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# Books After AI

How artificial intelligence changes the purpose of books, and the role of the author

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Books after AI: Tradition meets future

Every few decades, someone declares the book dead. Radio, television, and later the internet were all supposed to kill it. Then e-books.

Now the claim is back, this time powered by AI.

The claim is also mostly wrong, but not in the way people think.

AI does not kill books. It kills a specific function that books used to have. And once you see which function that is, the rest falls into place.

## **The core confusion**

### **Information is not understanding**

When people say that books are threatened by AI, they usually mean “knowledge”. But that word hides several very different things.

Historically, people used books for at least four distinct purposes:

1. Information access
2. Understanding and sense-making
3. Inspiration and aesthetic orientation
4. Entertainment and narrative immersion

Only the first one is replaced cleanly by AI. The others are not.

Most debates collapse these into one. That leads to bad conclusions.

### **What AI actually replaces is information delivery**

AI is radically better than books at one thing: **on-demand information**.

It is better at:

- Lookup and recall
- Procedural guidance
- Step-by-step explanations

- Context-specific examples
- Personalization
- Continuous updating

This matters because a large share of modern non-fiction books function, in practice, primarily as information delivery systems.

That includes:

- Manuals and handbooks
- How-to books
- “X explained” books
- Most business advice books
- Most self-help books that repackage known frameworks

In these cases, AI is not just competitive; it is structurally superior.

If I want to know how to prune roses, structure a database, prepare a presentation, or understand a tax rule, an LLM gives me a faster, clearer, and more tailored answer than any book. And it does so without forcing me through hundreds of pages written for an imaginary average reader.

This is true even for subjects I care deeply about, such as Viking history. When I want facts, timelines, or explanations of trade systems, AI is superior, while the books I keep and reread are those that offer perspective, narrative, or a particular way of seeing that period.

This collapses the traditional non-fiction value chain.

**Author → publisher → book → reader**  
becomes

**User → AI → tailored synthesis**

That is not a trend; it is a structural shift.

## **Why this does not mean “books are obsolete”**

Because information was never the only reason we read books, it was just the most economically scalable one.

Once information becomes cheap, the other functions become visible again.

## **Book categories**

To understand what survives, it helps to sort books into categories based on what they actually do for the reader.

### **Category 1. Information books**

This category of books will collapse.

These books exist primarily to transfer information.

Examples:

- Technical manuals
- Reference books
- Many professional textbooks
- Many business and productivity books

Their value proposition was efficiency. That advantage is gone.

Most of this category will shrink dramatically and, in large part, disappear entirely. This is not a moral judgment; it is a simple tool competition.

### **Category 2. Understanding and perspective books**

This category of books will survive and shift.

These books are not about answers. They are about **how to think**.

They provide:

- Coherent mental models
- Worldviews
- Trade-offs
- Judgments
- A way to see a domain as a whole

Good philosophy, serious non-fiction, and genuinely opinionated business or technology books fall into this category.

They cannot be atomized without losing their point. Their value lies in internal coherence, not in individual facts.

AI can summarize them. It can help readers explore them. But it cannot replace their function, because the function is not information retrieval. It is sense-making.

These books will remain relevant. But authors will need to be explicit about their perspective and assumptions. Filler will not survive.

### **Category 3. Inspiration books**

This category of books will strengthen.

This category is often overlooked because it does not map well to search queries.

Examples:

- Gardening books
- Cookbooks
- Travel books
- Architecture and design books
- Craft and hobby books
- Visual, browsable books

These books are not read to answer a question. They are read to **evoke possibilities**.

Their value lies in:

- Curation, not completeness
- Taste, not coverage
- Aesthetic coherence
- Non-linear discovery
- Serendipity

Even if I can ask an AI everything about flowers, I still want to leaf through a gardening book. Even if I can query an LLM about Seoul or South Korea, I still borrow travel books from the library. Not for facts, but for orientation and inspiration.

An LLM is excellent when you have a question.

A book shines when you do not yet have one.

AI complements this category. It does not replace it.

#### **Category 4. Entertainment and narrative**

This category of books is more fragile than it looks.

It is often said that stories are safe. This is only partially true.

Adult fiction, memoirs, narrative history, and essays with a strong voice are relatively robust. Readers seek a specific author, a specific voice, and a sustained narrative arc.

But children's books reveal a weak spot.

#### **Where storytelling becomes a service**

I am a grandfather. My son's children are four and five.

We still read physical books sometimes. But not always. Increasingly, we use our mobile phones to ask an LLM to generate a bedtime story. It takes a second.

We can say:

- Make it short tonight
- Use the child's name
- Make it about dinosaurs or trucks
- Make it less scary

Why buy expensive children's books that are used briefly, get lost, or get broken, when personalized stories are infinite and free?

This is not a moral failure. It is a structural difference.

Many children's books are not really "works". They are **services**.

They are:

- Short
- Formulaic
- Used briefly
- Not reread years later
- Not tied to identity or memory objects

For these, AI is strictly superior.

## **Two kinds of children's books**

This matters.

### **Disposable bedtime stories**

This category of books is at high risk.

This is where most children's books sit.

AI wins on:

- Cost
- Availability
- Personalization
- Flexibility

This part of the market will shrink fast.

### **Anchor books and memory objects**

This category of books is more resilient.

Some children's books survive because they are not about content.

They are:

- Ritual objects
- Emotional anchors
- Shared memories
- Physical artifacts

These are closer to keepsakes than stories. Only a small fraction of children's books ever reach this status, but those that do are hard to replace.

The lesson is simple: AI does not threaten stories as such, but **interchangeable stories**.

### **What this means for authors**

The author's role changes.

#### **Old role**

- Knowledge collector



- Explainer
- Translator of complexity
- Authority by scarcity

### **New role**

- Sense-maker
- World-builder
- Curator of judgment
- Authority by coherence and experience

The future author is less of a teacher and more of a guide.

This requires:

- Clear points of view
- Explicit trade-offs
- Responsibility for conclusions
- Acceptance of disagreement

Voice and judgment matter more, while filler matters less.

## **What happens to books in small languages**

This is uncomfortable, but necessary to say.

Course literature in small languages is in real trouble.

Students already prefer English sources. AI operates primarily in English internally. Translation is now instant, cheap, and good enough. Publishers cannot compete on cost or speed, and authors cannot justify the effort.

The result is not that everything becomes English. The result is the **functional extinction of technical literature in small languages.**

This will happen first in:

- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)
- Business and economics
- University-level textbooks
- Professional handbooks

What remains local:

- Fiction
- Children's books
- Cultural history
- Memoirs
- Inspiration books tied to place and identity

AI translation does not save small-language textbooks. If everyone reads a translated English original, no local original is produced. Authority, citations, and updates remain English-first.

Languages survive where meaning, identity, and emotion matter more than efficiency. They fade where efficiency and precision dominate.

That is not ideology, but economics.

## **Fewer books. Better books**

This is not a tragedy, but a positive development.

For decades, the market rewarded volume, not clarity. AI removes that incentive, punishes redundancy, and exposes shallow synthesis.

What remains are books that:

- Offer perspective

- Inspire
- Entertain in a non-interchangeable way
- Take responsibility for a way of seeing the world

When answers are cheap, thinking becomes valuable again.

Books will still exist. But fewer of them. And the good ones will matter more.

Books

Reading

Writing

Authors

AI



Edit profile

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