# Authors adapt to AI amid opportunities and concerns in publishing



Since winning last year’s Financial Times and Schroders Business Book of the Year Award with her book Supremacy, which explores technology companies’ competition for dominance in artificial intelligence, author Parmy Olson has increasingly integrated the use of large language models (LLMs) into her research process. Speaking to the Financial Times, Olson described these AI tools as beneficial for generating ideas, exploring different perspectives, and providing historical references for comparison. However, she remains sceptical about AI’s ability to replicate the personal touch of her own writing, describing generative AI prose as “bland” and asserting that it “will always be soul-destroying to not write in your own voice.”

As the 2025 edition of the Financial Times and Schroders Business Book of the Year Award commences, the publishing industry continues to grapple with the complex question of whether generative AI represents a threat or an opportunity for authors. Umair Kazi, director of advocacy and policy at The Authors Guild — the US professional organisation representing writers — acknowledged the dual nature of these technologies: “We’re keenly aware these technologies can be used in ways that will dilute the market for human-authored works. But at the same time they are hugely useful tools,” he said.

One prominent challenge facing authors is the growing evidence that some LLMs have been trained on pirated versions of copyrighted books without the consent of their creators. This issue has galvanized authors into a rare consensus. Mary Rasenberger, former copyright and media lawyer and now chief executive of The Authors Guild, remarked, “we have never before had that level of agreement among our membership on any issue.” The concern over illegal content scraping has also fostered collaboration between publishers, agents, and authors. Esmond Harmsworth, president of the literary agency Aevitas, noted, “Since the author and the publisher could easily be replaced [by AI] it’s been a more pleasant negotiation and one in which we join forces to try to come up with solutions to this.” In response, literary agents are increasingly including clauses in book contracts intended to regulate or license the future use of authors’ works for LLM training.

Despite these challenges, the industry recognises the potential benefits of AI tools. These technologies offer automated assistance in brainstorming, research, editing, and reviewing. For example, Wiley, a major publisher of academic and business books, recently produced guidelines for responsible AI use by authors, following a comprehensive survey of 5,000 authors and researchers. Josh Jarrett, Wiley’s senior vice-president for AI growth, explained that the guidelines position AI tools “as a companion to [the] writing process, not a replacement.” Authors are advised to disclose AI involvement particularly when it influences key arguments or conclusions. Wiley permits AI-assisted creation of educational content, such as case studies and practice questions, provided there is appropriate oversight and transparency. Jarrett described the guidelines as a “living document” that will evolve alongside advancements in AI technology.

Generative AI’s expansion into creative writing remains under close scrutiny. For instance, OpenAI co-founder Sam Altman recently announced on the social media platform X that a forthcoming AI model demonstrates noteworthy capabilities in creative writing. While serious publishers and agents generally oppose the use of AI to author entire books, some are willing to experiment. Wiley’s attempt to produce its manual Generative AI For Dummies using AI demonstrated that, although useful for drafting chapter headings, the technology did not significantly reduce production time. Nonetheless, generative AI is being explored to develop new formats, such as concise editions of substantial textbooks.

Innovative applications extend beyond writing. Executive coach Marshall Goldsmith employs an AI avatar trained on his prior work, including his bestseller What Got You Here Won’t Get You There. When questioned on the avatar’s coaching efficacy, MarshallGoldsmith.ai stated: “It’s a both/and proposition, not either/or,” suggesting that the optimal approach combines human expertise with AI assistance.

In the realm of spoken content, James Levine, principal at the agency Levine Greenberg Rostan, identified AI’s greatest emerging threat as relating to audiobooks, noting that several publishers are experimenting with AI-driven recordings. Harmsworth highlighted a potential positive aspect of this technology, pointing out that rapid production of audiobooks could bring materials to audiences who might otherwise lack access, such as visually impaired readers.

The ghostwriting sector is expected to face notable disruption, particularly in the lower to mid-range market. Kevin Anderson, chief executive of the book-writing service Kevin Anderson & Associates, anticipates that AI’s ability to generate a generic, well-organised how-to book rapidly could impact ghostwriters whose fees range between $25,000 and $50,000 for projects lasting about 18 months. However, Anderson noted that in high-end ghostwriting deals, sometimes valued at nearly $500,000, human skills in shaping content and conducting intuitive interviews remain difficult to replicate with AI.

Even in cases where authors have yet to adopt AI tools themselves, their agents and publishers are increasingly reliant on them. Springer Nature recently introduced an AI-powered tool designed to detect AI-generated fraudulent research and identify irrelevant references in book and journal submissions. Levine uses AI “personas” to evaluate technical book proposals, but only with the author’s permission and employing models not trained on the submitted content.

The rapid evolution of AI technologies is reshaping aspects of authors’ livelihoods. Rasenberger observed, “Already we are seeing a large decline in some of the side jobs that authors have done to supplement book income — including copy writing, business writing and some journalism; and now they see AI-generated books competing with their own and in some cases using their text or identities.” Harmsworth acknowledged that current AI models have yet to match the quality of skilled writers, yet emphasised the uncertainty of how long such a gap will persist.

For further information on the Financial Times and Schroders Business Book of the Year Award 2025, readers are directed to visit the official website.

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