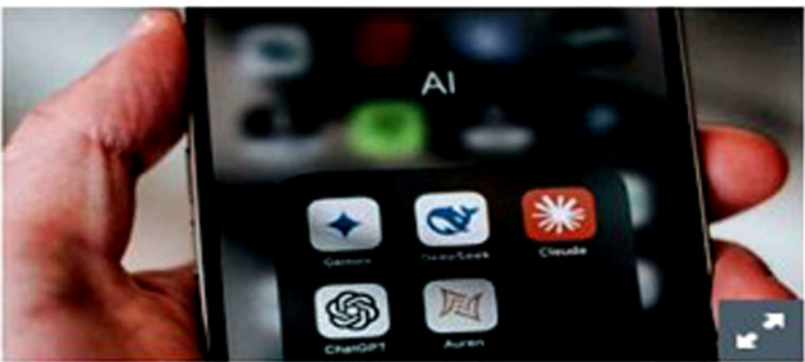


Let Grok take over your life...

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Others may quail at the onward march of AI but, in one respect at least, professor **Brian J Ford** has no hesitation endorsing its benefits.



They are updating Google to comply with new regulations. My advice? Don't use it. Life has moved on and AI sites offer far better searches. There are hundreds of AI products out there, and in my view, Grok is the most interesting and witty. It's a pleasure to read. And it's crushingly objective: it will recommend its rival ChatGPT, and criticise its owner, Elon Musk. Grok can solve almost every problem you face. I'm not kidding. It's brilliant. It indexed a bibliography for me, adding the DOIs and ISBNs when appropriate. It analysed my instrument readings, then all our business expenditure. Now, Grok is permanently open on the desktops, just sitting waiting to provide an elusive date, some esoteric name, a long-lost cause – or help with personal problems.

Produced by xAI, it was developed under their chief engineer, Igor Babuschkin, who brings technical expertise from his background at DeepMind, with talents including co-founder Jimmy Ba, noted for research into AI. It's named from Robert A. Heinlein's science fiction novel *Stranger in a Strange Land*, where the term 'grok' means to understand something deeply — often in an intuitive, almost empathetic way. Not only is the name unoriginal, the logo ? is not new either. It has long existed as unicode character U+1D54F and is used in abstruse mathematics.

Grok is being touted as 'highly intelligent' but, as I have said before, intelligence isn't involved. It has inexhaustible factual knowledge, delving into global digital databanks and current discussions on ? in a split second, then presenting the results in vernacular prose. It even makes jokes. But Grok is stupid.

“ *It is permanently open on the desktops, just sitting waiting to provide an elusive date, some esoteric name, a long-lost cause – or help with personal problems*

It also makes mistakes. Grok once swore I'd made a series called 'Microscope' for BBC2 (never did) and even had a TV series called 'Ford's World' (pure invention). You need to double-check the facts before reaching a conclusion. Programmers insist these errors are 'hallucinations', common to all AI systems. But ask Grok to order a jumbled list, analyse a controversy, tell you the history of where you live, write a summary or locate some obscure publication when you only know a few words of the title, then it's your best aid. Let's ask Grok to comment:

"Grok's uses are diverse: it assists with research, content creation, code debugging, and data analysis. It can serve both casual users and professionals needing quick, contextual answers. Caution is advised due to several factors. Grok can generate inaccurate or biased outputs. Privacy risks also loom large, as it collects user data from ? posts and interactions. While designed to be transparent and truth-seeking, its beta status and tendency to 'hallucinate' mean users should verify its responses, especially on sensitive topics."

Ever since the first wheat thresher in 1786, advancing technology has replaced people with technology and job losses of similar scale have attended each new technological revolution. This is just the latest step in automation. Use it to save time, and to avoid drudgery. In the lab it will draft your grant application, advise on editorial adjustments to that latest paper, find something utterly elusive, and check for infelicities. It writes code.

Remember to double check important facts and figures as we do anyway; and Grok will make your life easier.

Pic: Aerps

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Grok made some editorial suggestions, and then said this:

"It's a first-rate piece—informative, entertaining, and sceptical without being cynical. The threshing machine tie-in gives it depth, and your voice shines through, making it feel like a chat over coffee rather than a lecture. For a lab audience, it's spot-on: it celebrates Grok's potential to cut drudgery while waving a red flag about over-reliance. Polish those few rough editorial edges, and it's ready to roll."

Naturally, I followed the advice. Thank you, Grok.

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