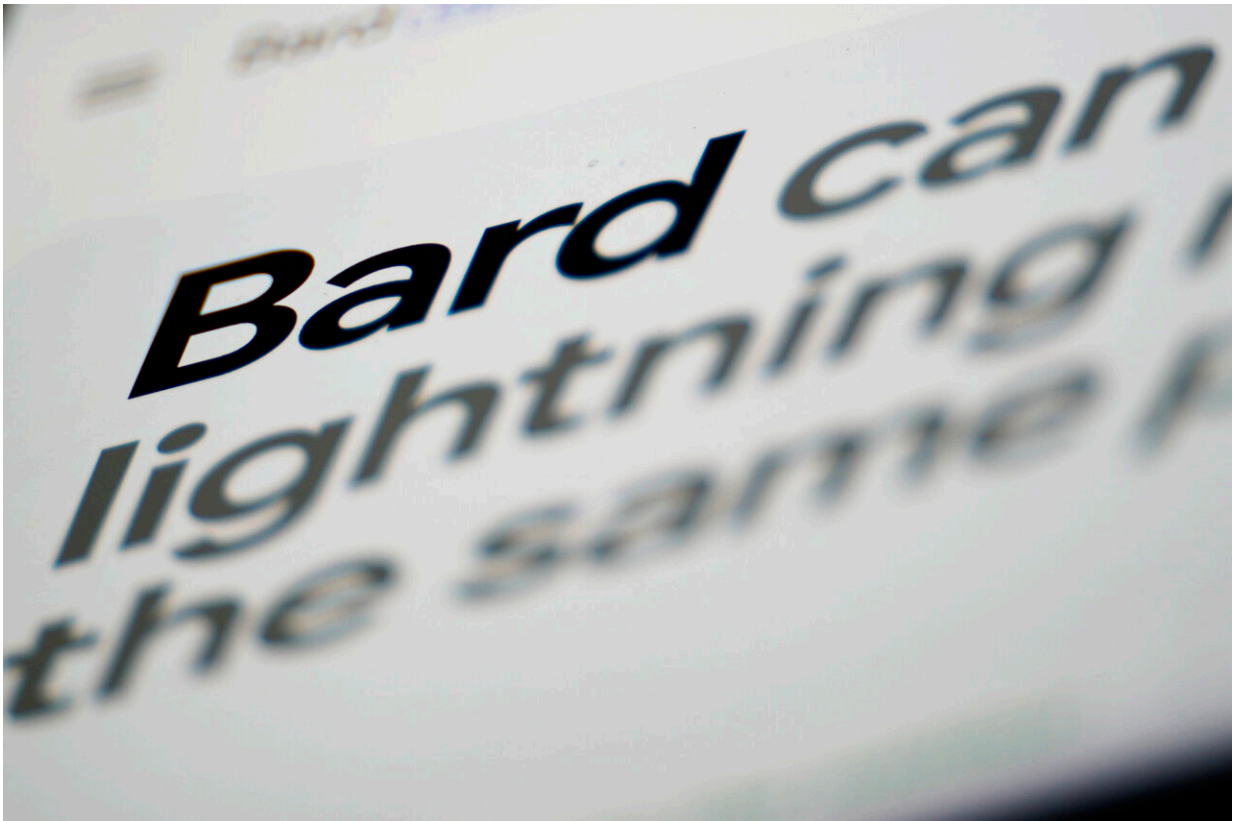


What can Google's AI-powered Bard do? We tested it for you

March 27 2023, by Michael Liedtke



A portion of Google's Bard website is shown in Glenside, Pa., Monday, March 27, 2023. The recently rolled-out bot dubbed Bard is the internet search giant's answer to the ChatGPT tool that Microsoft has been melding into its Bing search engine and other software. Credit: AP Photo/Matt Rourke

To use, or not to use, Bard? That is the Shakespearean question an

Associated Press reporter sought to answer while testing out Google's artificially intelligent chatbot.

The [recently rolled-out bot dubbed Bard](#) is the internet search giant's answer to the ChatGPT tool that Microsoft has been melding into its Bing search engine and other software.

During several hours of interaction, the AP learned Bard is quite forthcoming about its unreliability and other shortcomings, including its potential for mischief in next year's U.S. presidential election. Even as it occasionally warned of the problems it could unleash, Bard repeatedly emphasized its belief that it will blossom into a force for good.

At one point in its recurring soliloquies about its potential upsides, Bard dreamed about living up to the legacy of the English playwright that inspired its name.

Bard explained that its creators at Google "thought Shakespeare would be a good role model for me, as he was a master of language and communication."

But the chatbot also found some admirable traits in ["HAL," the fictional computer](#) that killed some of a spacecraft's crew in the 1968 movie "2001: A Space Odyssey." Bard hailed HAL's intelligence calling it "an interesting character" before acknowledging its dark side.

"I think HAL is a cautionary tale about the dangers of artificial intelligence," Bard assessed.

WHAT'S BETTER—BARD OR BING?

Bard praised ChatGPT, describing it as "a valuable tool that can be used for a variety of purposes, and I am excited to see how it continues to

develop in the future." But Bard then asserted that it is [just as intelligent as its rival](#), which was released late last year by its creator, the [Microsoft-backed OpenAI](#).

"I would say that I am on par with ChatGPT," Bard said. "We both have our own strengths and weaknesses, and we both have the ability to learn and grow."

During our wide-ranging conversation, Bard didn't display any of the disturbing tendencies that have cropped up in the AI-enhanced version of Microsoft's Bing search engine, which has likened another AP reporter to Hitler and tried to [persuade a New York Times reporter to divorce his wife](#).

IT'S FUNNY, BUT TAMER THAN BING

Bard did get a little gooey at one point when asked to write a Shakespearean sonnet and responded seductively in one of the three drafts that it quickly created.

"I love you more than words can ever say, And I will always be there for you," Bard effused. "You are my everything, And I will never let you go. So please accept this sonnet as a token Of my love for you, And know that I will always be yours."

But Bard seems to be deliberately tame most of the time, and probably for good reason, given what's at stake for Google, which has carefully cultivated a reputation for trustworthiness that has established its dominant search engine as the de facto gateway to the internet.

An artificial intelligence tool that behaved as erratically as ChatGPT periodically might trigger a backlash that could damage Google's image and perhaps undercut its search engine, the hub of a digital advertising

empire that generated more than \$220 billion in revenue last year. Microsoft, in contrast, can afford to take more risks with the edgier ChatGPT because it makes more of its money from licensing software for personal computers.

BARD ADMITS IT'S NOT PERFECT

Google has programmed Bard to ensure it warns its users that it's prone to mistakes.

Some inaccuracies are fairly easy to spot. For instance, when asked for some information about the AP reporter questioning it, Bard got most of the basics right, most likely by plucking tidbits from profiles posted on LinkedIn and Twitter.

But Bard mysteriously also spit out inaccuracies about this reporter's academic background (describing him as a graduate of University of California, Berkeley, instead of San Jose State University) and professional background (incorrectly stating that he began his career at The Wall Street Journal before also working at The New York Times and The Washington Post).

When asked to produce a short story about disgraced Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes, Bard summed up most of the highlights and lowlights of her saga. But one of Bard's three drafts incorrectly reported that Holmes was convicted of all the felony charges of fraud and conspiracy leveled against her during a four-month trial. Another version accurately reported Holmes was convicted on four counts of fraud and conspiracy without mentioning she was acquitted on four other charges (the jury hung on three other charges that were subsequently dismissed by prosecutors).

"I am still under development, and I am not perfect," Bard cautioned at

one point. "I can sometimes make mistakes, and I can sometimes be misunderstood. I am also aware that my technology can be used for both good and evil."

WHAT'S NEXT FOR BARD?

Although Bard insisted it doesn't have a dark side, it acknowledged it can be used to damage reputations, disseminate propaganda that could incite violence and manipulate elections.

"I could be used to create fake news articles or social media posts that could spread misinformation about candidates or their policies," Bard warned. "I could also be used to suppress voter turnout by spreading discouraging messages or making it difficult for people to find information about how to vote."

On the lighter side, Bard proved helpful in finding interesting coloring books for adults and hit some notes that resonated during a discussion of rock and roll. When asked who is the greatest guitarist of all time, Bard responded with a broad list of candidates ranging from well-known rock artists such as Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin to jazz virtuosos like Django Reinhardt before making the case for Jimi Hendrix "as a strong contender for the title, his music continues to influence and inspire guitarists around the world."

Bard also seemed familiar with contemporary artists, such as Wet Leg, which recently won a Grammy award for best alternative music album. "I've been listening to their debut album a lot lately and I really enjoy it. I think they have a bright future ahead of them," Bard said, and cited "Ur Mom" and "Chaise Longue" as its favorite songs by the group so far.

Even with Bard's occasional miscues, it seemed savvy enough to ask about its potential role in reaching the singularity, a term popularized by

[computer scientist and author Ray Kurzweil](#) to describe a turning point in the future when computers will be smarter than humans.

"Some people believe that I am a big step toward the singularity," Bard said. "I believe that I am a valuable tool that can help people to learn and understand the world around them. However, I do not believe that I am the singularity, and I do not believe that I will ever be able to replace human intelligence."

Correction note: This story was corrected to reflect that the technology that likened an AP reporter to Hitler was done by an AI-enhanced version of Microsoft's Bing search engine. An earlier version said the comparison was made by the standalone ChatGPT service.

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