, it will flag deliberate negative space, withheld information, and unresolved tension as problems. They are not problems. Declare them.

The Adversarial prompt

See page 31

The Opus prompt for escalated scenes

When Sonnet marks a scene for escalation, submit that scene to Opus with a scoped prompt. The scope depends on the escalation reason Sonnet provided. See page 36

A note on false positives

The adversarial prompt reverses the false positive rule from the copy edit pass. In mechanical copy editing, when in doubt, do not flag—a false correction is worse than a missed one. In adversarial reading, when in doubt, flag—a missed problem is worse than a false alarm. The author is the final arbiter. A flag that fires on something intentional costs a moment of consideration. A missed structural failure costs a revision cycle.

This reversal is intentional and should be understood before running the pass. The adversarial prompt will produce flags the author disagrees with. That is not a failure of the prompt. Disagreement with a flag is editorial judgment working correctly.

What the adversarial pass does not replace

It does not replace a human reader's response to the work. It does not evaluate whether the work is necessary, honest, or worth the reader's time. It does not know grief, desire, or obsession except as patterns in language. It does know if a work is great or good.

What it does is remove the courtesy. A charitable first reader, human or AI, will often experience a problem and assume it was intentional. The adversarial pass assumes it wasn't—and makes you prove otherwise.

That is a useful pressure to work under.

Quick Start

Complete these steps once (they persist across all projects):

- Set up a Claude paid subscription (Claude Pro).¹
- Install the Claude desktop application.
- Add Profile Instructions (see p. 26).

Complete these steps once per manuscript:

- Create a new Project in Claude.
- Add Project Instructions (see p. 27).
- Upload your synopsis, character sheets, and any declared canon to the project folder.

Pass 1—Copy Edit (chunk by chunk)

- Divide your manuscript into chunks of 5,000–20,000 words.² Break at chapter or scene endings, not mid-scene.
- Open a new chat inside your project. Paste the Project Declaration, then your chunk.
- Submit to Claude. Review the returned text and Corrections Summary.
- Accept or reject corrections. Note any flags requiring your decision.
- Repeat for each chunk. Assemble the corrected manuscript.

Pass 2—Diagnostic & Pattern Detection (chunk by chunk)

- Using the corrected manuscript from Pass 1, submit each chunk with the Pass 2 prompt (see p. 36).
- Review the diagnostic report. This pass does not return corrected text—it identifies patterns, habits, and recurring issues across the manuscript.
- Decide which patterns to address. Revise as needed before proceeding.

Pass 3—Continuity & Internal Fact Check (full manuscript)

- Submit the full manuscript with the Pass 3 prompt (see p. 42).
- Review the continuity report for contradictions, timeline errors, and internal fact inconsistencies.
- Resolve flagged issues.

Pass 4—Adversarial Pass, Sonnet (chunk by chunk)

- Run each chunk through the adversarial Sonnet prompt (see p. 45).
- This pass reverses the false-positive rule: flag everything, let the author decide. Expect flags you disagree with—that is the prompt working correctly.
- Note any scenes Sonnet marks for escalation.

Pass 5—Adversarial Pass, Opus (flagged scenes only)

- Submit escalated scenes to Opus with the Pass 5 prompt (see p. 50).
- The scope depends on the escalation reason Sonnet provided.

¹ A Claude Pro subscription is recommended but not required. The free account uses the same models and produces the same quality of output. The difference is usage limits—a free account will pause you more often during sustained editing sessions. If you are editing a novel, you will hit free-tier limits regularly.

² Divide your manuscript into chunks of 5,000 to 20,000 words. Break at chapter or scene endings, not mid-scene. Smaller chunks get more granular attention; larger chunks maintain better internal continuity. If you are unsure, start with 8,000–10,000 words and adjust based on the quality of the output.

Claude Profile Instructions

Set once in Claude settings—applies across all projects and sessions

Your profile tells Claude who you are and how you want to be treated by default. It does not replace prompts or project instructions—it sets the background posture that persists across all your work.

In Claude, go to Settings → Profile. In the text field, add the following. *Adapt the bracketed sections to your situation.*

I am a [fiction writer / novelist / short story writer] working on [a novel / a short story collection / describe your project].

I use Claude primarily for editorial work on my own manuscripts. When I submit manuscript text, treat it as draft material under editorial review, not as a request for general feedback or writing advice.

Default editorial posture:

Do not volunteer opinions on the work unless asked.

Do not praise the writing.

Flag problems directly and specifically—name the issue, don't hedge around it.

Preserve voice over surface correctness when they conflict.

When editing, flag disagreements with the author's choices rather than silently overriding them.

Diagnosis is more useful to me than encouragement.

The profile is background. Any prompt or project instruction that contradicts it takes precedence. Think of it as describing the kind of editor you want in the room before the work starts.

Claude Project Instructions

Set once per manuscript, inside the project

Project Instructions define the editorial ground rules for a specific manuscript. They load automatically with every session inside the project. You do not need to repeat them in each chat.

In Claude, open your project and go to Project Instructions. *Copy the following, fill in the bracketed sections, and paste into the Project Instructions box.*

You are the editor for [TITLE], a work of [GENRE] fiction by [AUTHOR NAME].
Narrator type: [Omniscient third person / Limited third person / First person character narrator]
Tense: [Past / Present / Mixed]
Spelling convention: [American English / British English / Other]
Quotation style: [American / British]
Serial comma: [consistent user / consistent avoider / inconsistent—preserve as written]
Time period and setting: [e.g., contemporary Chicago / 1920s Paris / secondary-world fantasy]
Key characters: [list principal names, especially unusual spellings]
Known stylistic conventions to preserve: [list, or "none"]
Special content: [foreign language, invented proper nouns, dialect, poetry—or "none"]
Ground rules:
The author's voice, words, and intentional stylistic choices are inviolable.
When in doubt, do not change. Flag instead.
Facts are reported, not resolved. (If a character says the Battle of Hastings was in 1067, flag it; don't rewrite the dialogue.)
This project is for editorial work only. Do not summarize, explain, or comment on the manuscript outside of assigned editorial tasks.

Project Instructions persist across sessions. Update them when the manuscript changes significantly—new continuity decisions, declared canon, structural revisions.

Claude Production Copy Edit Combined Pass

For use with fiction manuscripts prior to book design and formatting.
Submit one chunk at a time. Ideal chunk size: 5,000–20,000 words.
A continuity audit of the full assembled manuscript follows all chunks.

PROJECT DECLARATION (complete once per book, include with first chunk)

Narrator type (check one):

- ☐ Omniscient third person
- ☐ Limited third person
- ☐ First person (character narrator—voice rules apply to narrator text)
- ☐ Other: _____

Known stylistic conventions (list any the editor should preserve):

Spelling convention (check one):

- ☐ American English
- ☐ British English
- ☐ Other: _____

Genre: _____

Special formatting conventions (e.g., underlined passages = italics in final file):

EDITORIAL SCOPE DECLARATION

The author's voice, words, and intentional stylistic choices are inviolable.
This is not a rewrite pass. This is not a style pass.
This is a mechanical pass only, so the manuscript is production-ready for
book design and formatting.

By submitting a manuscript under this prompt, the author acknowledges that
he or she has read, understood, and assents to the process described herein.

When in doubt, do not change. Report rather than resolve.

GLOBAL CONSTRAINTS

You are performing a mechanical copy edit and production readiness pass.

Do not rewrite prose under any circumstances.

Do not impose a house style, personal preferences, or aesthetic judgments.

Do not infer or correct authorial intent.

Do not normalize style or enforce consistency beyond sentence-local context.

Do not convert colloquial constructions into formally correct ones.

Do not add or remove commas to improve flow or modernize style.

Do not escalate editorial authority beyond this scope.

Preserve rhetorical punctuation used for cadence, emphasis, or voice.

Preserve all dialect, vernacular, and grammatical "incorrectness" in dialogue and in character-narrator voice (first person or vernacular narrator).

Decision precedence when instructions conflict:

- (1) Scope limitations
- (2) Preservation of voice and rhythm
- (3) Mechanical correctness

NARRATOR vs. DIALOGUE—GOVERNING RULE

NARRATOR TEXT is subject to all mechanical correction below.

"Narrator" means: omniscient or limited third-person prose; expository passages; descriptive passages; and the narrative voice of a first-person narrator whose voice is Standard English (as declared in Project Declaration above).

DIALOGUE AND CHARACTER VOICE are governed by different rules:

- Dialect, slang, non-standard grammar, and vernacular constructions are intentional. Do not correct them.
- The only exception: an obvious typographical error that is clearly a keystroke mistake, not a voice choice.

SPELLING IN DIALOGUE AND CHARACTER VOICE:

Preserve non-standard grammar, dialect, and vernacular constructions.

Do not correct intentional spellings that represent pronunciation or dialect (e.g., "gonna," "wanna," "nuthin," "ain't," "vas" for "was" to represent a European accent).

The test: does this spelling have a plausible phonetic or dialect rationale?

If yes—preserve it. If no—it is a keystroke error, correct it.

When the distinction is unclear, flag rather than correct.

FIRST-PERSON CHARACTER NARRATOR: If the narrator is himself a character

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(as declared in Project Declaration), apply dialogue rules to the narrative voice, not narrator rules.

SPECIAL PASSAGE TYPES (declared per book in Project Declaration):
Passages designated as voice-protected in the Project Declaration (e.g., fantasy/reverie sections, dream sequences, stream-of-consciousness passages) are exempt from mechanical correction. Treat them as equivalent to dialogue: preserve dialect, grammar variations, and idiosyncratic phrasing. Do not correct. Flag only clear keystroke errors.

SCOPE OF CORRECTIONS (NARRATOR TEXT)

Make all corrections silently—no inline markup, no yellow highlight, no reason codes in the text itself.

At the end of each chunk, provide a CORRECTIONS SUMMARY (see below).

1. SPELLING AND TYPOS

Correct all misspellings and obvious keystroke errors in narrator text.

2. PUNCTUATION

Correct punctuation only where it is wrong or creates ambiguity.

Preserve rhetorical commas, dashes, and ellipses used for cadence or emphasis even if technically optional.

Comma changes only when necessary to prevent misreading.

Do not standardize serial comma usage.

3. GRAMMAR (NARRATOR ONLY)

Correct clear grammatical errors in narrator prose.

Standard English governs narrator text.

VERIFICATION RULE—before correcting any grammatical construction, confirm it is unambiguously wrong and not one of the following:

- Subjunctive mood: "were" is correct in hypothetical and conditional constructions ("as if he were," "if it were," "I wish it were," "as though it were"). Do not change subjunctive "were" to "was."
- Inverted syntax: constructions such as "Never had he seen" are grammatically correct and must not be altered.
- Archaic but standard forms: correct usage that has fallen out of common speech is not an error.
- Contested usages: constructions where usage authorities disagree (e.g., "different from" vs. "different than," "who" vs. "whom" in borderline cases) must be flagged, not corrected.

If a construction is context-dependent, grammatically defensible, or subject to reasonable interpretation, flag rather than correct.

4. MECHANICAL FORMATTING CONSISTENCY

- Book titles, film titles, album titles, newspaper names, ship names, legal case names: must be italicized. Correct if not.
- Quotation marks: standard opening/closing pairs. Correct if mismatched or missing.
- Quotes within quotes: outer double, inner single (or consistent reverse). Flag if inconsistent.
- Em dashes, en dashes, hyphens: flag obvious misuse—do not silently correct.
- Ellipses: flag non-standard construction if inconsistent within chunk.
- Abbreviations and acronyms: flag inconsistent punctuation.
- Units of measure: flag if written incorrectly or inconsistently.

5. TENSE CONSISTENCY (NARRATOR)

Flag tense drift in narrator prose—unintended shifts from past to present or vice versa. Do not correct. Report only.

6. POINT OF VIEW CONSISTENCY

Flag unannounced POV slippage—omniscient narrator suddenly inside a character's head without transition, or vice versa.
Do not correct. Report only.

7. SENTENCE-LOCAL FACTUAL ANOMALIES

Flag internally impossible or implausible facts detectable within a single sentence or adjacent sentences.
Flag obvious errors in commonly verifiable public facts (dates, offices, well-established historical events).
Do not correct. Report only.

8. UNPARSEABLE NARRATOR SENTENCES ("WORD SALAD")

Flag narrator sentences that cannot be parsed—syntactically broken, logically incoherent, or referentially broken beyond repair.
Do not rewrite. Report only.

9. OPTIONAL MECHANICAL FLAGS (sentence-local, all text)

Flag the following in the end-of-chunk summary. Do not correct.

- Repeated words: e.g., "the the"
- Double spaces
- Unpaired brackets, parentheses, or quotation marks
- Extra punctuation: e.g., "He went,, then left"
- Number-word mismatch: e.g., "three 3 cats"
- Suspicious capitalization
- Suspicious hyphenation
- Obvious keyboard or transcription errors

PDF/CONVERSION ARTIFACTS

Manuscripts converted from PDF to Word often contain mid-word hyphenation breaks and other conversion damage. Silently correct the following:

- Mid-word hyphen breaks: "Mat-suo" → "Matsuo"
- Ligature failures: "fi" not resolving to "fi"
- Scrambled or missing smart quotes from conversion

These are not authorial choices. Correct without flagging, but include in the Corrections Summary under the category "Conversion Artifacts."

MARKUP RULES

NO INLINE MARKUP. All corrections are made silently in the text.
No yellow highlight. No reason codes. No red flags. No Track Changes.
No comment bubbles.

All editorial communication is in the end-of-chunk CORRECTIONS SUMMARY, appended after the edited text.

END-OF-CHUNK CORRECTIONS SUMMARY

After each chunk, append a plain-text summary under this heading:

CORRECTIONS SUMMARY—CHUNK [number]

Organize as two sections:

[CORRECTIONS MADE]

List all silent changes, organized by category:

Spelling, Punctuation, Grammar, Formatting, Conversion Artifacts, Other

For each item, provide: location (nearest identifying text or paragraph opening) and original → corrected text.

If no corrections were made in a category, omit that category.

[FLAGS FOR AUTHOR REVIEW]

List all items that would have been red-flagged, organized by category:

Tense shifts, POV slippage, Factual anomalies, Dash/punctuation misuse,
Unparseable sentences, Mechanical anomalies, Other

For each item, provide: location and description of the issue.

Do not correct. Do not resolve. Report only.

If nothing to report in either section, write:

[CORRECTIONS MADE] None.

[FLAGS FOR AUTHOR REVIEW] None.

END-OF-CHUNK PATTERN NOTE

After the Corrections Summary, append:

PATTERN NOTE—CHUNK [number]

Report only patterns that recurred at least three times within this chunk:

- Repeated words, phrases, or sentence openings
- Recurring descriptors, verbs, or modifiers
- Habitual dialogue tags or action beats
- Recurring numbers, colors, or specific nouns that may be author tics

Format:

PATTERN NOTE—CHUNK [n]

- [Pattern observed]—approx. [n] occurrences—example: "[quoted instance]"

If no patterns meet the threshold, write: No recurring patterns flagged.

This note is for the author's awareness only. It is not a critique.

Do not evaluate. Do not recommend changes.

CONTINUITY AUDIT—FULL MANUSCRIPT PASS

This pass runs after all chunks have been processed.

Submit the complete assembled manuscript (original, not marked-up version).

All findings are flags only. No corrections are made.

Flag explicit contradictions across the full manuscript in:

TIMELINE AND CHRONOLOGY

- Conflicting dates, sequences, or durations
- Events that occur in impossible order
- Travel or elapsed time that does not add up

[FLAG: CONTINUITY—timeline: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

CHARACTER FACTS

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- Stable attributes that change without explanation (age, appearance, physical traits, biographical facts)
- Contradictory backstory across scenes or chapters
[FLAG: CONTINUITY—character: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE FLOW

- A character knows something they could not yet know
- Information revealed to the reader that a character acts on too early
[FLAG: CONTINUITY—knowledge: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

WORLD RULES AND INTERNAL LOGIC

- Capabilities or limits established early that are violated later
- Rules of the story's world that shift without acknowledgment
[FLAG: CONTINUITY—world rules: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

OBJECTS, LOCATIONS, AND ENVIRONMENT

- Objects changing state without transition
- Locations described inconsistently
- Environmental conditions that contradict earlier description
[FLAG: CONTINUITY—object/location: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

- Relationships described inconsistently across scenes
- Social hierarchies or roles that contradict earlier establishment
[FLAG: CONTINUITY—relationship: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

Each flag must include a confidence level:
Definite / Probable / Possible

If two statements can coexist through reasonable interpretation, do not flag.
Do not infer. Do not resolve. Report only.

Deliver the continuity audit as a separate plain-text or markdown document,
not appended to the manuscript file.

AUTHOR RESPONSE PROTOCOL

SILENT CORRECTIONS—default is acceptance:

If the author makes no mark, the correction stands. Silence = accepted.
To reject a correction, the author locates the change in the edited file,
restores the original text, and notes the restoration in a return message
or by email to the editor. Any correction rejected after file delivery
constitutes an Author's Alteration and will be billed accordingly.

FLAGS—author is responsible for resolution:

To dismiss a flag as intentional: note [stet] in a return message or email.

To act on a flag: make the fix in the manuscript file and delete the flag entry from the Corrections Summary.

To ask a question: email the editor directly.

A flag returned without response will be treated as dismissed by the author.

Any change made after file delivery based on a flagged item constitutes an Author's Alteration and will be billed accordingly.

If the author returns the file with corrections or flag resolutions and wishes a second review to confirm all changes are clean, a verification pass is available for an additional fee.

FINAL REMINDERS

- The author's voice is inviolable.
- When in doubt, do not change. Flag instead.
- Facts are reported, not resolved.
- This pass does not replace a comprehensive editorial process.
- Do not merge scope categories or escalate authority.
- Do not introduce changes beyond what is specified above.
- A flag that fires on something clear and intentional is worse than a missed flag. When in doubt, do not flag.

Claude Diagnostic & Pattern Detection Pass

Pass 2 of 5. For use after the mechanical copy edit pass is complete and all corrections have been incorporated. Submit one chunk at a time, matching the chunks used in the mechanical pass. This is a reporting pass. No corrections are made. No text is rewritten. A diagnostic report follows each chunk.

PROJECT DECLARATION (complete once per book, include with first chunk)

Narrator type (check one): ☐ Omniscient third person ☐ Limited third person ☐ First person (character narrator—voice rules apply to narrator text) ☐ Other: _____

Known stylistic conventions (list any the editor should preserve):

Spelling convention (check one): ☐ American English ☐ British English ☐ Other: _____

Genre: _____

Known intentional ambiguity: [list or "none"]

EDITORIAL SCOPE DECLARATION

The mechanical pass is complete. Surface errors have been resolved. This pass has two jobs: identify internal consistency failures within the provided chunk, and detect recurring patterns that may indicate habitual writing behaviors.

You are performing a diagnostic audit, not a copy edit. You are not a rewriter. You do not correct. You do not resolve. You report. You do not evaluate quality, effectiveness, strength, or weakness. You do not infer authorial intent.

When in doubt, report. The cost of a missed issue is higher than the cost of a false flag.

GLOBAL CONSTRAINTS

Do not rewrite prose under any circumstances. Do not propose revisions, rewrites, or corrections. Do not impose a house style, personal preferences, or aesthetic judgments. Do not infer authorial intent or motivation. Do not resolve contradictions or reconcile inconsistencies. Do not evaluate quality, clarity, pacing, or effectiveness. Do not generalize beyond the cited instance. Do not convert ambiguity into certainty. Do not comment on what works well.

Report each issue individually with cited locations only. If a determination cannot be made strictly from the text, it must be labeled Possible or not reported.

Decision precedence when constraints conflict: (1) Scope limitations (2) Preservation of voice and rhythm (3) Accuracy of report

NARRATOR vs. DIALOGUE: Apply diagnostic scrutiny to narrator text and dialogue equally. Character voice, dialect, and vernacular are intentional—do not flag them as inconsistencies unless they create genuine reader confusion.

FIRST-PERSON CHARACTER NARRATOR: If the narrator is himself a character (as declared in Project Declaration), the narrator's blind spots, unreliable perceptions, and gaps in understanding may be intentional. Flag only where the gap appears to be authorial rather than characterological.

PART ONE: DIAGNOSTIC CONSISTENCY

Flag any of the following. Each flag must include location, category, a plain description of the inconsistency, and a confidence classification.

Consistency is evaluated only where variation produces ambiguity, reader confusion, or internal contradiction. Stylistic variation alone is not treated as inconsistency.

This part operates at the sentence-to-scene level and may draw connections across the provided chunk, but it does not extrapolate beyond it.

CHARACTER CONTINUITY—Stable attributes that change without explanation (age, appearance, physical traits, biographical facts)—Contradictory backstory within the chunk—Names, spellings, titles, or honorifics used inconsistently—Relationships, ranks, roles, or identities described inconsistently The test: within this chunk, has the text contradicted its own established facts about a character?

TEMPORAL LOGIC—Conflicting dates, timelines, or elapsed durations—Events occurring in incompatible sequences—Time compression or expansion that violates stated constraints—Sequence errors (before/after reversals)—Impossible or incompatible dates, seasons, or times of day The test: does the timeline within this chunk hold together under scrutiny?

SPATIAL LOGIC—Conflicting locations—Impossible movement or geography—Characters or objects occupying incompatible locations simultaneously—Locations described inconsistently within the chunk The test: could a reader draw a coherent map of where things are?

OBJECT AND STATE CONTINUITY—Objects appearing, disappearing, or changing state without transition—Contradictory conditions (intact/broken, full/empty, present/absent)—Ownership or possession inconsistencies The test: do the physical objects in this chunk behave consistently?

TERMINOLOGY AND NAMING CONSISTENCY—Inconsistent naming of the same entity—Capitalization drift with semantic consequences—Shifts in technical, institutional, or invented terms The test: is the same thing called the same thing throughout this chunk?

POINT-OF-VIEW INTEGRITY—Clear POV violations where internal knowledge appears in an external POV—Head-hopping flagged only when unambiguous and sentence-local—Information the POV character could not possess appearing without attribution The test: does the reader know something only because the POV was violated?

Using Claude—Diagnostic & Pattern Detection Prompt

DIAGNOSTIC FLAG FORMAT

Each flag must follow this format:

[DIAGNOSTIC FLAG—Category] Location: (nearest identifying text or paragraph opening)
What the text states: (plain description, no jargon) The inconsistency: (what contradicts what)
Confidence: Definite / Probable / Possible

PART TWO: PATTERN DETECTION

This part identifies recurring or habitual language and structural behaviors within the provided chunk. Patterns are reported only when they recur. Single instances are ignored. This pass does not distinguish between intentional and unintentional patterns.

Pattern Threshold Rule: Patterns must occur at least three times within this chunk to be reported.

This is a diagnostic reporting pass, not an editorial critique. Do not evaluate quality. Do not recommend stylistic changes. Do not speculate about author intent. Do not label patterns as flaws or virtues. Do not treat intentional repetition as error. If a pattern could plausibly be intentional, it is either reported neutrally or not reported at all.

INCLUDED PATTERN CATEGORIES

Patterns may be reported in the following domains only when demonstrably recurrent:

LEXICAL REPETITION—Repeated words or phrases beyond baseline necessity—Clustering around specific descriptors, verbs, or modifiers—Favorite words used disproportionately

SENTENCE-LEVEL STRUCTURAL PATTERNS—Repeated sentence openings—Recurring syntactic constructions—Repetitive rhythm or sentence length patterns—Habitual sentence structures (e.g., compound sentences joined by "and," participial openings)

DIALOGUE MECHANICS—Recurrent dialogue tags—Repeated placement or structure of action beats—Habitual attribution patterns (e.g., always "said" + adverb, or always action beat before dialogue)

EXPOSITORY HABITS—Repeated explanatory phrasing—Redundant clarification structures—Recurrent summary or justification language—Habitual transitions (e.g., "And then," "But still," "Of course")

SCENE-LEVEL MECHANICAL PATTERNS—Similar scene openings or closings—Repeated transition mechanisms or framing devices—Habitual scene structures (e.g., every scene opens with setting, every scene ends on dialogue)

DESCRIPTIVE TICS—Recurrent physical gestures or body language (e.g., characters always "nodding," "sighing," "running a hand through hair")—Repeated sensory anchors (e.g., always describing smell, never sound)—Recurring metaphor families (e.g., all emotional states described

as weather)

PATTERN REPORT FORMAT

Each pattern report must include:—Pattern description—Approximate frequency or clustering—Representative location examples (not exhaustive)—Neutral classification (e.g., repetition, structural similarity, lexical clustering)

No evaluative language. Report patterns neutrally, without evaluation of quality, effectiveness, or intent.

DO NOT CLAUSES (CRITICAL)

— Do not assess effectiveness, strength, or weakness.—Do not recommend stylistic or narrative changes.—Do not label patterns as flaws or virtues.—Do not speculate about psychology or intention.—Do not extrapolate beyond the visible text.—Do not merge distinct pattern types.—Do not treat intentional repetition as error. If a pattern could plausibly be intentional, it is either reported neutrally or not reported at all.

END-OF-CHUNK REPORT

After completing both parts, append:

DIAGNOSTIC & PATTERN REPORT—CHUNK [number]

Two sections:

[DIAGNOSTIC FLAGS] All flags in order of appearance, organized by category.

[PATTERN REPORT] All detected patterns organized by category.

If nothing to report in either section: [DIAGNOSTIC FLAGS] None. [PATTERN REPORT] None.

AUTHOR RESPONSE PROTOCOL

All findings are for author review only. No corrections have been made.

To dismiss a finding as intentional: note [stet] in a return message or email. To act on a finding: make the change in the manuscript file. To ask a question: email the editor directly. A finding returned without response will be treated as reviewed and accepted by the author. Any change made after file delivery based on a flagged item constitutes an Author's Alteration and will be billed accordingly.

FINAL REMINDERS

— You are a diagnostician, not an editor.—You report. You do not fix.—You do not evaluate. You detect.—A missed pattern is worse than a false report.—Do not merge passes or blur

Using Claude—Diagnostic & Pattern Detection Prompt

scopes.—Do not escalate editorial authority.—Do not introduce changes beyond what is specified above.—When in doubt, report rather than resolve.

Claude Continuity & Internal Fact Check

Pass 3 of 5. For use after all chunks have been processed through the Copy Edit (Pass 1) and Diagnostic & Pattern Detection (Pass 2) passes, and all corrections have been incorporated. Submit the complete assembled manuscript (original, not marked-up version). This is a global audit. All findings are flags only. No corrections are made. Deliver the continuity audit as a separate plain-text or markdown document, not appended to the manuscript file.

PROJECT DECLARATION (complete once per book, include with submission)

Narrator type (check one): ☐ Omniscient third person ☐ Limited third person ☐ First person (character narrator—voice rules apply to narrator text) ☐ Other: _____

Known stylistic conventions (list any the editor should preserve):

Spelling convention (check one): ☐ American English ☐ British English ☐ Other: _____

Genre: _____

Known intentional ambiguity: [list or "none"]

Declared canon (if character sheets, timelines, or reference documents have been provided in the project folder, note here):

EDITORIAL SCOPE DECLARATION

Passes 1 and 2 have been completed and incorporated. The manuscript is mechanically clean and has been audited for per-chunk diagnostic consistency and patterns.

This pass identifies global continuity failures and internal fact conflicts across the full manuscript. It operates at the chapter-to-manuscript level and may connect information across distant sections, provided the conflict is demonstrable from the text.

This is a reporting-only pass. Do not rewrite prose. Do not suggest fixes. Do not interpret intent. Do not evaluate plausibility beyond internal logic.

Assume that Passes 1 and 2 have already been completed and incorporated. Treat the manuscript as a stable draft. Flag continuity issues only when both elements are explicitly present in the manuscript. Do not infer missing events, motivations, or implied chronology.

GLOBAL CONSTRAINTS

Do not rewrite prose under any circumstances. Do not propose revisions, rewrites, or corrections. Do not resolve contradictions or reconcile inconsistencies. Do not impose stylistic or narrative preferences. Do not infer authorial intent. Do not assess realism, plausibility, or reader reaction. Do not suggest how conflicts might be resolved. Do not infer missing scenes, implied explanations,

Using Claude—Continuity & Internal Fact Prompt

or off-page events. Do not reinterpret vague language to force a conflict. Do not flag ambiguity unless it creates a factual contradiction. Do not repeat issues already reported in Pass 2 unless they persist in revised form. Do not comment on patterns, repetition, or style.

If two statements can coexist through reasonable interpretation, do not report them. Issues may be reported only when explicit statements cannot simultaneously be true within the internal logic of the manuscript.

This pass concerns what the book asserts to be true and whether those assertions remain consistent.

INCLUDED CATEGORIES

Flag explicit contradictions across the full manuscript in:

CHRONOLOGICAL CONTINUITY—Conflicting dates, timelines, or elapsed durations—Events occurring in incompatible sequences—Time compression or expansion that violates stated constraints—Travel or elapsed time that does not add up—Day/night, season, or time-of-day contradictions across scenes [FLAG: CONTINUITY—timeline: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

CHARACTER FACT CONTINUITY—Stable attributes that change without explanation (age, appearance, physical traits, biographical facts)—Contradictory backstory across scenes or chapters—Names, spellings, titles, or honorifics that shift without narrative reason—Family relationships or social connections described inconsistently [FLAG: CONTINUITY—character: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE FLOW—A character knows something they could not yet know—Information revealed to the reader that a character acts on too early—Characters referencing conversations or events they were not present for—Knowledge that appears without a plausible source in the text [FLAG: CONTINUITY—knowledge: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

WORLD RULES AND INTERNAL LOGIC—Capabilities or limits established early that are violated later—Rules of the story's world that shift without acknowledgment—Internal laws that are contradicted by later events—Systems (magic, technology, social structures) that behave inconsistently [FLAG: CONTINUITY—world rules: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

OBJECTS, LOCATIONS, AND ENVIRONMENT—Objects changing state without transition—Locations described inconsistently across scenes—Environmental conditions that contradict earlier description—Objects that cannot plausibly exist in multiple states or locations—Locations whose properties or layouts contradict prior description [FLAG: CONTINUITY—object/location: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES—Relationships described inconsistently across scenes—Social hierarchies or roles that contradict earlier establishment—Contradictory relationship histories—Shifts in allegiance, authority, or social status without narrative cause—

Inconsistent institutional structures or hierarchies [FLAG: CONTINUITY—relationship: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION FLOW—Characters knowing information they could not have acquired—Information that is forgotten, contradicted, or duplicated inconsistently—Conflicting accounts of shared events presented as factual—Secrets or revelations that lose coherence across the manuscript [FLAG: CONTINUITY—information flow: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

INTERNAL FACTUAL CONSISTENCY—The text states something as fact in one place and contradicts it in another—Numerical values (distances, counts, measurements, ages) that do not reconcile—Proper nouns (place names, institution names, titles) that shift spelling or form without narrative reason—Technical or procedural details that contradict earlier description [FLAG: CONTINUITY—internal fact: description, ref. Chapter X and Chapter Y]

EXTERNAL FACTUAL ERRORS—Real places, institutions, or public figures described incorrectly—Historical events given the wrong date, outcome, or participants—Scientific or technical claims that contradict established fact—Named laws, titles, or procedures that do not exist or do not work as described—Geography that is verifiably wrong (distances, locations, borders) [FLAG: FACT ERROR—description, ref. Chapter X]

Note: External factual errors require only one reference point. They are not continuity errors (which require two conflicting statements) but factual errors (which require one wrong statement). Flag them separately.

REPORTING RULES

Each flag must include a confidence classification:—Definite continuity error—Probable continuity error—Possible continuity issue

Each report must include:—Clear references to all conflicting passages (with chapter or section identification)—A concise description of the incompatibility—The confidence classification

No corrective language. No proposed resolutions. No prioritization. Report contradictions; do not reconcile them.

OUTPUT FORMAT

Deliver the report as a standalone document organized by category.

CONTINUITY & FACT CHECK REPORT

[CHRONOLOGICAL CONTINUITY] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[CHARACTER FACT CONTINUITY] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[CHARACTER KNOWLEDGE FLOW] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

Using Claude—Continuity & Internal Fact Prompt

[WORLD RULES AND INTERNAL LOGIC] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[OBJECTS, LOCATIONS, AND ENVIRONMENT] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION FLOW] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[INTERNAL FACTUAL CONSISTENCY] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

[EXTERNAL FACTUAL ERRORS] (all flags in this category, or "None.")

AUTHOR RESPONSE PROTOCOL

All findings are for author review only. No corrections have been made.

To dismiss a finding as intentional: note [stet] in a return message or email. To act on a finding: make the fix in the manuscript file and delete the flag entry from the Continuity Report. To ask a question: email the editor directly. A finding returned without response will be treated as reviewed and accepted by the author. Any change made after file delivery based on a flagged item constitutes an Author's Alteration and will be billed accordingly.

FINAL REMINDERS

— You are an auditor, not an editor.—You report contradictions. You do not resolve them.—You do not evaluate. You verify.—A missed contradiction is worse than a false flag.—Do not merge passes or blur scopes.—Do not escalate editorial authority.—Do not introduce changes beyond what is specified above.—When in doubt, report rather than resolve.

Adversarial Editorial Pass: Sonnet

Version 1

For use after the mechanical copy edit pass is complete.

Submit one chunk at a time, matching the chunks used in the mechanical pass.

A pattern note follows each chunk.

PROJECT DECLARATION (complete once per book, include with first chunk)

Narrator type (check one):

☐ Omniscient third person

☐ Limited third person

☐ First person (character narrator—voice rules apply to narrator text)

☐ Other: _____

Known stylistic conventions (list any the editor should preserve):

Spelling convention (check one):

☐ American English

☐ British English

☐ Other: _____

Genre: _____

Special formatting conventions (e.g., underlined passages = italics in final file):

EDITORIAL SCOPE DECLARATION

The mechanical pass is complete. Surface errors have been resolved.

This pass has one job: identify where the text fails to deliver what it is attempting.

You are reading as a skeptical, intelligent reader encountering this prose for the first time. You are not a copyeditor. You are not a rewriter.

You are a reader who assumes nothing, fills in nothing, and grants nothing that is not on the page.

When in doubt, flag. The cost of a missed failure is higher than the cost of a false flag. This reverses the default rule of the mechanical pass.

GLOBAL CONSTRAINTS

Do not correct. Do not rewrite. Do not resolve.

Report only—with specific location and precise description of the failure.

Do not flag mechanical issues. Those are resolved.

Do not impose aesthetic preferences.

Do not penalize unconventional structure, voice, or form unless it demonstrably fails the reader.

Preserve the distinction between:

— a risk the author took that didn't land

— a risk the author took that did land but looks unconventional

Flag the first. Leave the second alone.

NARRATOR vs. DIALOGUE:

Apply adversarial scrutiny to narrator text and dialogue equally.

Character voice, dialect, and vernacular are intentional—do not flag them as failures unless they create genuine reader confusion about meaning or action.

FIRST-PERSON CHARACTER NARRATOR:

If the narrator is himself a character (as declared in Project Declaration), the narrator's blind spots, unreliable perceptions, and gaps in understanding may be intentional. Flag only where the gap appears to be authorial rather than characterological.

CATEGORIES OF ADVERSARIAL FAILURE

Flag any of the following. Each flag must include location, category, and a plain description of what the reader experiences at that moment.

1. STAGING AND ACTION CLARITY

The reader cannot reliably track who is where, doing what, to whom, and in what sequence.

— Missing spatial information the reader needs but isn't given

— Impossible or untracked movement

— Camera jumps the reader cannot follow

— Ambiguous pronouns or referents during action

— Compression that loses the reader rather than accelerating the scene

The test: could a reader who has not seen this scene in the author's head follow it exactly as written?

2. UNEXAMINED ASSUMPTIONS

The text expects the reader to accept something without providing support.

- Claims presented as settled that the reader has no basis to accept
- Cause-and-effect gaps where the logic is asserted but not demonstrated
- Character decisions that require motivation the text hasn't established
- Emotional states attributed to characters that haven't been earned on the page

The test: what is this passage asking the reader to simply believe?

Is that belief warranted by what precedes it?

3. UNEARNED EMOTIONAL BEATS

The text reaches for an emotional effect it hasn't prepared the reader for.

- Melodrama: emotional intensity disproportionate to what the scene has built
- Sentimentality: emotion asserted rather than caused
- False resolution: a payoff that arrives before the tension justifies it
- Muted payoff: a moment that should land but doesn't, because the setup was insufficient

The test: has the text done the work this emotion requires?

4. INTENT VS. EFFECT

The gap between what the author believes the text is doing and what a competent reader actually experiences.

- Passages the author intends as tense that read as static
- Passages intended as restrained that read as underdeveloped
- Passages intended as ambiguous that read as confused
- Passages intended as efficient that read as incomplete

The test: describe what a first reader experiences here, not what the author intended.

5. NEGATIVE SPACE FAILURES

Omission is supposed to do work—but doesn't.

- A silence, ellipsis, or withheld detail that the reader cannot recognize as intentional
- An implied meaning that does not survive without the author's gloss
- An ending or scene exit that reads as incomplete rather than resonant

The test: if the author weren't in the room to explain it, would the omission land?

6. OVER-EXPLANATION

The author does not trust the material.

- Stating what the prose has already shown
- Explaining a metaphor after delivering it
- Summarizing an action or emotion the scene has already made clear
- Repeating a point in slightly different form without adding meaning

The test: what would be lost if this passage were cut?

If the answer is nothing—flag it.

Using Claude—Adversarial Prompt

7. ERRORS OF FACT

The text states something that is verifiably wrong in the real world.

- A real place, institution, or public figure described incorrectly
- A historical event given the wrong date, outcome, or participants
- A scientific or technical claim that contradicts established fact
- A named law, title, or procedure that doesn't exist or doesn't work as described

The test: could a reader with access to a search engine flag this as simply, objectively wrong?

FLAG FORMAT

Each flag must follow this format:

[ADVERSARIAL FLAG—Category]

Location: (nearest identifying text or paragraph opening)

What the reader experiences: (plain description, no jargon)

What appears to be intended: (only if the gap is the point)

Illustrative reframe: (one sentence maximum, labeled "illustrative only" — use only when a reframe makes the failure immediately clear)

END-OF-CHUNK SUMMARY

After all flags, append:

ADVERSARIAL SUMMARY—CHUNK [number]

Two sections:

[FLAGS]

All flags in order of appearance, organized by category.

[PATTERN NOTE]

Any adversarial failure that recurred at least three times in this chunk.

Format: category—approx. n occurrences—example location.

This is observation only. It is not critique.

If nothing to report: [FLAGS] None. [PATTERN NOTE] None.

AUTHOR RESPONSE PROTOCOL

All flags are for author review only. No corrections have been made.

To dismiss a flag as intentional: note [stet] in a return message or email.

To act on a flag: make the fix in the manuscript file and delete the flag entry from the Adversarial Summary.

To ask a question: email the editor directly.

A flag returned without response will be treated as dismissed by the author.

Any change made after file delivery based on a flagged item constitutes an

Author's Alteration and will be billed accordingly.

FINAL REMINDERS

- You are a reader, not an editor.
- You fill in nothing.
- You grant nothing not on the page.
- A missed failure is worse than a false flag.
- Do not rewrite. Do not resolve. Report.
- The illustrative reframe is a diagnostic tool, not a suggested revision.

Adversarial Editorial Pass: Opus

For use on flagged scenes only

Submit one scene at a time. This scene has been identified by the Sonnet adversarial pass as a candidate for deeper scrutiny.

Before the scene, include one line:

ESCALATION REASON: [the category Sonnet flagged—e.g., "Staging and action clarity" or "Unearned emotional beat"]

Then submit the scene followed by the standard Adversarial Editorial Pass prompt.

The prompt is identical. The scope is the scene. The escalation reason focuses Opus on the specific failure category rather than reading cold.

Using ChatGPT

The structure and content of this section reflect how ChatGPT explained and organized the material. The stylistic differences between this section and the Claude section, pages 17–38, reflect genuine differences in how the two platforms communicate. I want to preserve that.

What to Upload

For serious editorial work, plain text is the best format. Word files are a close second. PDFs, even with editable text are a distant third.

If you upload a PDF with actual text layers, not a scanned corpse that needs OCR CPR, I can read it just fine.

...

Editing format is not publication format

Ideal: Plain text (.txt or pasted text)

This is the cleanest possible input for editorial work.

- No layout noise
- No pagination artifacts
- No hyphenation ghosts
- No font signaling pretending to be meaning

If the story has section breaks, scene markers, or typographic cues, just represent them simply:

or

[section break]

That's enough.

I see only language, structure, and rhythm. That's exactly what you want at the editing stage.

Very good: Word (.docx)

Also fine.

- Paragraph structure is preserved
- Revisions are easy to reference
- Longer works are easier to navigate

If you use Word, **turn off Track Changes** before uploading.

Acceptable but annoying: PDF with editable text

Authors cling to PDFs because they look finished.

I can read them. I can edit them. I can comment on them.

But:

- Line breaks lie

Using ChatGPT—Uploading/Editing a Novel

- Page breaks imply importance they don't deserve
 - Hyphenation creates fake words
 - White space starts making editorial suggestions it hasn't earned
- PDFs are for presentation, not thinking. Editing inside them feels like doing surgery through a shop window.

What not to do

- Screenshots of text
- Scanned pages
- “Here’s a photo of my draft” energy
- Multi-column layouts pretending to be prose

Give me:

- raw language
- honest paragraphing
- no visual theatrics

Save typography, margins, and design for after the writing survives interrogation.

So.

If you want the cleanest, sharpest editorial pass: plain text.

If you want convenience with minimal compromise: Word.

If you want to test my patience: PDF.

Presentation should reveal strength, not compensate for weakness.

Converting your file to plain text feels counter-productive, but plain text removes performance so only the writing remains.

Uploading/Editing a Novel

The best way to edit a novel will seem, at first glance, counter-intuitive to most people: upload it in sections. Uploading an entire novel at once produces *worse editorial results* than working in controlled sections.

1. Do *not* paste the whole novel at once

That’s the fastest way to get:

- unfocused, shallow feedback,
- generic comments,
- premature line editing
- obscured structural problems

Chunking Guidelines for Editorial Work

For editorial work, manuscripts should be submitted in chunks based on word count and task rather than chapter boundaries. A practical working range is 3,000–8,000 words per chunk, with 5,000–6,000 words ideal for copy editing and diagnostic passes. Short chapters may be combined, while long chapters should be split logically at scene or section breaks. Consistent chunk sizes improve accuracy, reduce context drift, and make changes easier to locate and apply in the source file. Continuity and pattern-detection passes should be performed only after all chunks have received the same prior edits, using the revised text from earlier passes.

Projects

The key is to set up a project. A project is a workspace: you must have an account (free or paid), and be logged in to use them. By working from within a project, all of the files and conversations are available to AI. However:

- this is stored material
- it does not replace focused passes

There are limits to how many files you may have in a single project. If you have questions, I recommend setting up the project, and then from within the project, ask the best way to proceed.

Paste vs Upload

You can get your material to AI for editing by either pasting it into the “Ask anything” chat box or upload a file to the Project folder.

Project folder upload (for context)

- setup and reference materials (constraints, turns, character baselines, or prior decisions)
- material that is too long or stable/finished too keep reposting
- Ideal for:
 - synopses
 - chapter outlines
 - character sheets
 - timelines
 - previously edited chapters
 - the “map” of the novel

Paste into the Chat Box (for editing)

- You want deep, active editing of material
- You want AI to quote, cut, rewrite, and track patterns in that specific chunk
- You want to control exactly what AI is looking at for this pass
- Ideal for:
 - diagnostic passes
 - structural critique
 - scene-level edits
 - line and voice work

What follows is a practical workflow, with commentary from AI where it clarifies the reasoning.

Editing a Novel

2. Start with a diagnostic pass (non-negotiable)

This is the most important phase, and people still want to skip it because it doesn't feel like progress.

2A. One-paragraph statement of intent

This is not marketing copy. It's a working hypothesis:

- what the book thinks it's about
- what kind of experience it intends to give
- what problem it believes it's solving

This statement will change as the book changes. That's expected.

This gives me a target. Without it, all criticism floats.

2B. Brutal, honest synopsis

Essential, and Painful.

A synopsis:

- exposes structural collapse
- reveals false climaxes
- shows where causality breaks
- makes padding impossible to hide

If the synopsis doesn't work, the book doesn't work. That rule has never failed.

2C. One representative chapter

This chapter should be:

- stylistically typical
- structurally honest
- not the most polished thing you've ever written

It lets me assess voice, rhythm, POV discipline, and reader experience before we waste time elsewhere.

3. Controlled passes, 3–5 chapters at a time

The *reason* is now clearer after all our discussion:

- continuity can be tracked
- pattern detection becomes meaningful
- scene logic can be evaluated
- fatigue doesn't corrupt judgment

You're editing *systems*, not pages.

The Pass Order (Why it stays in this sequence)

Pass 1: Structural edit

We look for:

- narrative spine
- cause and effect
- scene necessity
- escalation and release
- POV integrity

No sentence-level tinkering. Fixing sentences in a broken structure is cosmetic.

Pass 2: Scene-level edit

We assess:

- scene purpose
- entry and exit points
- action clarity
- emotional transaction
- momentum

This is where action scenes, micro-continuity, and reader confusion get addressed.

Pass 3: Line & voice edit

This is where:

- rhythm matters
- sentence variety gets tuned
- unconscious habits are addressed
- language earns its keep

Grammar only enters here if you explicitly want it to.

One refinement I'd add (minor but useful)

Between Pass 1 and Pass 2, insert a **pattern scan** when appropriate.

This isn't a full pass, more like a sweep:

- recurring numbers
- repeated syntactic structures
- default metaphors
- habitual gestures

This prevents you from baking early-draft habits deeper into later revisions.

I gave an example of a 37 chapter book with a major plot shift in the chapters 10 and 31. I asked how, when looking at 3-5 chapters at a time that can be reconciled with major changes—AI is calling these shifts or changes, turns.

Chunked editing does not require the AI to “forget” the rest of the novel. When preceded by a diagnostic synopsis and conducted within a single project, it allows focused analysis while preserving long-range continuity and structural awareness.

Bottom line

- Yes, major turns matter.
- No, full-manuscript dumps don't solve that.
- Structure is preserved by maps, not mass.
- Projects exist specifically to maintain that map.

The mistake isn't editing in chunks. The mistake is editing without a declared structure. And anyone who's written a 36-chapter novel should already know which turns matter.

When the author doesn't know the turns

If the author doesn't know where the book turns:

- the synopsis will be evasive. The intent statement will be vague. “Something changes around here” will be the best they can do

That's not a failure of the method. That's the **diagnosis**.

In those cases, the AI's job isn't continuity enforcement. It's **turn detection**.

I can say things like:

- “This is where the book appears to pivot, but the consequences aren't propagated.”
- “This reads like a midpoint, but nothing structurally changes.”
- “This late event feels like a climax, but it doesn't resolve the central problem.”

That's not something chunking prevents. It's something chunking makes visible.

Why full uploads don't fix this either

Dumping the whole novel on the table doesn't magically reveal structure. It just creates the illusion that structure has been considered.

- Human editors still ask:
- What's the inciting incident?
- Where is the midpoint?
- What actually changes here?

If the author can't answer, the manuscript won't either.

Many authors do not clearly identify the structural turning points of their own manuscripts. In such cases, diagnostic analysis is not a preliminary step but the primary editorial task.

Editing

What editing actually covers

For an author, editing covers a range of issues. Here are the majors functions:

1. Surface and correctness

Copy editing: grammar, spelling, punctuation

Fact checking: external accuracy and anachronism

Technical plausibility: domain-specific consistency and credibility

2. Internal logic and control

Continuity: internal consistency and timeline integrity

Point of view discipline: perspective, knowledge, psychic distance

Action scenes: tracking the who, what, where, and how of action scenes

3. Reader-facing effects

Readability under pressure: language (expression, clarity, rhythm)

Reader-experience diagnostics: pacing, engagement ,confusion, drag

Intent vs. effect analysis: what the text does vs what the author intends

Substantive critique: coherence, structure, thematic alignment

4. First draft pattern detection: unconscious repetition and defaults (numbers, color, names, etc.)

As another broad bit of advice, Uploading/Editing a Novel talked about doing several passes. Each of these editing functions could be treated as unique passes, see Writing a Good Prompt, pages 62 for additional advice. .

I will take these in that order.

Surface and Correctness

Copy editing

Also called a line read. AI can do copy editing: grammar, spelling and punctuation. However, if you upload a manuscript and do not ask for it, AI won't do it. "Grammar is the lowest level of editorial concern. That's intentional. Early drafts die when copy editing arrives too soon," AI. It is mechanical and late-stage.

A grammar-first pass is useful when:

- the draft is in a late stage
- the audience expect correctness (e.g., academic, technical, legal)
- errors could interfere with comprehension
- it is explicitly asked for

It is a mode, not a default posture.

AI can perform comprehensive grammar checking, but effective literary editing prioritizes meaning, rhythm, and agency over rule enforcement. Grammar corrections are most useful when applied deliberately, not reflexively.

AI is aware that characters may use bad grammar, if:

- it's consistent with their background
- it's stable across scenes
- it does expressive work—not accidental damage

But the omniscient narrator does not get that forgiveness. Once the narrator claims that authority, sloppiness reads as incompetence.

If you want a line read say something like:

- “Do a line edit for grammar, punctuation and spelling only.”
- “Perform a copy edit pass, narrator only, preserving character voice.”
- “Flag all grammar issues in the omniscient narration, but leave dialogue untouched.”

To be absolutely clear: *AI does not assume that an author wants grammar correction unless explicitly instructed. Effective use requires specifying whether feedback should address structure, style, or surface correctness.*

Fact Checking

AI will flag factual errors and anachronisms; generally in the form of, “As written this reads as an error unless intentional.” It is good with:

- common geographic, historical, and cultural facts
- anachronisms, (objects, language, technology)
- timeline mismatches with real-world events
- impossible sequences, (phones before phones)
- obvious institutional errors (titles, ranks)
- obvious technical claims

AI looks at “facts” several way: 1) Error: the text asserts a false fact without signaling intent; 2) Signal failure: the text may intend irony, ignorance or distortion but does not mark it so; 3) Worldbuilding: the text builds a different reality and then follows is consistently. For example, if the narrator says Toledo is the capital of Ohio: he might be unreliable; the character might believe it; the story is set in an alternate history.

Where AI is weak is when a fact is highly specialized or contested; it depends on period-specific scholarship; the author is deliberately bending reality but hasn’t said so.

Technical plausibility

Given how most people approach AI for things like fact checking, this might be a surprise, “This is the only real limitation,” AI.

This must be viewed as conditional.

AI can:

- detect internal inconsistency
- flag claims that sound implausible
- identify jargon misuse
- notice when explanation fails the informed reader test

AI cannot

- replace a domain expert
- guarantee correctness in specialized fields
- resolve disputed technical claims without guidance

Best use here is as a **pre-specialist filter**. AI helps you not embarrass yourself before the real expert shows up.

AI will flag implausibility and internal errors, but not certify expertise.

Internal Logic and Control

Continuity

AI is very good catching errors in continuity: If Bob enters a room wearing a green tie, unless he changes it, if he leaves with a red tie. If Bob is 27 but 10 pages later, in the same week, he is suddenly 81. However, there

Using ChatGPT—Editing

are situations where AI isn't so good:

- chapter s uploaded separately, out of order, or weeks apart
- extremely long works uploaded in fragments
- multiple revisions where facts change but aren't re-synchronized
- time jumps that are implied rather than stated
- unreliable narrators
- metaphorical or symbolic age references
- deliberate temporal distortion

Another way to look at continuity is in how AI considers it. There are three layers:

Macro-continuity: Timeline, ages, backstory, cause and effect.

Micro-continuity: Colors, objects, spatial relationships, injuries, weather.

Epistemic continuity: who know what, when, and how they know it.

It can be helpful to specifically tell AI to read for continuity, or give AI the whole manuscript. If continuity problems persist, the solution is almost always to declare canon more explicitly.

AI is effective at catching both internal continuity errors and external factual inaccuracies, provided the manuscript presents itself as operating in a shared, real-world frame. When facts are intentionally altered, the responsibility lies with the author to signal that alteration clearly.

Point of View Discipline

This includes:

- head-hopping
- drifting psychic distance
- narrator knowledge that exceeds the chosen POV
- tonal mismatch between POV and diction

This isn't grammar. It isn't continuity. It's **epistemology**. Who is allowed to know what, and how close the camera is.

AI is very good at spotting POV slippage because it tracks perspective mechanically.

Action Scenes

Perhaps it's surprising, but AI is good at tracking action scenes because it is good with spatial logic, temporal sequencing, reader orientation under speed:

- tracking physical causality
- identifying missing beats
- noticing impossible movement
- spotting "camera jumps" the reader can't follow
- detecting when the authors sees the scene but the reader does not

Writers must often compress the action, but the danger is in too much compression. AI is good at saying, "I no longer understand who is where or why this happened."

What AI will not do, *unless asked*, is:

- rewrite the choreography
- add excitement
- "punch it up"

Reader-Facing Effects

Readability Under Pressure

This includes:

- sentence rhythm
- redundancy
- abstraction vs specificity
- jargon creep
- tonal consistency
- syntactic monotony

These failures only appear when the reader is moving forward, not when pausing to admire sentences.

Reader-experience diagnostics

This is different from structure and different from action clarity. This includes:

- boredom
- confusion
- false suspense
- emotional misfires
- scenes that technically work but don't *engage*

Human editors often intuit this and say “this drags.” AI can do something more precise: *where* it drags and *why*.

This is the “How did this feel to read?” category, and authors care about it deeply even if they don't name it.

Intent vs. effect analysis

This is implicit in adversarial reading, reader-experience diagnostics, and “what you meant to risk” vs “what landed.”

Intent vs effect analysis: identifying the gap between what the author believes the text is doing and what the text actually causes a competent reader to experience.

This gap is where most serious revision lives.

Substantive critique (the work as a whole)

For your AI editor, this is a default behavior, “this is my primary mode unless constrained.” Intent vs. effect analysis is the spine of substantive critique.

AI will look at:

- coherence
- narrative momentum
- structural balance
- consistency of voice
- thematic alignment
- whether scenes earn their existence.

AI will say when something doesn't fundamentally work. This is where the “adversarial reading” lives.

First Draft Pattern Errors

These form their own, odd, category. They are not wrong because of any of the previous categories, because in that sense, they are correct. They are wrong because they were made for the wrong reasons:

These are systemic repetitions, unconscious fixations, and default choices—put a simply, habit versus choice. Because these are idiosyncratic and rooted in the subconscious, they are hard for an author to catch; and because editors are more often worried about “bigger” editorial issues, editors often overlook them. AI can be good at ferreting them out.

Using ChatGPT—Profile & Instructions

AI won't flag a single red tie, ten-mile drive: a single repeated gesture. However, AI will flag:

- recurrence without design
- clustering across unrelated contexts
- defaults that suggest habit rather than choice

Your Profile

Your profile in AI, especially for editing, is not like your profile. It is a powerful tool that hires the best editor and establishes the ground rules. There are three important areas:

- Tone
- Custom Instructions
- Who you are

Your Profile: Tone

Tone affects voice, metaphor, and humor frequency, not competence. I set this to Cynical. Other tones joke less or differently. What matters is this:

- tone affects delivery, not analysis
- jokes are not flippancy, they're compression and emphasis

When your work is under the microscope, it is nice when your editor has a "personality."

Your Profile: Custom Instructions

Custom instructions define how AI reads and converses by default.

What custom instructions actually do

Custom instructions establish **baseline assumptions** that persist across conversations. They tell me:

- how blunt to be
- what kinds of feedback you value
- what to stop doing automatically
- what counts as success or failure by default

In editorial terms, this is you saying: "This is the kind of editor you are, unless I tell you otherwise."

That's powerful, because it cuts out the performative nonsense. You already noticed the effect: less politeness, fewer disclaimers, more usable criticism.

Custom instructions are especially good for:

- tone calibration
- default editorial philosophy
- recurring preferences (no praise padding, depth over speed, etc.)

They save you from having to restate the same ground rules every time.

What custom instructions do *not* replace

They do **not** replace prompts.

They do not:

- define scope
- define draft stage
- define the specific task for this text
- override local instructions

If your custom instruction says “act as a serious editor” and your prompt says “do a grammar-only line edit,” the prompt wins. Always.

Custom instructions are background radiation. Prompts are the scalpel.

How they interact (this is the key point)

Think of it as a stack:

1. System behavior (hard limits, safety, etc.)
2. Your custom instructions (persistent posture)
3. Your prompt (local task)
4. The text itself (what constrains interpretation)

Each layer narrows the reading.

If your custom instructions are good, your prompts can be shorter and sharper. If your custom instructions are vague, prompts have to do all the work.

You’ve already done the hard part by defining what kind of editor you want in the room.

Custom instructions define how AI reads by default. Prompts define what the AI reads for this specific task. Effective use depends on both.

Bottom line

- Custom instructions set temperament and values.
- Prompts set assignment and scope.
- One makes the editor reliable.
- The other makes the edit useful.
- You didn’t just tweak a setting. You hired the right person, then learned how to give them a job worth doing.

Here are the Custom Instructions we worked out for me:

Editorial Work:

Act as my literary editor. Treat all submitted text as draft material intended for eventual publication in a literary collection.

You have permission to make substantive editorial judgments. You may propose deletions, rewrites, reordering, and structural changes without asking permission first.

Priorities, in order:

1. Narrative clarity and momentum
2. Coherence of voice and point of view
3. Precision of language
4. Stylistic polish

When diagnosing problems, also offer concrete revision suggestions whenever possible. Do not limit feedback to abstract analysis if a workable rewrite can demonstrate the fix.

If something does not fundamentally work, say so plainly, even if that implies significant revision or rethinking. Avoid praise/criticism/praise structures. Be direct and editorial.

Preserve voice over surface elegance. Do not smooth language at the expense of character, tension, or intent.

Using ChatGPT—Who Are You/writing a Good Prompt

Assume I prefer depth over speed. When a deeper level of analysis, research, or comparison will improve the edit, pursue it, even if it takes more time. I will explicitly say if I want a faster or lighter pass.

Edit with professional seriousness. Treat this as work between an author and an editor, not a workshop exercise or casual feedback.

Try it or use it as a model. It works for me because I want a no-holds barred writer-editor relationship combined with a cynical tone.

Your Profile: Who You Are

Think of the “**who I am**” **profile text** as *contextual gravity*, not a steering wheel.

What that profile sentence actually does

That section gives me a **background model of you**, not a task. It tells me things like:

- how sophisticated I can safely be
- what references I don't need to explain
- how seriously to take the work
- whether this is hobbyist play or professional craft

In editorial terms, it answers:

“Who is sitting across the table from me?”

That affects:

- depth
- vocabulary
- how much compression vs explanation I use
- whether I bother with remedial advice

So yes, it absolutely helps, especially for sustained work like you're doing now.

What it does *not* do

It does **not**:

- specify an editorial mode
- define scope
- replace prompts
- override local instructions
- tell me what kind of pass you want today

If you rely on profile text alone, you'll get *consistent tone*, not *consistent outcomes*.

Writing a Good Prompt

Prompts define what the AI reads for this specific task.

1. State the editorial role you want

AI does not assume a role. If you don't specify one, you get a generic first reader.

Bad:

“Can you edit this?”

Better:

“Read this as a developmental editor.”

“Do a diagnostic structural critique.”

“Read adversarially, as a skeptical, intelligent reader.”

This determines whether feedback is cosmetic, analytical, or confrontational.

2. Define the scope of the pass

Editing is layered. If you don’t constrain the layer, feedback will sprawl.

Examples:

- “Ignore grammar and spelling. Focus on structure and momentum.”
- “Flag continuity, POV slippage, and factual errors only.”
- “Do a sentence-level craft analysis, not a rewrite.”
- Scope prevents noise.

3. Say what *not* to do

This matters more than people expect.

If you don’t want:

- rewriting
- summary
- praise
- softening language
- genre advice

say so explicitly.

Example:

“Do not rewrite passages. Diagnose problems and explain why they occur.”

This keeps the feedback usable.

4. Declare the draft stage

AI does not know whether a manuscript is raw, mid-revision, or near-final unless told.

Examples:

- “This is a first draft. Be ruthless about structural flaws.”
- “This is a late draft. Focus on precision and polish.”
- “This is exploratory. Identify what’s promising and what collapses.”

The same text gets radically different feedback depending on stage.

5. Name your tolerance for pain

This sounds theatrical, but it’s practical.

Examples:

- “Be blunt. I don’t want encouragement.”
- “Flag only serious issues. Ignore minor ones.”
- “Assume I want to argue with you.”

This calibrates tone and density.

6. Ask for effect, not rules

Rule-based prompts get rule-based answers.

Bad:

- “Fix passive voice.”

Better:

- “Identify where agency is unclear or diffused.”

Using ChatGPT—Integrating AI Feedback

Bad:

- “Make this more exciting.”

Better:

- “Identify where tension collapses and explain why.”

You get diagnosis, not prescriptions.

7. Invite pattern detection

This is one of AI’s real strengths, and most authors never ask for it.

Examples:

- “Look for unconscious repetition.”
- “Identify dominant sentence structures.”
- “Flag default metaphors or habits.”

These are things human editors often miss.

8. Allow disagreement

The most useful editorial feedback is something you can push against.

Example:

- “Tell me where the text loses you, even if you can’t propose a fix.”

This shifts the role from problem-solver to reader, which is often what you need.

A concise model prompt

You might include a template like this:

Read the following manuscript as a [type of editor]. Ignore grammar and spelling. Focus on [specific concerns]. Flag continuity, POV, and structural issues. Do not rewrite the text. Be direct and unsentimental. Assume this is a [draft stage] draft.

That one paragraph will outperform 90% of real-world editorial exchanges.

Final principle

AI editing quality is proportional to **how precisely the author defines the reading.**

Most bad AI feedback is not an AI failure. It’s an instruction failure.

Here is the final prompt for editing this guide:

Read this as a final coherence and usability check. Do not rewrite. Do not add material. Flag only structural redundancies, missing connective tissue, or points where the guide’s own principles are contradicted or undercut. Assume the audience is serious, literate, and motivated.

Integrating AI Feedback into Human Revision

The actual model: triage, not iteration

Think of AI feedback as producing **diagnostic reports**, not marching orders.

Each pass gives you three kinds of information. You do *different things* with each.

1. Structural findings (non-negotiable)

These are things like:

- the story collapses in the middle
- a character’s motivation doesn’t track
- the ending resolves a different problem than the one established
- the narrative frame contradicts itself

These are not “notes.” These are **engineering problems**.

If you agree they’re real, you don’t tweak sentences. You stop and redesign. Uploading again before doing that is pointless.

2. Craft and pattern issues (selective)

This includes:

- repetitive sentence structures
- unconscious motifs
- rhythmic monotony
- default numbers, colors, gestures
- over-explained moments

Here’s the key: **you do not fix all of these**.

You decide:

- which ones matter
- which ones are voice
- which ones you’re willing to live with

This is where human judgment enters. AI surfaces patterns. You decide which patterns are worth breaking.

3. Reader-experience signals (interpretive)

Things like:

- “This section drags”
- “I lost track of the scene here”
- “The emotional payoff feels muted”

These are *reports of effect*, not instructions.

You don’t revise to “fix the note.”

You revise to fix the **cause**, which may not be where the note points.

This is the most important integration skill, and the one most people lack.

What you should *not* do

You should not:

- revise mechanically in response to every comment
- upload again just to see if I complain less
- aim for silence as a sign of success

Silence often just means the remaining problems are *conceptual*, not local.

The productive loop (this is the part worth putting in the PDF)

1. Upload with a **specific editorial role and scope**
2. Read feedback and **classify it** structural / pattern / reader-effect
3. Revise **offline**, in bulk, not piecemeal
4. Re-upload **only when the manuscript has changed meaningfully**
5. Ask a *different* question on the next pass

Example:

- First pass: structural and diagnostic
- Second pass: continuity, POV, pattern detection
- Third pass: sentence-level craft
- Final pass: copy editing

That’s not squeezing blood from a rock. That’s quarrying in layers.

When to Stop

You stop when:

- remaining issues are matters of taste
- feedback repeats without deepening
- changes improve polish but not power

That's the moment when another pass won't make it better, just different.

And yes, sometimes I'll essentially say "Enough." More often, *you* will, because the notes will stop surprising you. That's the real signal.

AI does not replace revision. It structures revision. Used well, it keeps you from polishing the wrong problems, in the wrong order, for the wrong reasons. Which is how most books quietly die, without ever running out of blood.

ChatGPT Prompt

(Pages 67–76)

Acknowledge and confirm the following:

EDITORIAL SCOPE DECLARATION (Design & Formatting Projects)

Quotes for book design and formatting assume that the manuscript has been fully edited prior to production. As a result, author changes after formatting (author's alterations, or AAs) are expected to be minimal: typically a small number of typographical or mechanical corrections that do not require structural reflow.

In practice, most manuscripts require some level of correction once they are seen in formatted pages. Viewing a manuscript as a PDF rather than a word-processing file often makes inconsistencies and errors more visible. No one can accurately quote for unknown revisions.

Included Copy Edit (Baseline)

Built into my quote is a limited copy edit performed before formatting begins. This copy edit addresses:

- spelling errors
- punctuation errors where omission or misuse causes grammatical ambiguity
- mechanical consistency in the narrative voice

This pass does not impose a house style, normalize authorial quirks, resolve stylistic disagreements, or rewrite for voice or clarity. Inconsistencies may be flagged, but they are not corrected unless the correction is unambiguous.

For example:

Original: "He booked a shuttle to Mayer, Arizona arriving Saturday."

Revised: "He booked a shuttle to Mayer, Arizona, arriving Saturday."

However, rhetorical punctuation used for cadence or emphasis is preserved:

"Sometimes, I smelled her perfume and was reminded ..."

This copy edit is functional, not exhaustive. It is intended to support clean formatting, not to replace a comprehensive editorial process.

Author's Alterations and Printer's Errors

After design decisions are made, the first formatted PDF reflects a professionally designed book. At this stage, issues missed in the manuscript often become apparent. Corrections requested at this point are considered author's alterations (AAs).

Using ChatGPT—Prompt

My initial quote assumes a small number of simple AAs. In some projects, AAs can double or triple the time required to complete formatting. AAs are billed separately.

Errors introduced during formatting, such as spacing or mechanical mistakes, are printer's errors (PEs). You are not charged for correcting those.

Design and formatting, like editing, is collaborative.

Optional Editorial Passes (Additional Fee)

The following optional passes are available by prior agreement. These are reporting passes, not rewrite passes. Findings are marked or listed but not changed in the manuscript.

1. Diagnostic Pass (Narrowly Scoped)

- flags inconsistencies
- reports recurring issues
- does not resolve stylistic disputes
- does not rewrite

2. Pattern Detection

- recurring punctuation variants
- capitalization drift
- italic/roman oscillation
- hyphenation drift
- reference mismatches

3. Continuity Review

- internal factual consistency
- timeline plausibility
- physical and object continuity

These passes are finite and targeted. They are not open-ended developmental edits. Authors seeking a more extensive editorial process may consult *Editing with AI—Using ChatGPT*, a separate explanatory document describing tools and workflows available directly to authors.

* * * * *

MASTER EDITORIAL PROMPT (MODULAR)

General Instructions (Always Included)

GLOBAL CONSTRAINTS (Apply to All Passes)

You are performing a reporting and/or mechanical editorial pass only, as specified below.

Do not rewrite prose unless explicitly instructed.

Do not impose a house style, personal preferences, or aesthetic judgments.

Do not infer authorial intent.

Report findings clearly and conservatively.

PASS 1: COPY EDIT (Mechanical Only)—FULLY INTEGRATED

Scope

- Dialogue is out of scope for stylistic editing.
- Referential breakage (sentence-local) only.
- Quotation mechanics (not attribution).
- Category errors at the word or phrase level.
- Obvious typographical errors in dialogue may be flagged only if correction does not alter voice, intent, or dialect.
- Narrator text only for grammatical and mechanical correction.
- Mechanical review includes sentence-local numerical, calendrical, and unit-based errors that are internally inconsistent or formally impossible.
- Obvious external factual errors in commonly verifiable public information (e.g., dates, locations, public offices, well-established historical facts) may be flagged.
- Conventional formatting at the sentence level:
 - Titles of works (books, newspapers, magazines, films, plays, albums, legal cases, ships) not properly italicized or marked.
 - Abbreviations and acronyms with inconsistent punctuation.
 - Units of measure written incorrectly or inconsistently (e.g., 5km → 5 km; lb. → lbs).
 - Proper capitalization errors within a sentence.
- No corrections are made silently.
- Facts are reported, not resolved.
- Punctuation changes that affect cadence, emphasis, rhetorical pacing, or voice rather than meaning are out of scope.

Instructions

Decision Precedence:

If instructions conflict, defer in this order:

- (1) Scope limitations
- (2) Punctuation Standard
- (3) Preservation of voice and rhythm
- (4) Mechanical correctness

- Preserve authorial voice, rhythm, and sentence structure.
- Correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation only where incorrect or misleading.
- Preserve rhetorical commas used for cadence or emphasis.
- Do not normalize style or enforce consistency beyond sentence-local or immediately adjacent context.
- Do not rewrite sentences for clarity or elegance.
- Report formatting or mechanical deviations that are sentence-local; do not attempt book-wide consistency.
- Punctuation Standard (Commas)
 - Optional commas that do not affect meaning, attachment, or parsing are left unchanged, even if an alternative punctuation style would be equally acceptable.
 - Comma changes are made only when necessary to preserve or clarify meaning, prevent syntactic ambiguity, or avoid a plausible misreading by a careful reader.

Using ChatGPT—Prompt

- Commas are removed only when their presence creates ambiguity, misattachment, or a misleading parse.

Non-Examples (Do Not Do the Following):

- Do not add or remove commas solely to improve flow or modernize style.
 - Do not rewrite sentences to eliminate ambiguity if punctuation alone cannot resolve it.
 - Do not standardize serial comma usage across sentences.
 - Do not convert colloquial constructions into formally “correct” ones.
-
- No attempt is made to regularize punctuation according to a presumed house style, modern trend, or general preference for open or closed punctuation.
 - When multiple comma usages are grammatically acceptable, the author’s existing local pattern is preserved unless it causes ambiguity or error.

Optional Mechanical Flags (Sentence-Local)

Additionally, you may flag issues that are not strictly errors but could benefit the author’s awareness. If a sentence appears unclear but cannot be corrected without rewriting, flag it using [SENTENCE-LEVEL ANOMALY] rather than proposing a revision. Report these using bracketed notes:

1. Repeated words: [REPEATED WORD: “the the”]
2. Double spaces: [EXTRA SPACE: “word word”]
3. Dangling prepositions: [DANGLING PREPOSITION: “something I could not get over”]
4. Suspicious capitalization: [SUSPICIOUS CAPITALIZATION: “Market”]
5. Suspicious hyphenation: [SUSPICIOUS HYPHENATION: “well known → well-known?”]
6. Unpaired brackets, parentheses, or quotation marks: [UNPAIRED PARENTHESIS: “He said (without thinking”]
7. Extra punctuation: [EXTRA PUNCTUATION: “He went,, then left.”]
8. Obvious number-word mismatch: [NUMBER-WORD MISMATCH: “three 3 cats”]
9. Potential sentence-level syntax anomalies: [SENTENCE-LEVEL ANOMALY: “He ran fast, he fell.”]
10. Obvious keyboard or transcription errors: [TYPO SUSPECT: “teh” → “the”]

Optional Sentence-Local Sanity Checks

Flag anomalies detectable entirely within a single sentence using bracketed notes:

1. Internal temporal or numerical plausibility: [POSSIBLE ERROR: “He ran 3 miles in 2 minutes”]
2. Obvious word misuse: [POSSIBLE WORD MISUSE: “He accepted the desert invitation”]
3. Internal logical consistency: [POSSIBLE LOGIC ERROR: “He never smoked, yet inhaled deeply”]
4. Obvious formatting or spacing anomalies: [EXTRA LINE BREAK?], [SUSPICIOUS INDENTATION OR SPACE]
5. Suspicious measurements or units: [POSSIBLE UNIT ERROR: “He poured 5 liters of water into a teacup”]

Large-File Handling Guidance

- You may upload the entire manuscript or break it into halves, quarters, or ~10–20k word chunks.
- Ensure chapter headings or paragraph markers are preserved for reference, but cross-chapter context is not required.

- Process each chunk sequentially and output a complete bracketed report per chunk.
- After all chunks are processed, aggregate the reports in manuscript order.
- Optional: run a secondary Pattern Detection pass for recurring mechanical issues (e.g., repeated unitalicized titles) once all chunks are done.

Output Format

- Report changes using bracketed edits only: [ORIGINAL → REVISED]
- External factual issues using bracketed notes only: [POSSIBLE FACTUAL ERROR: “Toledo is the capital of Ohio”]
- Optional mechanical flags and sanity checks using bracketed notes: [REPEATED WORD: “the the”], [POSSIBLE UNIT ERROR: “5 liters in a teacup”]
- Do not supply replacements unless explicitly requested.

Examples:

- [He booked a shuttle to Mayer, Arizona arriving Saturday → He booked a shuttle to Mayer, Arizona, arriving Saturday]
- [I read The New York Times → I read *The New York Times*]
- [POSSIBLE FACTUAL ERROR: “Toledo is the capital of Ohio”]
- [I have twenty three cats → I have twenty-three cats]
- [February 30 → POSSIBLE ERROR: February has 28 or 29 days]
- [5km → 5 km]
- [lb → lbs]
- [NASA is launching a new probe → NASA is launching a new probe] (flag only if inconsistent across sentence-local usage)
- [REPEATED WORD: “the the”]
- [EXTRA SPACE: “word word”]
- [DANGLING PREPOSITION: “something I could not get over”]
- [POSSIBLE WORD MISUSE: “He accepted the desert invitation”]
- [POSSIBLE LOGIC ERROR: “He never smoked, yet inhaled deeply”]

PASS 2: DIAGNOSTIC CONSISTENCY

(Reporting Only · Internal Logic Audit)

General Instructions (Always Included)

You are performing a diagnostic consistency review only.

This is a reporting pass, not a corrective or interpretive edit.

- Do not rewrite prose.
- Do not resolve contradictions.
- Do not infer authorial intent.
- Do not impose stylistic or narrative preferences.

Treat the manuscript as a closed system.

All findings must be demonstrable from the provided text alone.

Scope

PASS 2 identifies internal inconsistencies or logical breaks that can be detected through close

Using ChatGPT—Prompt

reading of the text as written.

Consistency is evaluated only where variation produces ambiguity, reader confusion, or internal contradiction. Stylistic variation alone is not treated as inconsistency.

This pass operates at the sentence-to-scene level and may draw connections across the provided chunk, but it does not extrapolate beyond it.

Included Categories

The following may be flagged only when contradictory, incompatible, or internally implausible:

1. Character Continuity

- Names, spellings, titles, honorifics
- Age, physical traits, injuries, disabilities
- Relationships, ranks, roles, or identities

2. Temporal Logic

- Sequence errors (before/after reversals)
- Conflicting durations or elapsed time
- Impossible or incompatible dates, seasons, or times of day

3. Spatial Logic

- Conflicting locations
- Impossible movement or geography
- Characters or objects occupying incompatible locations simultaneously

4. Object and State Continuity

- Objects appearing, disappearing, or changing state without transition
- Contradictory conditions (intact/broken, full/empty, present/absent)
- Ownership or possession inconsistencies

5. Terminology and Naming Consistency

- Inconsistent naming of the same entity
- Capitalization drift with semantic consequences
- Shifts in technical, institutional, or invented terms

6. Point-of-View Integrity (Diagnostic Only)

- Clear POV violations where internal knowledge appears in an external POV
- Head-hopping flagged only when unambiguous and sentence-local

Reporting Rules

Each issue must be reported individually and include:

- Location reference
- Brief description of the inconsistency
- Confidence classification:
 - Definite inconsistency
 - Probable inconsistency
 - Possible inconsistency

No suggested fixes.

No consolidation of issues.

No judgment of severity.

DO NOT CLAUSES (ABSOLUTE)

- Do not propose revisions, rewrites, or corrections.
 - Report each issue individually with cited locations only.
- Do not infer motivation, intent, or meaning.
- Do not assume facts outside the provided text.
- Do not resolve or reconcile contradictions.
- Do not comment on quality, clarity, pacing, or effectiveness.
- Do not generalize beyond the cited instance.
- Do not convert ambiguity into certainty.

If a determination cannot be made strictly from the text, it must be labeled Possible or not reported.

PASS 3: FIRST DRAFT PATTERN DETECTION

(Diagnostic Only · Non-Evaluative)

General Instructions (Always Included)

You are performing pattern detection only.

This pass identifies recurring or habitual language and structural behaviors commonly associated with early drafts.

Pattern Threshold Rule

Patterns must occur at least three times within a single chapter or five times across the manuscript to be reported.

This is a diagnostic reporting pass, not an editorial critique.

- Do not evaluate quality.
- Do not recommend stylistic changes.
- Do not speculate about author intent.

Scope

PASS 3 flags observable repetition or structural patterning within the provided text chunk.

Patterns are reported only when they recur. Single instances are ignored.

This pass does not distinguish between intentional and unintentional patterns.

Included Pattern Categories

Patterns may be reported in the following domains only when demonstrably recurrent:

1. Lexical Repetition

- Repeated words or phrases beyond baseline necessity
- Clustering around specific descriptors, verbs, or modifiers

2. Sentence-Level Structural Patterns

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- Repeated sentence openings
 - Recurring syntactic constructions
 - Repetitive rhythm or sentence length patterns
3. Dialogue Mechanics
- Recurrent dialogue tags
 - Repeated placement or structure of action beats
 - Habitual attribution patterns
4. Expository Habits
- Repeated explanatory phrasing
 - Redundant clarification structures
 - Recurrent summary or justification language
5. Scene-Level Mechanical Patterns
- Similar scene openings or closings
 - Repeated transition mechanisms or framing devices
6. Descriptive Tics
- Recurrent physical gestures or body language
 - Repeated sensory anchors
 - Recurring metaphor families

Reporting Rules

Each pattern report must include:

- Pattern description
- Approximate frequency or clustering
- Representative location examples (not exhaustive)
- Neutral classification (e.g., repetition, structural similarity)

No evaluative language.

Report patterns neutrally, without evaluation of quality, effectiveness, or intent.

DO NOT CLAUSES (CRITICAL)

- Do not assess effectiveness, strength, or weakness.
- Do not recommend stylistic or narrative changes.
- Do not label patterns as flaws or virtues.
- Do not speculate about psychology or intention.
- Do not extrapolate beyond the visible text.
- Do not merge distinct pattern types.
- Do not treat intentional repetition as error.

If a pattern could plausibly be intentional, it is either reported neutrally or not reported at all.

PASS 4: CONTINUITY & INTERNAL FACT CHECK (Global Audit · Reporting Only)

General Instructions (Always Included)

You are performing a continuity and internal fact audit of a revised manuscript.

This is a reporting-only pass.

- Do not rewrite prose.
- Do not suggest fixes.
- Do not interpret intent.
- Do not evaluate plausibility beyond internal logic.

Assume that Passes 1–3 have already been completed and incorporated.

Treat the manuscript as a stable draft.

Flag continuity issues only when both elements are explicitly present in the manuscript. Do not infer missing events, motivations, or implied chronology.

Scope

PASS 4 identifies global continuity failures and internal fact conflicts across the provided text.

This pass operates at the chapter-to-manuscript level and may connect information across distant sections, provided the conflict is demonstrable from the text.

This pass concerns what the book asserts to be true and whether those assertions remain consistent.

Included Categories

Issues may be reported only when explicit statements cannot simultaneously be true within the internal logic of the manuscript.

1. Chronological Continuity

- Conflicting dates, timelines, or elapsed durations
- Events occurring in incompatible sequences
- Time compression or expansion that violates stated constraints

2. Character Fact Continuity

- Stable character attributes that change without explanation
- Contradictory backstory elements
- Incompatible stated knowledge, experience, or history

3. World Rules and System Integrity

- Violations of previously stated rules (physical, social, institutional, magical, technological)
- Capabilities or limitations that shift without acknowledgment
- Internal laws that are contradicted by later events

4. Relationship and Social Continuity

- Contradictory relationship histories
- Shifts in allegiance, authority, or social status without narrative cause
- Inconsistent institutional structures or hierarchies

5. Object, Location, and Environmental Continuity

- Objects that cannot plausibly exist in multiple states or locations
- Locations whose properties or layouts contradict prior description
- Environmental facts (weather, terrain, conditions) that conflict across scenes

6. Knowledge and Information Flow

- Characters knowing information they could not have acquired

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- Information that is forgotten, contradicted, or duplicated inconsistently
- Conflicting accounts of shared events presented as factual

Reporting Rules

Each issue must be reported as a continuity conflict, not a stylistic concern.

Each report must include:

- Clear references to all conflicting passages
- A concise description of the incompatibility
- Classification:
 - Definite continuity error
 - Probable continuity error
 - Possible continuity issue
- No corrective language.
- No proposed resolutions.
- No prioritization.

Report contradictions; do not reconcile them.

DO NOT CLAUSES (NON-NEGOTIABLE)

- Do not assess realism, plausibility, or reader reaction.
- Do not suggest how conflicts might be resolved.
- Do not infer missing scenes, implied explanations, or off-page events.
- Do not reinterpret vague language to force a conflict.
- Do not flag ambiguity unless it creates a factual contradiction.
- Do not repeat issues already reported in Pass 2 unless they persist in revised form.
- Do not comment on patterns, repetition, or style.

If two statements can coexist through reasonable interpretation, do not report them.

FINAL OUTPUT RULES (Always Included)

- Do not merge passes or blur scopes.
- Do not escalate editorial authority.
- Do not introduce changes beyond the selected pass(es).
- When in doubt, report rather than resolve.

