

From Skeptic to Evangelist - My AI Journey

Jerry Spencer
Precisely – Senior Software Engineer

Monday February 23, 2026

9:45 AM

Room: Salon 15

[As you can see, I am old to Z.](#)

[I'm not new to Z, I'm old to Z.](#)

[This entire presentation was created using AI.](#)

[So I asked AI to write a history of AI.](#)

[Now, if any person is asked to write a history of themselves, it's going to be kind of long.](#)

[So I said, wait, okay, write a brief history.](#)

[Then I said, okay, write a brief history in the 20th century.](#)

[All right, good.](#)

History vs. Memory

Recorded History

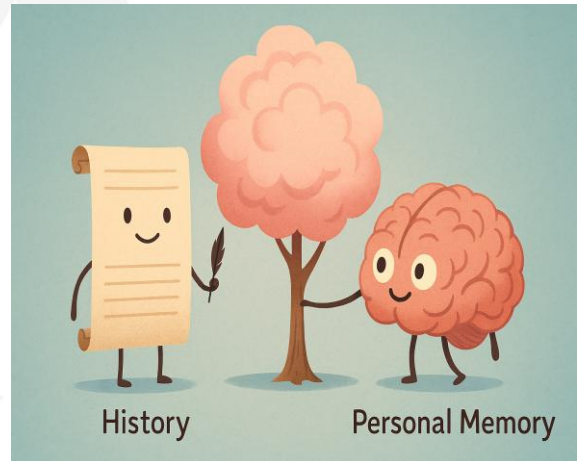
History is the interpretation of past events recorded by people who did not directly experience them. It is learned through documents and education.

Personal Memory

Memories are personal recollections shaped by individual perspectives and experiences, offering a unique view of events lived through.

Event Perspectives

Events become memories for those present, and history for others, influencing how they are understood and remembered.



Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 0 0 0 2

And then I said, you know, there's a difference between history and memory. A lot of the things that happened in AI, I was a witness to. So I said, I'm going to present it from that vantage point. They, do research, they read things, and they give information based on that. Memory is, oh yeah, I was there, I remember that. I was sitting on this sofa, you know, things of that nature. So we're going to talk history, and then I'm going to talk about the things that I remember about AI and how that shaped my current interest and belief in AI.

The Cuban Missile Crisis



Missile Deployment in Cuba

The Soviet Union positioned nuclear missiles in Cuba, posing a direct threat to the United States' security in 1962.

U.S. Naval Blockade

The United States responded with a naval blockade, aiming to prevent further delivery of missiles and escalate the pressure.

Diplomatic Resolution

Tense negotiations and diplomacy defused the crisis, highlighting the dangers of escalation and the importance of communication.

Copyright © by SHARE Association. Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

An example of the difference between history and memory is the Cuban Missile Crisis.

A lot of people, it's simply history to them.

They weren't there, they see news clips, they read papers.

I was there.

I remember every night we huddled around one of the three stations watching the news, trying to see what was going to happen in the world.

We thought that this was possibly the end of the world because of nuclear weapons.

So I remember that all the adults were tense and they were afraid.

And I was like, OK, well, what's happening?

So I was trying to understand that.

So it's kind of the same thing with AI.



EARLY CONCEPTS AND FOUNDATIONS OF AI IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Copyright© by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>



Philosophical Roots and Early Ideas

Classical Logic Foundations

Aristotle's work on formal logic and reasoning laid the early philosophical foundation for artificial intelligence.

Symbolic Logic Development

Leibniz and Boole advanced symbolic logic, crucial for the mechanization of thought and computation theories.

Algorithm and Mechanization Concepts

Early 20th-century ideas conceptualized algorithms and mechanized reasoning, modeling human intelligence by machines.



Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>



So we're going to start with our early concepts and foundations of AI in the 20th century.

And then they immediately start with, like I said, Aristotle.

So Aristotle, and this is history to me even.


So I wasn't there for that.

But he talked, he set the format for AI.

He talked about logic and things of that nature.

So he kind of got the ball rolling.

So he did that.



SHARE
EDUCATE • NETWORK • INFLUENCE

Alan Turing and the Turing Test

Turing Test Concept
The Turing Test measures a machine's ability to demonstrate intelligence indistinguishable from a human.

Foundations of AI
Turing's publication laid the philosophical and practical foundations of artificial intelligence research.

Impact on Research
His work sparked debates and research into natural language processing and cognitive modeling in AI.

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 6

Then later on, Alan Turing created the Turing test.
And this was to determine how close to a human a machine was.
Now, once again, this is history to me, but just by a little bit, not quite as much as Aristotle, just a little bit.
So they made some initial attempts at machine intelligence.



Initial Attempts at Machine Intelligence

Pioneering AI Programs

Logic Theorist and General Problem Solver were early AI programs focusing on symbolic reasoning and theorem proving.

Challenges Faced

Computational limitations and real-world problem complexities shaped the direction of future AI research.

Foundations of AI

Initial attempts demonstrated the feasibility of automating logical reasoning and established AI paradigms.

They had pioneering AI programs.
They had some challenges.
Understand, you're trying to codify what the human brain does.
And
We're still working on that.
We haven't gotten that perfected yet.
So this is their first attempt at that.
So they tried that, everything was wonderful.



THE EMERGENCE OF AI RESEARCH AND PROGRAMS

Copyright© by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>



The Dartmouth Conference of 1956

Birth of Artificial Intelligence

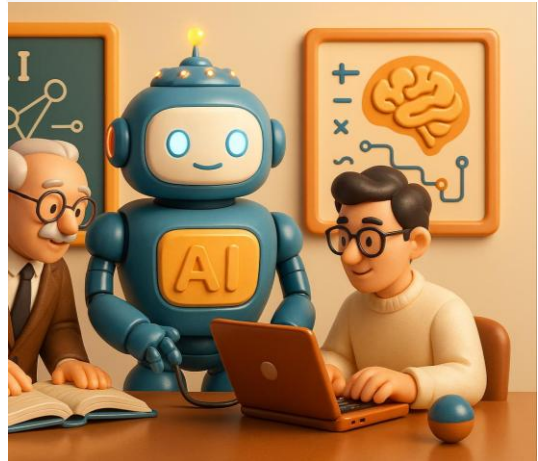
The 1956 conference marked the formal beginning of AI as a unique academic field.

Founding Organizers

Key figures like McCarthy and Minsky organized the event to explore machine intelligence.

Impact on AI Research

The conference inspired funding, global research, and set future AI development agendas.



Copyright © by SHARE Association. Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 0 0 0 9

Then they started AI research.

Now, the Dartmouth Conference of 1956 is where the name AI was created.

And for some odd reason, they weren't inviting three-year-olds to the Dartmouth Conference.

I was three and they didn't invite me.

So I don't have a memory of that, but they came, artificial intelligence was created, they started doing research, everybody had their own ideas.

There were no PCs.

The only thing that existed were mainframe computers and maybe some minis, things of that nature.

So they're working on it, they're trying to do their best, get it all together.

And

They make some progress.



Development of Early AI Programs

ELIZA and Natural Language Processing

ELIZA simulated human-like conversation, pioneering early natural language processing in AI.

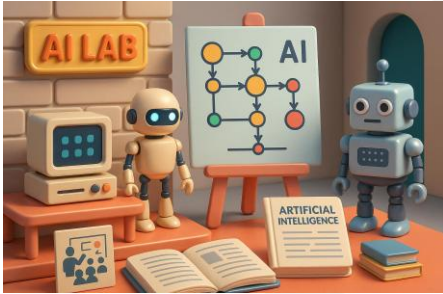
SHRDLU and Command Understanding

SHRDLU interpreted simple commands in restricted environments, demonstrating AI planning abilities.

Foundational Techniques and Limitations

Early AI programs revealed strengths and challenges, guiding focus on heuristic and domain-specific solutions.

They have what they called Eliza, and natural language processing. So that was one of their first attempts. Then they had SHRDLU. And they had various other things. Meanwhile, I'm playing with a ball and running around. So I wasn't involved with it at that point, just to be clear.



Growth of Academic Research in AI

Establishment of AI Labs

AI research labs at major universities were founded, fostering innovation in AI technologies and collaboration.

Advancements in AI Techniques

Significant progress occurred in symbolic AI, knowledge representation, and early robotics during this era.

Academic Collaboration and Funding

Growing government and institutional funding supported conferences and publications, solidifying AI research globally.

Diversification and Applications

AI subfields diversified with a focus on practical applications impacting various industries.

Additionally, we had academic research into AI.

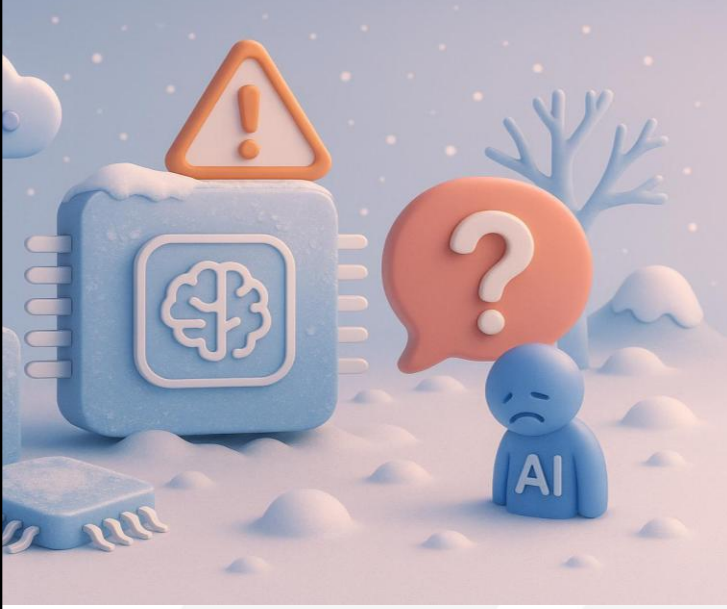
And they created AI labs, they had advanced AI techniques, things were rolling along.



CHALLENGES AND BREAKTHROUGHS FROM THE 1970S TO 1990S

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>





The illustration depicts a winter scene with snow-covered ground and trees. A large blue square object with a brain icon and a warning sign on top sits on the left. A smaller blue figure with 'AI' on its chest and a sad face stands in the center, looking up at a large red speech bubble containing a white question mark. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with snow-covered hills and trees.

SHARE
EDUCATE • NETWORK • INFLUENCE

AI 'Winters' And Setbacks

Periods of Reduced Funding
AI winters occurred during the 1970s and late 1980s, marked by sharply reduced investment and enthusiasm.

Technical Limitations
Early AI faced major technical hurdles and unmet expectations, limiting its progress and causing skepticism.

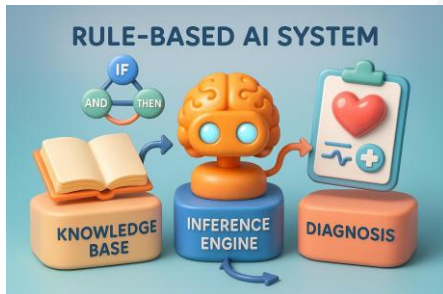
Shift to Practical AI
Setbacks led to focus on domain-specific, practical AI applications rather than broad generalized intelligence.

Copyright © by SHARE Association. Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 13

Then we come to the 70s.
From the 70s through the 90s, things were happening.
And this is where I come on the scene.
They were talking about AI
For those of you who might remember, there was a newspaper called Computer World.
Now, newspapers are things that you read.
They don't exist anymore.
But, you know, so when you got your Computer World, the first thing you did was look at the back for want ads to see if anybody was hiring.
You did that.
And then you might take a little time to look at the front.
Well, there was all this information about AI.
AI, artificial intelligence,
They can't do that.
Let me see.
What are they talking about?
Oh, that's pretty interesting.
I decided I was going to learn Lisp.

And that was supposed to be the programming language for AI.
OK, I'm going to learn Lisp.
I can do this.
I knew COBOL.
I knew Assembler.
So surely I could learn Lisp.
Only issue with that was that you had to have a machine to run it on.
I don't think the company was really interested in me learning Lisp.
They didn't say, Jerry, we have a machine for you to play with here.
So that effort kind of fell back.
And then all of a sudden, AI was no longer in the paper.
It wasn't on the front page.
It was nowhere through the paper.
This is what they call one of the AI winters.
There were several AI winters.
You know, they had, you know, it came up, it went down.
It came up and went down.
Sine curve.
But one of the things that I saw in this is the last sentence, it talks about skepticism.
And I didn't ask it to put that in there, but that was where my skepticism arose.
I said, they're never going to be able to do this.
You know, this is never going to be done.
It's impossible.
So they would talk about AI, you know, it would resurface, and I said, it's not going to happen.
It's impossible.
So
Things rolled along.
I'm working on my career now.
I went from a programmer trainee to a programmer to an analyst to a systems programmer.
So when I became a systems programmer, I'm learning assembler language.
And I'm like, yeah, okay, so, you know, leave that AI stuff alone.
I've got things to do.
Have a family.
You know, I got work to do.
So AI, for some reason, went on without me.
It merrily rolled along.
So, they had different systems.



Expert Systems and Rule-Based Approaches

Origins and Commercial Success

Expert systems were among AI's first commercial successes in the 1970s, using rule-based logic to mimic expert decision making.

Knowledge Bases and Inference Engines

These systems utilize knowledge bases and inference engines to solve specialized domain problems such as medical diagnosis.

Limitations and Industry Impact

Expert systems showed practical utility despite limits in uncertainty handling and learning, influencing AI business applications.

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 14

So, they had different systems.

They had knowledge bases, inference engines.

All these things AI thinks is important, and it tells us about itself, the things that it did.

Then we have neural networks and learning, large language models.

All that stuff comes into play.

All right, so this is great.

This is interesting, but I knew nothing about it because I had given up on AI.

AI was impossible.

So before we move on to the 21st century, there was some advance in AI when Deep Blue beat Kasparov in chess.

And I said, oh, that's great, but how's that going to help me?

That's great and wonderful, but it doesn't do me any good.

Besides, I need a mainframe for that.

I figured it was a supercomputer.

So, you know, it didn't do anything to help my skepticism.

My skepticism was firmly entrenched.

Advances in Neural Networks and Learning

Backpropagation Algorithm

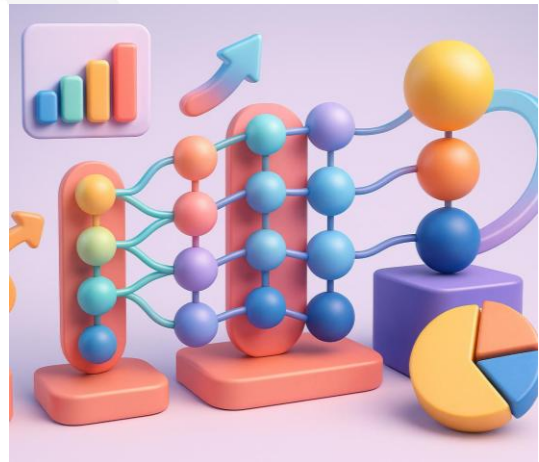
The introduction of backpropagation in the 1980s enabled effective multi-layer learning in neural networks.

Adaptive Learning Systems

Advances in neural networks allowed models to learn adaptively from data, enhancing learning capabilities.

Deep Learning Revolution

These advances ushered in the deep learning era, shifting AI from symbolic to connectionist approaches.



Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>



AI IN THE MODERN ERA: 21ST CENTURY PROGRESS

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>





Rise of Machine Learning and Big Data

Growth in Data and Computing

Explosive growth in data availability and computational power enabled training of complex machine learning models.

Machine Learning Advancements

ML techniques use large datasets to improve prediction accuracy and pattern recognition beyond manual programming.

Impact on AI Applications

Advances in ML and big data power applications like search engines, recommendation systems, and voice recognition.

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 17

So that brings us to the 21st century.

So now we've got machine learning and big data.

Big data was always there, but it was, it just grew.

It was, this is really bigger data.

the mainframe could accommodate however much data you could afford.

So, if you wanted to have all the data in the world, you could put it on the mainframe.

It just cost you a billion dollars or whatever it was.

So, all right, so now we're getting somewhere.

And in 2011, Watson beat Ken Jennings.

Now, this is a memory.

I was there.

Probably most of you were too.

you're all over 15, so.

all right, so we're making progress.

But once again, I can't go to the mainframe and say, okay, mainframe, I want you to bring up Watson so I can do some artificial intelligence stuff.

It wasn't going to happen.


So, you know, by this point in time, PCs are available.

But there's no, I mean, they're doing things like spreadsheets and word processing

programs.

AI is nowhere on the horizon, as far as I can tell.

So, we won't worry about that.



SHARE
EDUCATE • NETWORK • INFLUENCE

Deep Learning Revolution

Neural Network Advances

Deep learning uses multi-layer neural networks enabling breakthroughs in AI performance and complex data understanding.

Key Architectures

Convolutional and recurrent neural networks greatly improved accuracy in image and speech recognition tasks.

AI Applications

Deep learning enabled innovations in autonomous vehicles, robotics, and natural language processing industries.

Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 18

So there was a deep learning revolution.

So we've got neural network advances, key architectures, and AI applications.

So

I would see these things from time to time, but my skepticism kept me from really researching it.

And so, okay, so I said, all right, fine.



Current Applications and Future Directions

Current AI Innovations

AI currently drives innovation in healthcare, finance, autonomous systems, and creative industries worldwide.

Emerging AI Frontiers

Research focuses on general AI, ethical frameworks, and AI-assisted decision making for better integration.

Future Human-AI Collaboration

Future AI promises collaborative human-AI systems and wider accessibility with transparency and regulation challenges.

Then it brings us down to current applications and future directions.
Now, this is where things actually turned around.
I worked for a company called DTS Software, and they were acquired by Precisely.
Well,
In the process, they took away all my toys.
They took my system.
DCS Software, there was like six or seven people.
It's not a big company.
We did everything ourselves.
We had a zPDT.
We brought it up.
If we screwed it up, we brought it down, IPL'd it, brought it back up.
We controlled JES.
So this is the environment I'm used to.
All of a sudden, I'm in a very structured environment.
fine.
Tell you what, you've taken away my toys.
I've gone through all of the training and the setup and everything and the onboarding that I had to do.

So they had Udemy classes.
And I said, you know what I'm going to do?
I'm going to learn some more about this AI.
It seems to be the hot thing.
So I'm going to learn some more about that.
So I took some Udemy classes and they taught me that you could use AI
with Microsoft Office.
That's pretty interesting.
Still skeptical, but interesting.
Then my wife, she was the early adapter with AI.
And she's an artist, and she decided that she was going to make some images.
And she tried to make images, and they were missing legs.
They had six fingers on a hand and to see, I tell you, that AI is worthless.
But, I continued to study it because it was a hot thing.
So I went to a session, it was either, it was at some conference, I don't remember
which one it was, but the instructor said, all right, everybody who uses AI, raise your
hand.
Well, I was, you know, adamant, I do not use AI, I'm not going to raise my hand.
He said, okay, do you use Google?
I said, yeah.
He said, that's AI.
And so I was going to argue with him, and then I realized, wait, I don't know what I'm
talking about.
It could well be AI.
So that kind of shifted me off of the, shifted me from zero to 1.
You know, we're trying to get to 100.
Shifted me from zero to 1.
All right, so, okay, I'll consider it.
So after I've learned how to use Microsoft Office with AI,
Precisely began to really push AI.
And I said, well, if they're convinced of it, maybe it's something that'll work for me.
So let's look at it.
So I began to play with it.
And one of the things, I pride myself on is remembering things, even though my
memory is flawed at best.
But if I get anabend
I'm supposed to know what that abend means.
Well, I was finding that I didn't know more and more.
Plus there were new abends, new problems, new messages.
So I said, okay, well, let me Google it, because that was my go-to at that point.
I'd Google it.
Well, I said, well, let me see what AI has to say.

So I learned to write prompts, and we were using Copilot.
I would ask Copilot, what does this message mean?
And they would come and give me, what the message meant, how to fix it.
And this was great, this might work.
So I went from there from one to maybe 47, 48, somewhere in there.
So I'm beginning to, I kind of like this.
So I was making a presentation and it was about VSAM and I had to, I knew
there was JCL-defined VSAM.
So I didn't want to leave that out.
I wanted to put that into the presentation.
So I asked AI about it.
And we got into a knock-down, drag-out battle.
It insisted there was no such thing as JCL-defined VSAM.
The only way you could define VSAM was through IDCAMS.
So when it gave me some JCL, but it executed IDCAMS.
I said, no, I know you can do this.
I lost that battle.
It was never convinced.
I never could prompt.
I could never do anything to get it to believe that there was JCL-defined VSAM.
But, you know, that shows that there are limitations, but it's still a very useful tool.
So my wife is a little more encouraged because now she can get graphics where
people actually kind of look like people.
They don't have missing limbs.
And I'm beginning to use it to actually do things
that are useful to me.
And then I take the leap and use it in real life.
I said, let me see.
I need to get a key made.
So find me a locksmith.
It gave me 4 locksmiths.
They were all rated, you know, four stars or whatever.
Which one?
This one's closest to me.
It gave me that kind of information.
I said, this will work.
So I went from a skeptic
to an evangelist.



Now, you might remember there was a Frank's Red Hot Sauce commercial. And this is in the quaint old times before people cussed all the time. So they had a grandmother, and she said, I put that bleep on everything. Well, I kind of co-opted that. And in the sense of AI, I said, I use that bleep for everything. Then I asked, DO YOU? I have used it to analyze programs. It's written, I write assembler code. Now, if I wrote Java or C, C, something like that, it can really get involved in that. But it hasn't gotten quite that good with assembler yet. I think it's moving in that direction, but it hasn't gotten there yet. So, okay, fine. I use it for that. I use it for errors that come up. I use it for things I don't know. Tell me about this. And it gives me a whole lot of information. It's great and wonderful. But you have to be careful with your prompts.

That's one thing that it has taught me.

It has taught me, it has actually taught me to communicate better with people.

Because

people can interpret things and interject things, and it might not be what you really intend.

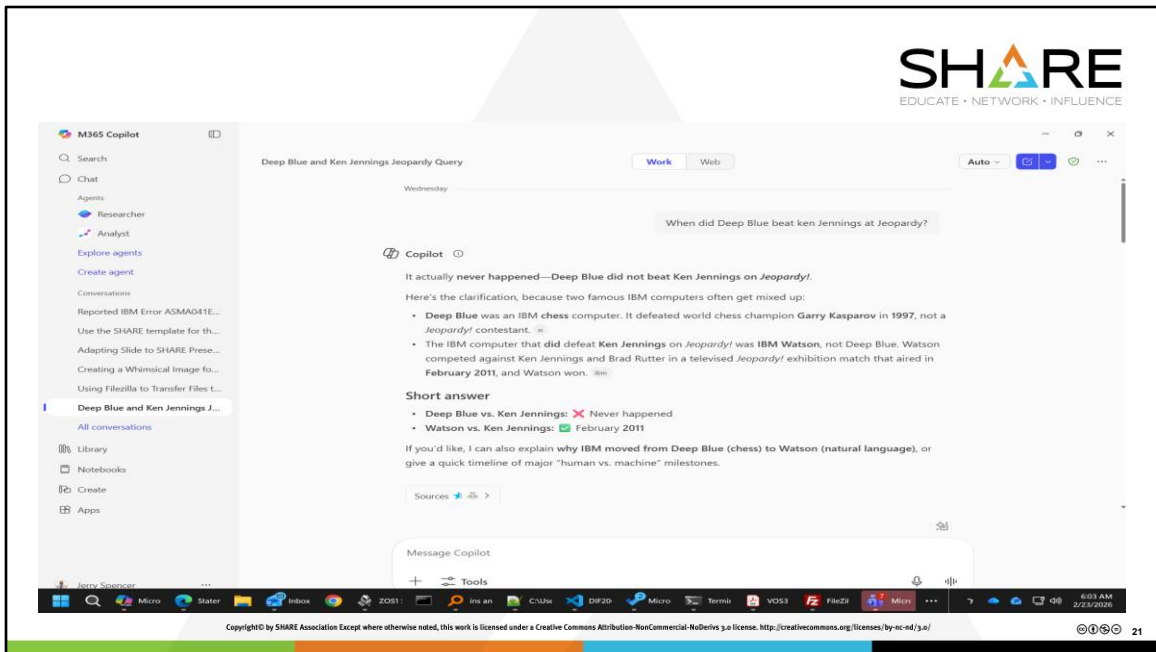
Same thing is true of AI.

If you don't tell it exactly what you want, it's going to tell you what it's going to give you.

So when I give instructions now to my daughter, I try to make it as clear as possible.

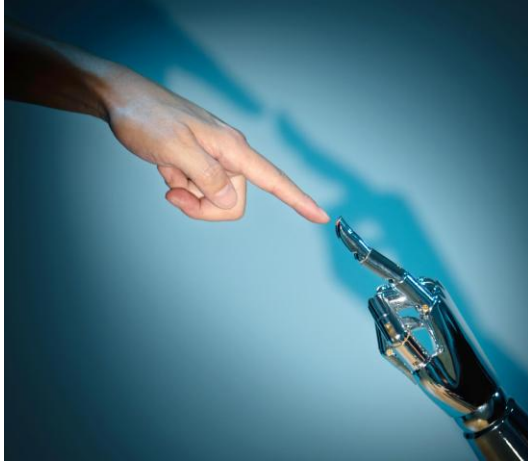
And the same thing is true with AI.

My prompts have gotten better because now I know I need to tell it exactly what I want, and maybe it will give me what I asked for.



Now, you have to be careful because AI has some human tendencies. With my flawed memory, I asked, when did Deep Blue beat Ken Jennings in Jeopardy? And then I realized I said something bad about its mama. You notice it said it actually never happened, never happens in bold, you know, it just kind of got upset, said, you know, you're stupid, but it didn't say all that, but, you know, but you can see the inference.

Trust But Verify in AI



Copyright © by SHARE Association. Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

Trust But Verify Approach

A 'trust but verify' approach safeguards the accuracy and reliability of AI-driven decisions in important applications.

Role of Human Oversight

Real Intelligence is vital for interpreting AI outputs, catching errors and biases that AI systems may miss.

Building Accountability

Combining human and artificial intelligence establishes accountability and enhances complex decision-making outcomes.

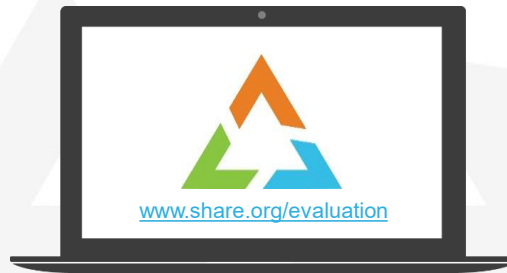
In conclusion, you have to take a “Trust But Verify” approach to AI. Take everything it has with a grain of salt. Double check what it says. Try its suggestions to guarantee that they actually work before you turn it loose on the world.

Your feedback is important!



Submit a session evaluation for each session you attend:

www.share.org/evaluation



Copyright © by SHARE Association Except where otherwise noted, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 license. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

© 0 0 0 23

Please include this slide at the end of your presentation!