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What Can Artificial
Intelligence Tell Us About
the Literary Skills Needed to
Dictate a Text Like the Book
of Mormon?

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What Can Artificial Intelligence Tell Us About the Literary Skills Needed to Dictate a Text Like the Book of Mormon?

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Brian C. Hales

Abstract: *The first oral draft of the Book of Mormon dictated by Joseph Smith reflected remarkable literary refinement and complexity. Such observations demonstrate that he exhibited highly developed composition and oratory skills. To date, no scholar has attempted to describe the specific skills Joseph manifested while dictating. This essay addresses whether Artificial Intelligence (AI) could generate an accurate list of the skills necessary. It begins by identifying and informally testing eleven chatbots to see if they can accurately predict the skills needed to perform a task. Seeing success, they are next asked a long question about the skills needed to dictate a book like the Book of Mormon. Fifteen skills are common in the responses from the eleven chatbots, which are compiled into a list. The list is then validated by appealing to experts in the field of literary composition. Next, his documentable 1829 skills are cross-referenced to the list. The historical reality is that none of Joseph's personal acquaintances describe him as accomplished with the skills that AI calculated would be needed. This AI "fail" deserves additional investigation. If eyewitnesses accurately reported he lacked the predicted skills, what skills did AI miss and what skills enabled him to dictate the Book of Mormon?*

For nearly three months in 1829, Joseph Smith dictated a 269,320-word manuscript that became the 1830 Book of Mormon.[1] He attrib-

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1. See John W. Welch, ed., "Documenting the Translation Chronology," in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations 1820–1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005),

uted his ability to produce the words to supernatural assistance — the "gift and power of God."[2] Predictably, most secular observers reject these claims. Some postulate Joseph Smith received outside help from collaborators or a preexisting manuscript. Others hypothesize that mental illness, trances, or hallucinogens enhanced his cognitive abilities. Most of those theories have been debunked, and skeptics have moved on to other speculations.[3]

Currently, the most popular secular theory describes how Joseph Smith's natural cognitive abilities were sufficient to accomplish the task.[4] As Eran Shalev observes: "Historians have long denied Smith the image of the ignorant rural boy who could not have acquired all the

119–213. See also Larry E. Morris, *A Documentary History of the Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019); Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011).

2. *The Joseph Smith Papers: Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 89; *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (1 March 1842): 707, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/NCMP1820-1846/id/9801/rec/2; "History, 1838–1856 Vol. A–1 [23 December 1805–30 August 1834]," p. 31, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-a-1-23-december-1805-30-august-1834/37.

3. See Brian C. Hales, "Naturalistic Explanations of the Origin of the Book of Mormon: A Longitudinal Study," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (2019), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol58/iss3/5/; Brian C. Hales, "Automatic Writing and the Book of Mormon: An Update," *Dialogue* 52, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 1–35, dialoguejournal.com/articles/automatic-writing-and-the-book-of-mormon-an-update/; Brian C. Hales, "Visions, Mushrooms, Fungi, Cacti, and Toads: Joseph Smith's Reported Use of Entheogens," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 38 (2020), journal.interpreterfoundation.org/visions-mushrooms-fungi-cacti-and-toads-joseph-smiths-reported-use-of-entheogens/.

4. See William L. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020). For counterpoint, see Brian C. Hales, "Joseph Smith as a Book of Mormon Storyteller," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 46 (2021), journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smith-as-a-book-of-mormon-storyteller/; Brian C. Hales, "Theories and Assumptions: A Review of William L. Davis's *Visions in a Seer Stone*," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 39 (2020), journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theories-and-assumptions-a-review-of-william-l-daviss-visions-in-a-seer-stone/; Gardner, *Gift and Power*, 320; "Richard Bushman — Reddit — Ask Me Anything," MormonThink, 16 December 2013, mormonthink.com/glossary/richard-bushman-ama.htm; and Robert A. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance," *Dialogue* 35, no. 3 (2002): 102, dialoguejournal.com/articles/joseph-smith-the-book-of-mormon-and-the-american-renaissance/.

material that he would have needed to write *The Book of Mormon*."[5] Similarly, after mentioning "some 6,000-plus titles" that scrutinize the "empirical claims" of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, Richard S. Van Wagoner declared: "The main conclusion of this particular growing body of work is that there is no element in the Book of Mormon that cannot be explained naturalistically."[6] Fawn Brodie agreed: "The source of his [Joseph Smith's] power lay not in his doctrine but in his person, and the rare quality of his genius was due not to his reason but to his imagination. He was a mythmaker of prodigious talent." And "His talent, it is true, was not exceptional, for his book lacked subtlety, wit, and style. He was chiefly a tale-teller and preacher."[7] In his biography, *The Making of a Prophet*, Dan Vogel consistently reflects this idea, explaining that the process "was a more-or-less stream-of-consciousness composition," dictated "mostly impromptu and without the aid of notes."[8]

Beyond the supernatural versus natural debate, it is undeniable that Joseph Smith exhibited proficient literary skills every day for almost three months in 1829 as he spoke the first draft of the Book of Mormon.[9] Curiously, among the thousands of research studies exploring the book and its origin, none have attempted to identify those skills generally or specifically. Admittedly, such an approach assumes a naturalistic origin for the word-stream, which Latter-day Saint researchers

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5. Eran Shalev, "An American Book of Chronicles," in *Americanist Approaches to the The Book of Mormon*, ed. Elizabeth Fenton and Jared Hickman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 148.

6. Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Natural Born Seer: Joseph Smith American Prophet 1805–1830* (Salt Lake City: Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2016), 383–84.

7. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), ix, 62.

8. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), xix, 120.

9. The awkward wording scattered throughout the 1830 Book of Mormon may create the illusion that the text is not highly refined. Yet, multiple observations demonstrate that Joseph Smith's first oral draft met virtually all of the goals of content editing, redrafting, and revising: intertwining 77 storylines with impressive continuity, mentioning 147 geographical locations over 670 times with only two mistakes, referencing 207 individuals 3,780 times, apparently misappropriating one or two names (Benjamin to Mosiah) but maintaining strict character identification accuracy, flawlessly portraying two genealogies extended beyond twenty generations, inserting hundreds of timestamps that comply precisely with textual chronological requirements, and interweaving hundreds of heading outlines, editorial promises, and internal prophecies that are precisely fulfilled later in the narrative.

might consider faithless. However, secular scholars have similarly avoided this inquiry (with one exception discussed below). The question, "What literary skills did Joseph Smith exhibit while dictating the Book of Mormon?" remains unanswered and largely unaddressed.

Recently, Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots have boasted their ability to answer complex questions using English language interfaces. Part of the new usefulness of AI is advancements in natural language processing that enable it to understand and reply in everyday speech. These advancements, coupled with its training on large amounts of data, sometimes measured in petabytes, from text-based sources like websites, books, articles, and other publications, allow AI modules to respond to questions regarding the skills a person would need to accomplish a specific task. Recognizing this, I explored what AI might contribute to the question regarding the skills Joseph Smith manifested while dictating the Book of Mormon.

The remainder of this article is divided into four parts. Part One identifies eleven chatbots and informally tests them for accuracy. Part Two discusses the challenges of formulating the proper question (regarding the skills needed to dictate the Book of Mormon) to pose to the AI modules. Part Three compiles fifteen of the most popular skills mentioned by the chatbots and tests their validity. Part Four then brings us back to Joseph Smith to identify which skills the historical record shows he possessed in 1829 and whether they correlate to AI predictions.

Part One: Choosing and Testing Artificial Intelligence Chatbots

This study queried only free-of-charge and free-trial AI modules. Included were Microsoft Bree, ChatGPT 4o, Anthropic's Claude, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini, LDSBot, iAsk.AI, Meta AI, Inflection's PI, Quora's POE, and Perplexity.[10] Some of these chatbots are derivatives of others. For example, LDSbot is based on an older version of ChatGPT, which means that posing questions to LDSbot might be considered more as a second query to ChatGPT. However, all the chatbots were accessed through distinct online portals, supporting

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10. Microsoft Bree is an app with ten free inquiries and the required paid subscription. URLs for other chatbots on 19 July 2024 include: chatgpt.com; claude.ai/chat; copilot.microsoft.com; gemini.google.com/app; ldsbot.com/; iask.ai; meta.ai; pi.ai/discover; poe.com/Assistant; and perplexity.ai.

differences in their use of the underlying AI programming. Regardless, their answers consistently reflected beneficial diversity and were included.

In all, nine different questions were posed to the eleven chatbots. This essay only mentions five of them. However, all of the 99 raw responses can be downloaded at ldsperspectives.com/wp-content /uploads/2024/09/11-AI-Chatbot-Answers-to-9-Questions-BofM.pdf.

Informally testing chatbot accuracy

For the past few years, Artificial Intelligence has received increasing media coverage. Reports outlining AI chatbots' remarkable abilities are usually accompanied by accounts of occasional errors and even extreme blunders. Aware of these reports, I sought to first test their responses informally by asking them four questions:

1. What skills would I need to safely anesthetize a person for surgery?
2. What skills would I need to be a chef in a restaurant?
3. What skills would I need to fix an automobile?
4. What skills would I need to play for the Los Angeles Lakers?

As a retired anesthesiologist, I felt competent evaluating the accuracy of the answers to the first question. Having less expertise with the remaining three questions, I could only detect obvious inaccuracies. My review of all 44 responses (one from each chatbot for each of the four questions) failed to identify even one egregious error. Regarding anesthesia, the chatbots provided consistently correct information; the responses to the other three questions seemed equally defensible. In summary, all of the answers offered by the individual chatbots seemed accurate to me.

After this initial exercise, I concluded that AI responses can provide a starting point for thinking about task-related skills. The possibility of error requires that their predictions be treated as suggestions, like brainstorming-level ideas to address a problem. But their responses are far from useless. The *potential* for inaccuracy is real but should not be interpreted as *expected* inaccuracy. Expert validation or invalidation is always required, but the initial responses can provide a valuable jumpstart to answering the questions at hand.

Part Two: Formulating the Proper
Book of Mormon Author-Skills Question

A key to successful AI chatbot interactions is providing accurate details in the wording of the original questions. As with all computer programming, the AI output depends on the input. The saying, "garbage in, garbage out" consistently applies. Consequently, multiple variables, including the syntax and composition of the question, may significantly influence the answers. The AI module's previous learning input is also vital.

Accordingly, formulating a question with the proper phrasing and content is integral to obtaining useful data from the chatbots. Initially, I wanted to ask: "What skills would I need to dictate in three months a 269,320-word book with the literary characteristics of the Book of Mormon?"[11] However, since no scholar has published a comprehensive list of Book of Mormon literary characteristics, AI chatbots would have to guess at that part of the question. Possibly, they could glean a characteristic or two from available published writings. Yet, borrowing an entire list is currently impossible. Neither would AI algorithms automatically perform their own deep textual analyses of the Book of Mormon in order to generate a list of literary characteristics. They are not programmed to function that way.

Identifying Book of Mormon literary characteristics

To improve the chances of receiving useable responses, specific Book of Mormon literary characteristics were identified so they could be included in the question posed to the AI chatbots:

- 269,320 words.[12]
- Unique words: about 5,600.

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11. See also Nick Sales, "I Asked Chat GPT To Write a Book Like the Book of Mormon," *Faith in Focus* (YouTube Channel), youtube.com/watch?v=620 bnHwc7mQ.

12. On 18 February 2019, Book of Mormon scholar Stanford Carmack wrote: "The 1830 first edition has 6,852 full stops in 269,318 words." And later: "if we count the first instance of 'me thought' as two words (18, 41; the second is spelled as one word) and the second instance of 'for/asmuch' as two words (111, 32; no hyphen; the first is spelled as one word), then we get 269,320 words." Stanford Carmack, comments on Brian C. Hales, "Curiously Unique: Joseph Smith as Author of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019), journal.interpreterfoundation .org/comments-page/?id=21768.

- College-level vocabulary words: dozens.[13]
- Reading level: eighth grade.[14]
- Storylines: 77 major plus more minor.[15]
- Characters: 207.[16]
- Socio-geographic groups: 44.[17]
- Geographical locations in the "promised land" world: 147.[18]
- Number of separate travels between specific locations: over 400.[19]
- Original proper nouns: 170.[20]

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13. See Roger Terry, "The Book of Mormon Translation Puzzle," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 23, no. 1 (2014): 182, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms /vol23/iss1/10/.

14. See the results from submitting the Book of Mormon to reading difficulty algorithms in Brian C. Hales, "Curiously Unique: Joseph Smith as Author of the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 31 (2019): 153–56, 174–77.

15. See James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called The Book of Mormon* (Springville, UT: CFI, 2004), 10–15.

16. See Robert J. Matthews, *Who's Who in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967). This number does not include names found in chapters resembling King James Bible content including those mentioned in Isaiah.

17. The groups identified include: People of Akish, Amlicites (people of), Amalickiahites (people of), Amalekites, Ammonihahites (people of Ammonihah), Amulonites (people of Amulon), Anti-Nephi-Lehies (people of) or Ammonites (people of Ammon), people of Antiparah, people of Antipus, Christians or people of Jesus or people of Christ, people of the church, people of Coriantumr, Gadianton robbers (band of, robbers of), Gentiles, people of Gideon, people of Hagoth, Ishmaelites, people of the House of Israel, Jaredites (people of Jared), Jews, Jacobites, Josephites, King-men, Lamanites, people of (King) Lamoni, people of Lehi, people of Lehi, Lemuelites, people of liberty, people of (King) Limhi, people of Morianton, people of Moroni, people of Moronihah, people of Mosiah, Mulek (descendants), people of Nephihah, Nephites (people of Nephi), people of King Noah, order of the Nehors, people of Shiz, people of Zarahemla, people of Zeniff, people of Zemnarihah, and Zoramites.

18. See John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1990), 217–326; Roger R. Keller, "Land and Lands," in *Book of Mormon Authors: Their Words and Messages* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University [BYU], 1996), 103–50, rsc.byu.edu /book-mormon-authors-their-words-messages/land-lands.

19. Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 217–326.

20. Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Book of Mormon Names," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:186, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection /EoM/id/5545/rec/1. Hoskisson lists 188 names as "unique." A more conservative tally is 170.

- Distinct titles for the primary protagonist: over 100.[21]
- Chronological systems: 3.[22]
- Flashbacks and embedded storylines: 5.[23]
- Genealogies greater than twenty generations: 2.[24]
- Ecological references: 2,065.[25]
- Sermons: 63 comprising over 87,000 words.[26]
- Sermon topics: over 80.[27]
- Parallel poetic devices like chiasmus: over 400.[28]

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21. Susan Easton Black documents 101 different titles for Jesus Christ in *400 Questions and Answers about the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 34–38; Earl M. Wunderli tabulates 138 different names in *An Imperfect Book: What the Book of Mormon Tells Us About Itself* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2013), 329–33.

22. See Scripture Central Staff, "Sequential Consistency," Evidence #239, 20 September 2021, evidencecentral.org/evidence/sequential-consistency.

23. Flashbacks to the primary storyline in Mosiah and Alma include Zeniff, Noah, Abinadi, and Limhi (Mosiah 9–22), Alma (the elder) and the Waters of Mormon (Mosiah 23–24), Ammon and King Lamoni (Alma 17–20), Aaron and Muloki (Alma 21), and Helaman and his two thousand warriors (Alma 56–58).

24. See Scripture Central Staff, "Book of Mormon Evidence: Ether's Genealogy," Evidence #0096, 19 September 2020, scripturecentral.org/evidence/book-of-mormon-evidence-ether-s-genealogy.

25. R. Kent Crookston, *Book of Mormon Ecology: What the Text Reveals about the Land and Lives of the Record Keepers* (Provo, UT: Village Lane Publishing, 2020), 254.

26. Duke, *Literary Masterpiece,* 20–30. Duke's compilation included four "Biblical prophecies" with verbiage closely resembling chapters from the King James Bible, which have not been included here.

27. Topics include Abrahamic covenant, adversity, agency, apostasy, atonement of Jesus Christ, baptism, Bible, charity, chastity, Christ's ministry, condescension of God, conversion, covenant, creation, death, devil-satan, discipleship, eternal life, faith, fasting, foreordination, forgiveness, gathering, gifts of the spirit, God the Father, Godhead, gospel of Jesus Christ, grace, gratitude, happiness, heaven, hell, high priest, Holy Ghost, honesty, hope, humility, Jesus Christ, Israel, judgment, justice, justification, law of Moses, light of Christ, love, mercy, miracles, missionary work, obedience, opposition, ordinances, other sheep, parenting, peace, persecution, personal revelation, plan of salvation, prayer, premortality, priestcraft, priesthood, prophets, purpose of life, repentance, restoration of the gospel, resurrection, revelation, sacrament, sacrifice, salvation, second coming, service, sin, spirit world, spiritual gifts, temptation, ten commandments, trials, Urim and Thummim, warfare, works, and Zion.

28. See John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982), 33–52, rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-authorship/chiasmus-book-mormon; Donald W. Parry, *Poetic Parallels in the Book of*

- Bible intertextuality: at least 650 allusions and similar phraseology.[29]
- Subjects discussed with precision include biblical law, olive tree husbandry, and warfare tactics.[30]

An additional characteristic is that no full-sentence edits have been applied to the original dictation.[31]

Combining literary characteristics into the form of a question

Most of these Book of Mormon literary features are objective qualities found in the text of the book, although subjectivity is evident in some. These can be compiled into one question:

Mormon: The Complete Text Reformatted (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2007), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/61/.

29. Royal Skousen, "The Language of the Original Text of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 57, no. 3 (2018), 104–5, scholarsarchive. byu.edu/byusq/vol57/iss3/5/; Royal Skousen, *The History of the Text of the Book of Mormon, Part Four: The Nature of the Original Language* (Provo, UT: FARMS and BYU Studies, 2018), 865 et seq., 952–53; Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), xiii–xviii; and Nicholas Frederick, "Episode 92: Intertextuality in the Book of Mormon with Nick Frederick," LDS Perspectives Podcast, 22 August 2018, transcript p. 15, ldsperspectives.com /2018/08/22/intertextuality-book-mormon/, (transcript link on webpage).

30. See Wilford M. Hess, "Botanical Comparisons in the Allegory of the Olive Tree," in *The Book of Mormon: Jacob through Words of Mormon, To Learn with Joy*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1990), 87–102, rsc.byu.edu/book-mormon-jacob -through-words-mormon-learn-joy/botanical-comparisons-allegory-olive -tree; John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/49/; William J. Hamblin, "The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 495–96, scholars archive.byu.edu/mi/98/.

31. My research shows that 4,066 editorial changes have been made between the 1830 and 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon. These affect 4,721 words (1.8% of the total of 269,320 words). Of these, 91.7% (3,727 of 4,066) involve one word, with 46% (1,715 of 3,727) involving spelling alone. Two-word changes involve 5.6% of the total (227 of 4,066), and 1.0% or 40 of 4,066 com- prise three-word changes. The last 1.8% of the Book of Mormon emendations (72 of 4,066) involve four to thirteen words. Forty-eight of these are deletions of "it came to pass," leaving 24 phrases that have been deleted, added, substi- tuted, or moved. None involve a full sentence. See Brian C. Hales, "Authoring the Book of Mormon: Investigating Joseph Smith's 1829 Skills," (forthcoming).

> What skills would be needed to mentally create and dictate in three months without written notes a book with 269,320 words using about 5,600 unique words, including dozens of college-level vocabulary words, and reads at an eighth-grade level with the following characteristics: 77 storylines; 207 named characters; 44 socio-geographic groups; over 100 geographical locations in the imagined world; over 400 geographic movements by characters; over 170 original English proper nouns; over 100 distinct titles for the primary protagonist; three chronological systems; several lengthy flashbacks; two genealogies with greater than twenty generations; 100s of ecological references; at least 63 religious speeches comprising over 87,000 words discussing over 80 Christian themes; hundreds of parallel poetic devices like chiasmus; hundreds of intertextual King James Bible phrases; and discussing with precision subjects like biblical law, olive tree husbandry, and warfare tactics. Also, no full-sentence edits are afterward permitted.

This question was presented verbatim to the eleven AI chatbots through their the interfaces on their respective websites.[32]

Part Three: Compiling and Testing the Most Commonly Predicted Skills

Ten of the chatbots seemed oblivious to the possibility that the question above described an actual historical event. Only LDSBot connected it to Joseph Smith, reporting: "The skills required to accomplish something like that would be pretty remarkable. From a Latter-day Saint perspective, Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon is often seen as a remarkable accomplishment, attributed to divine inspiration."[33] Of the eleven responses, ChatGPT 4o provided the most comprehensive reply:

> Creating and dictating such a complex book in three months, without written notes and without permitting full-sentence edits afterward, is a monumental task. It requires a combination of advanced skills and capabilities in various areas. Here's a detailed list of the skills and attributes needed:

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32. The Microsoft Bree app allows ten unpaid responses and then requires a subscription.
33. Response from LDSBot posed to ldsbot.com/, 9 August 2024.

Cognitive and Memory Skills
- **Exceptional Memory:** Ability to retain vast amounts of detailed information about storylines, characters, locations, and other elements without written notes.
- **Mental Organization:** Organize the entire book structure, including intricate details, in your mind.

Advanced Language and Vocabulary Skills
- **Vocabulary Management:** Use a diverse vocabulary of around 5,600 unique words, including advanced terms, while maintaining an eighth-grade reading level.
- **Language Simplification:** Simplify complex ideas and vocabulary to make them accessible to an eighth-grade audience.
- **Precision and Clarity:** Communicate ideas clearly and precisely, avoiding ambiguity.

Dictation Proficiency
- **Clear Articulation:** Speak clearly to ensure accurate transcription by dictation software.
- **Consistent Pacing:** Maintain a steady pace that balances speed with clarity and accuracy.
- **Natural Speech Patterns:** Dictate in a way that sounds natural and engaging, avoiding overly complex sentence structures.

Creative and Analytical Skills
- **Creative Visualization:** Vividly imagine scenes, characters, and settings to describe them in detail.
- **Complex Plotting:** Weave multiple storylines, character arcs, and flashbacks seamlessly into the narrative.
- **Analytical Thinking:** Ensure logical consistency and coherence in the story, characters' actions, and plot developments.

Planning and Structuring
- **Comprehensive Mental Outline:** Develop a detailed mental outline of the book's structure before starting.
- **Story Structure Management:** Ensure the book has a coherent structure with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- **Chronological Management:** Handle multiple chronological systems and flashbacks with precision.

Concentration and Focus
- **Sustained Focu**s: Maintain deep concentration for extended periods to dictate large volumes of text.
- **Distraction Management:** Minimize distractions and maintain mental clarity during dictation sessions.

Self-Discipline and Motivation
- **Daily Commitment:** Dictate consistently every day to meet the word count goal (approximately 2,993 words per day).
- **Resilience:** Stay motivated and push through any mental fatigue or writer's block.

Time and Stress Management
- **Effective Scheduling:** Allocate specific times each day for dictation to ensure consistent progress.
- **Stress Reduction Techniques:** Use techniques to manage stress and prevent burnout.

Technological Proficiency
- **Dictation Software:** Use high-quality dictation software that can accurately transcribe your speech.
- **Error Handling:** Quickly correct minor transcription errors during the process to maintain the flow of dictation.

Specific Subject Matter Expertise
- **Biblical Knowledge:** Deep understanding of biblical law, themes, and the ability to integrate King James Bible phrases.
- **Specialized Knowledge:** Expertise in subjects like olive tree husbandry and warfare tactics.
- **Ecological Understanding:** Familiarity with a wide range of ecological references relevant to the story.

Literary and Rhetorical Skills
- **Poetic Devices:** Ability to use parallel poetic devices like chiasmus effectively.
- **Intertextuality:** Integrate intertextual references to the King James Bible seamlessly.
- **Speech Writing:** Craft compelling religious speeches that discuss Christian themes with depth and clarity.

Organizational and Tracking Skills
- **Character Management:** Keep track of 207 named characters, their movements, and interactions.
- **Geographic Awareness:** Manage over 100 geographical locations and over 400 geographic movements by characters.
- **Proper Nouns and Titles:** Remember and consistently use over 170 original English proper nouns and 100 distinct titles for the primary protagonist.
- **Genealogical Tracking:** Maintain accuracy in genealogies spanning over twenty generations.

Religious and Thematic Integration
- **Thematic Consistency:** Integrate and discuss over 80 Christian themes with precision.
- **Religious Discourse:** Compose and deliver lengthy religious speeches that are coherent and impactful.

Environmental and Support Systems
- **Conducive Environment:** Create a quiet, distraction-free environment for dictation.
- **Support Network:** Engage with a support network for encouragement and feedback, if possible.

Problem-Solving Skills
- **On-the-Fly Editing:** Make immediate minor adjustments to ensure the overall quality and coherence of the dictated content.
- **Adaptability:** Quickly adapt to any issues that arise during the dictation process.

By mastering these skills and maintaining a disciplined approach, you can tackle the daunting task of creating and dictating such a complex and detailed book within the specified constraints.

Summarizing chatbot responses

Table 1 summarizes the fifteen most commonly mentioned skills across the chatbot responses.[34]

Table 1. Summary of the most popular skills identified by eleven AI chatbots.

AI-identified skills needed to dictate a book with characteristics of the Book of Mormon	Bree AI	Chat GPT 4o	Claude	Copilot	Gemini	LDSBot	iAsk.AI	Meta AI	Perplexity	PI	POE
Attention to detail	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	
Biblical and religious knowledge	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Creativity-imagination	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X
Discipline-stamina	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Editing		X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
Memory	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mental focus	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Organizational		X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X
Religious composition	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X
Research-specialized knowledge	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Speaking — dictation	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X
Storytelling	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Time management	X	X				X	X		X		X
Vocabulary-language	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
World-building	X		X	X				X	X		X

34. See PDF available at ldsperspectives.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/11-AI-Chatbot-Answers-to-9-Questions-BofM.pdf.

The eleven chatbots identified dozens of additional major and minor skills, but the chart is representative of those most commonly reported.

Validating the list of skills—appealing to author-experts

As discussed above, AI predictions require independent validation from experts for their results to be considered correct. While less scientific, I corroborated the results through four exercises. For the first, I reasoned that such endorsement could be made by authors who have written long, complex books, even if not dictated. Over the past two decades, Three of the books I have authored have more than 200,000 words: *Modern Polygamy and Mormon Fundamentalism: The Generations after the Manifesto* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2006) with 240,864 words; *Joseph Smith's Polygamy: History and Theology,* 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2013), volume one with 274,402 words and volume two with 235,367 words. After carefully reviewing the list of fifteen skills and having read the Book of Mormon dozens of times, I concluded that all are needed, and the list is reasonably accurate.

William L. Davis's Visions in a Seer Stone *validates most of the list*

A second validation comes unintentionally from William L. Davis's 2020 book, *Visions in a Seer Stone: Joseph Smith and the Making of the Book of Mormon*. Davis is the only author to approach Joseph Smith's production of the Book of Mormon by looking at it through the lens of skill sets. He also considers the Book of Mormon to be "the result of Smith's individual creative efforts," the result of Joseph's natural intellect and abilities.[35] Despite flaws in documentation and logic, *Visions in a Seer Stone* represents a milestone in Book of Mormon studies and hopefully a watershed moment in naturalistic treatments of its origin (see Appendix B).

The skills-based approach in *Visions in a Seer Stone* focuses primarily on one specific oratorical ability. Called "laying down heads,"[36] Davis portrays how the ability enabled Joseph Smith to dictate the Book of Mormon.[37] "Laying down heads" is composed of three skills linked together. First is the ability to compose summary headings (of the material to be recited) and to organize them into *outlines*; sec-

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35. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, xi; see also x.
36. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 16.
37. Davis mentions "laying down heads" over 100 times in *Visions in a Seer Stone,* Kindle Edition; word search for "laying down heads."

ond is to *memorize and recall* the outlines in real time; and third is to *speak extemporaneously* to fill in the outlines with pre-memorized or spontaneously-invented narrative details. The word "outline" is mentioned over 300 times in *Visions in a Seer Stone* and is a primary theme in the theory Davis presents.[38]

Throughout its pages, *Visions in a Seer Stone* depicts Joseph Smith exhibiting more than the three skills needed to lay down heads. Most of these abilities are not directly discussed or highlighted. Instead, they show up when needed, generally without exploring how he might have learned or acquired them. In all, twelve of the fifteen skills identified by AI chatbots are attributed by Davis to Joseph (directly or indirectly) as he dictates the Book of Mormon, as demonstrated in table 2.

Table 2. AI-identified skills and the page numbers in *Visions in a Seer Stone* where it is asserted that Joseph demonstrated those skills.

AI-identified skills needed to dictate a book with characteristics of the Book of Mormon	Was the skill attributed to Joseph Smith in *Visions in a Seer Stone*?	Page numbers depicting Joseph Smith needing or demonstrating the skill
Attention to detail	Yes	105, 122, 146, 150, 155, 156, etc.
Bible and theology	Yes	3, 7, 108, 110, 113, 125, 178, etc.
Creativity-imagination	Yes	xi, 58, 61, 90, 108, 158, 162, etc.
Discipline-stamina	Not mentioned	-
Editing	Yes	2, 135, 143, 163, 190, 224, etc.
Memory	Yes	23, 24, 34, 46, 51, 80, 138, 143, etc.
Mental focus	Not mentioned	-
Organizational	Yes	16, 17, 80, 86, 105, 121, 131, 140, etc.
Religious composition	Yes	8, 17, 22, 25, 81, 90, 117, 120, etc.
Research-specialized knowledge	Yes	44, 48, 57, 173, etc.
Speaking — dictation	Yes	4, 36–38, 49, 105, 110–16, etc.
Storytelling	Yes	vii, 3, 4, 87, 127, 158, 168, 193, etc.
Time management	Yes	49, 58, 61, 163–65, 190, 192, etc.
Vocabulary-language	Yes	x, 113, 133, 163, 92, 168, 175, etc.
World-building	Not mentioned	-

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38. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone,* Kindle Edition; word search for "outline."

By describing Joseph Smith employing twelve of these fifteen skills during the dictation, *Visions in a Seer Stone* indirectly corroborates the necessity of the AI-generated skills list.

Additional validation of the fifteen skills

A third validation is implied by consulting books written by experts on composition, creative writing, and oratory.[39] These fifteen skills are repeatedly discussed in the respective books and referenced in their indexes, which illustrate that the list seems highly defensible from a literary standpoint.

The final observation involves how critics of any specific skill would need to successfully argue it was nonessential. They would need to explain how a long, complex, and literarily refined first draft narrative could be mentally created and dictated by an author lacking that particular skill. It appears such reasoning would be unsuccessful since all the skills can be rationally defended as at least contributory. Alternatively, skeptics could provide a reliable historical account describing how an author has duplicated this process using their intellect but without employing that particular skill.[40]

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39. See references to these skills in the indexes of book like Lynn Quitman Troyka, *Simon & Shuster: Handbook for Writers* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2017); Jean Wyrick, *Steps to Writing Well*, 13th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2017); Albert Zuckerman, *Writing the Blockbuster Novel*, updated ed. (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2016); Betty Mattix Dietsch, *Reasoning & Writing Well: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook*, 5th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2009); Randall McCutcheon, James Schaffer, and Joseph R. Wycoff, *Speech: Communication Matters,* 2nd ed. (Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill, 2001); Amy Einsohn and Marilyn Schwartz, *The Copyeditor's Handbook: A Guide for Book Publishing and Corporate Communications*, 4th ed. (Berkely: University of California Press, 2019); *Writer's Choice, Grade 12, Student Edition*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008); John J. Ruszkiewicz, Christy E. Friend, Daniel E. Seward, Maxine Hairston, *The Scott, Foresman Handbook for Writers*, 9th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2010); Alfred Rosa and Paul Eschholz, *Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition,* 14th ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2020).

40. One of the nine questions asked of the chatbots was: "Has any highly skilled author ever dictated a refined and complex book of over 200,000 words in under three months?" Seven of the chatbots reported it had never been done. Four claimed it had. However, the authors they identified did not routinely dictate all of their works and their first drafts went through extensive editing before publication. See data (PDF download): ldsperspectives.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/11-AI-Chatbot-Answers-to-9-Questions-BofM.pdf.

Part Four: Comparing to Joseph Smith's Documentable Skills

The final portion of this paper compares the fifteen AI chatbot skills to Joseph Smith's 1829 documentable skills.[41] Due to limitations in the documentary record, some skills are evaluated together in the sections below.

Attention to detail, discipline and stamina, mental focus, organizational, and time management skills

Unfortunately, most accounts describing Joseph Smith before age twenty-three do not directly address his attention to detail, personal discipline and stamina, mental focusing capability, organizing ability, or time management skills. However, historical references to his general ambition and resourcefulness in the 1820s reveal a common theme of alleged laziness.[42] Neighbor Christopher M. Stafford related in 1885: "Jo was the laziest one of the family."[43] Pomeroy Tucker wrote:

> The larger proportion of the time of the Smiths, however, was spent in hunting and fishing, trapping muskrats ("mushrats" was the word they used), digging out woodchucks from their holes, and idly lounging around the stores and shops in the village. Joseph generally took the leading direction of the rural enterprises mentioned, instead of going to school like other boys — though he was seldom known personally to participate in the practical *work* involved in these or any other pursuits.[44]

41. See Brian C. Hales, "Authoring the Book of Mormon: Investigating Joseph Smith's 1829 Skills," (forthcoming). See also Brian C. Hales, "Joseph Smith's Education and Intellect as Described in Documentary Sources," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 59 (2023): 1–32, journal.interpreterfoundation.org/joseph-smiths-education-and-intellect-as-described-in-documentary-sources/.

42. See Asa B. Searles in John Dixon, *History of Lee County* (Chicago: H. H. Hill and Co., 1882), 308, 397; John W. Barber, John Warner, Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of the State of New York* (1841), 580–81, archive.org/details/historicalcollec00barbny/page/580/mode/2up; Stephen S. Harding, quoted in Thomas Gregg, *The Prophet of Palmyra* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 36, 39, 54, archive.org/details/GR_1666/mode/2up.

43. Christopher M. Stafford, quoted in Arthur B. Deming, *Naked Truths About Mormonism, also a journal for important newly apprehended truths* (April 1888): 1.

44. Pomeroy Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism* (New York: D.

Another writer, Orsamus Turner, also used the terms "lounging" and "idle" to describe Joseph, but he admitted, "Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspirations."[45] Neighbor Orlando Saunders remembered Joseph "was a good worker."[46]

In 1831, James Gordon Bennett toured upstate New York with Martin Van Buren (the future United States President) and Nathaniel S. Benton.[47] Bennett did not personally meet Joseph Smith during that visit but soon after, published the rumors he heard:

> Young Joe, who afterwards figured so largely in the Mormon religion, was at that period a careless, indolent, idle, and shift-less fellow. He hung round the villages and strolled round the taverns without any end or aim — without any positive defect or as little merit in his character. He was rather a stout able bodied fellow, and might have made a good living in such a country as this where any one who is willing to work, can soon get on in the world. He was however, the son of a speculative Yankee pedlar, and was brought up to live by his wits.[48]

Bennett, then a freelance newspaper writer, had little to gain by misrepresenting the gossip he encountered; neither was he apparently worried about its accuracy. Whether true or not, this glimpse into the general tales describing Joseph Smith in 1831 supports that he was not then known as energetic or enterprising. If he had been training in the years before 1829 to acquire the skills needed to dictate a long book, he evidently was successful at keeping his efforts secret from the general neighborhood.

Bible and theology skills

Conflicting historical accounts from Joseph Smith's contemporaries describe his early familiarity with the Bible. John Stafford, who grew

Appleton and Co., 1867), 14–15, archive.org/details/originriseprogre00tuck /page/n21/mode/2up.

45. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852), 213–14, archive.org/details/bub_gb_TUX698v8KGkC/page/213/mode/2up.

46. William H. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," *The Saints' Herald* 28, no. 11 (1 June 1881): 165.

47. Dan Vogel, comp., ed., *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 3:281–82.

48. "James Gordon Bennett Account," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:284–85. See also pp. 281–82 regarding Bennett's journal entries.

up with the Smiths in Manchester, recalled that the Smith family "studied the Bible" in their home school.[49] Similarly, an unidentified Western New Yorker told William Kelley in 1881: "they [the Smith family] had school at their house and studied their Bible."[50]

In 1882, Stephen S. Harding wrote to Thomas Gregg saying Joseph "was familiar with the Scriptures, and never tired of reading the miracles in the Old Testament and in the New."[51] A. W. Cowles recalled: "He [Joseph Smith] read the Bible, especially its historical narratives and prophecies.[52] Pomeroy Tucker provided this description:

> As he [Joseph Smith] further advanced in reading and knowledge, he assumed a spiritual or religious turn of mind, and frequently perused the Bible, becoming quite familiar with portions thereof, both of the Old and New Testaments; selected texts from which he quoted and discussed with great assurance when in the presence of his superstitious acquaintances. The Prophecies and Revelations were his special forte. His interpretations of scriptural passages were always original and unique, and his deductions and conclusions often disgustingly blasphemous, according to the common apprehensions of Christian people.[53]

Tucker added: "The final conclusion announced by him [Joseph Smith] was, that . . . the Bible [was] a fable."[54] In contrast, Joseph taught that the Bible was "the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (Article of Faith 8). So, it is unclear whether Tucker based his report upon firsthand recollections or possibly derived it from the Book of

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49. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," 167.

50. "Kelley Notes," in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:87; spelling and punctuation normalized. Vogel explains on p. 83: "On 6 March 1881 William H. and Edmund L. Kelley visited Palmyra and Manchester, New York, and interviewed Thomas H. Taylor, William and Mary Bryant, Danford Booth, Ezra Pierce, Orin Reed, Orlando Saunders, Abel Chase, John H. Gilbert, and Hiram Jackway. They also interviewed John Stafford in Rochester. Notes of these interviews . . . [are] apparently in the handwriting of William Kelley." His notes reflect information he received from them.

51. Gregg, *Prophet of Palmyra*, 54, archive.org/details/GR_1666/mode/2up.

52. A. W. Cowles, "The Mormons: Pen and Pencil Sketches Illustrating their Early History," *Moore's Rural New Yorker* (2 January 1869): 13.

53. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 17, archive.org/details/originriseprogre 00tuck/page/n23/mode/2up

54. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress,* 18, archive.org/details/originriseprogre 00tuck/page/n25/mode/2up.

Mormon's criticism of the Bible.[55] In contrast, Orson Pratt, who first met Joseph Smith in 1830, summarized:

> This young man was not learned, like those educated in colleges and theological institutions; indeed, he was a farmer's boy, unacquainted with the arguments, and the tenets, and the creeds, and the institutions of religion that existed around him . . . a young man not versed in the Scriptures any more than most of the common lads of that age. And we all know that there are but a very few among farmers that have the opportunity of informing their minds at so early a period — at the age of twenty-one, in regard to the doctrines and prophecies contained in the Scripture.[56]

Additional accounts from eyewitnesses corroborate Joseph Smith's limited biblical knowledge. Lucy Mack Smith quoted a youthful Joseph saying: "I can take my Bible, and go into the woods and learn more in two hours than you can learn at meetings in two years, if you should go all the time."[57] But she also noted that by 1823 Joseph had "never read the Bible through in his life."[58] Similarly, David Whitmer remembered that "Smith was ignorant of the Bible" at the time of translation of the Book of Mormon.[59] Emma Smith told Edmund C. Briggs in 1856 that Joseph "had such a limited knowledge of history at that time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls."[60] Years later, in 1877, Emma repeated the story to Nels Madsen and Parley P. Pratt Jr.: "He had not read the Bible enough to know that there were walls around Jerusalem."[61]

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55. See 1 Nephi 13:28–29; 2 Nephi 29:6.

56. *Masterful Discourses and Writing of Orson Pratt,* comp., N. B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: N.B. Lundwall, 1962), 395, archive.org/details/masterful discour00prat/page/394/mode/2up.

57. Lucy Mack Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Lamoni, IA: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1912), 101, archive.org/details/biographical sket00smit_0/page/100/mode/2up.

58. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 92, archive.org/details/biographicalsket00 smit_0/page/100/mode/2up.

59. Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 211.

60. Edmund C. Briggs, "A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856," *Journal of History* 9, no. 4 (October 1916): 454, bhroberts.org/records/0rGxg3-kFtGKj/edmund_c _briggs_recalls_emma_hale_smith_saying_js_was_ignorant_of_jerusalem _having_walls.

61. Nels Madsen, "Visit to Mrs. Emma Smith Bidemon," transcript pp. 1–2,

Joseph's not knowing of the walls around Jerusalem is often repeated as evidence of his ignorance of the Bible. However, he described several times how he "searched the scriptures" as a youth.[62] He remembered how, after reading James 1:5, he retired to a grove of trees to pray vocally in 1820. Accounts depicting Joseph Smith as ignorant of the Bible are undoubtedly in error. However, it is also clear his familiarity was limited, and few verses, if any, had been committed to memory by 1829.

Composition, editing, vocabulary, and language

Unfortunately, Joseph Smith wrote very little before dictating the Book of Mormon; if he if he had written even moderately, virtually none of his handwritten communications survived. This reality makes evaluating his composition, editing, and language skills by reviewing his 1820s literary works impossible.

Nonetheless, multiple eyewitnesses left relevant historical observations. In an 1842 account, Orson Hyde observed: "He could read tolerably well, but he wrote very poorly, and had but little knowledge of rhetoric."[63] David Whitmer described Joseph Smith as "quite illiterate, knew nothing of grammar or composition."[64] He was "little versed in Biblical lore, was ofttimes compelled to spell the words out, not knowing the correct pronunciation."[65] In 1884, Martin Harris recalled: "I was Joseph Smith's scribe, and wrote for him a great deal; for he was such a poor writer, and could not even draw up a note of hand as his education was so limited."[66] John H. Gilbert recalled the Book of Mormon

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Church History Catalog, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/0d0d3c56-50a1-4071-90f0-2bb08b753a7f/0/0.

62. See "History, circa Summer 1832," p. 1, Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1.

63. Orson Hyde, *Ein Ruf aus der Wüste, eine Stimme aus dem Schoose der Erde* (Frankfurt, DE: Im Selbstverlage des Verfassers, 1842), 13, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/orson-hyde-ein-ruf-aus-der-wste-1842-extract/2, Google translation.

64. David Whitmer Interview "The Last Man. Of the Men Who Attested to the Truth of the `Book of Mormon,' David Whitmer Only Is Left. In the Sunset of Life He Bases His Hopes of Heaven on the Records of the Lost Tribe. And Solemnly Reiterates All that He Has Ever Said Regarding Them," *Chicago Times*, 17 October 1881; reprinted in *The Saints' Herald* 28, no. 22 (15 November 1881): 347.

65. David Whitmer, "The Book of Mormon," *Chicago Tribune,* 17 December 1885, 3.

66. Harris was interviewed by Simon Smith on 5 July 1875. He recounted

manuscript "was not punctuated at all," declaring: "They [Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery] did not know anything about punctuation."[67]

In an 1875 account, Joseph's brother, William, specifically addressed Joseph's writing abilities in the 1820s:

> It is to be remembered that Joseph Smith was only 17 years of age [in 1823] when he first first began his profesional career in the Minestrey. That he was illitterate to some extent is admitted but that he was enterly [entirely] unlettered is a mistake. In Sintax, orthography Mathamatics grammar geography with other studies in the Common Schools of his day he was no novis and for writing he wrote a plain intelegable hand.[68]

William refers to Joseph as "no novis," regarding syntax (sentence formation), orthography (spelling), mathematics, grammar, and geography. Yet he also states that Joseph was then "illiterate to some extent," suggesting his progress was limited. Orson Pratt agreed:

> His education was limited to a slight acquaintance with two or three of the common branches of learning. He could read without much difficulty, and write a very imperfect hand; and had a very limited understanding of the ground rules of arithmetic. These were his highest and only attainments; while the rest of those branches, so universally taught in the common schools throughout the United States, were entirely unknown to him.[69]

Memory and recall

Assessing Joseph Smith's 1829 memory and recall ability is difficult due to a lack of specific evidence. No eyewitness statements describe him possessing extraordinary recall or a photographic or

the interview on 30 April 1884 in Simon Smith, letter to editors, *The Saints' Herald* 31, no. 21 (24 May 1884): 324, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets /bbece5be-28e4-48b5-a0d8-a90d1c197ed4/0/3.

67. Kelley, "The Hill Cumorah, and the Book of Mormon," 165.

68. William Smith, "Notes Written on 'Chamber's Life of Joseph Smith,'" (1875), 27, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7ce89849-3bb8-4ca4-9627-3c283 aec0bae/0/32.

69. Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions in relation to the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh, 1840), 3, at Joseph Smith Papers, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/appendix -orson-pratt-an-interesting-account-of-several-remarkable-visions-1840/3.

eidetic memory. Likewise, through thousands of pages of their publications, biographers Fawn Brodie, Richard Bushman, George Q. Cannon, G. Homer Durham, Donna Hill, Preston Nibley, Lucy Mack Smith, Edward W. Tullidge, Dan Vogel, and John A. Widtsoe describe many of his personal qualities.[70] Yet, none portray him as possessing a phenomenal memory. Equally, none of the transcripts published in Dan Vogel's five-volume series *Early Mormon Documents* describe Joseph Smith as having an extraordinary ability to memorize and remember. Neither did Joseph Smith's brother-in-law, Michael Morse, describe him as capable of producing the Book of Mormon using his memory and other cognitive skills.[71]

Joseph Smith's attempt to learn Hebrew in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1836 demonstrated his memory and recall skills seven years after dictating the Book of Mormon. Professors Elvira V. Masoura and Susan E. Gathercole observe: "Research has revealed a close link between language acquisition and the capacity of the verbal component of working memory."[72] After attending the Hebrew classes taught by Joshua Seixas, Joseph learned to translate Hebrew into English satisfactorily but without becoming proficient.[73] In contrast, Orson Pratt mastered

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70. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*; Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); George Q. Cannon, *The Life of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), archive.org/details/lifeofjosephsmit01cann/mode/2up; G. Homer Durham, *Joseph Smith Prophet—Statesman* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1944); Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977); Preston Nibley, *Joseph Smith the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News Press, 1944); Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith,* archive.org /details/biographicalsket00smit_0/page/100/mode/2up; Edward W. Tullidge, *Life of Joseph the Prophet* (New York: Tullidge & Crandall, 1878), archive.org /details/lifeofjosephprop00byu2tull/page/n9/mode/2up; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004); John A. Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist: A Contribution to Mormon Philosophy* (Salt Lake City: General Board Young Men's MIA, 1908), archive.org/details /josephsmithassci00widt/page/n3/mode/2up.

71. William W. Blair, letter to editors, *The Saints' Herald* 26, no. 12 (15 June 1879): 190–91.

72. Elvira V. Masoura and Susan E. Gathercole, "Phonological Short-term Memory and Foreign Language Learning," *International Journal of Psychology* 34, no. 5–6 (1999): 383, researchgate.net/publication/255671234_Phono logical_Short-term_Memory_and_Foreign_Language_Learning.

73. "Certificate from Joshua Seixas, 30 March 1836," in *The Joseph Smith Papers: Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2017), 216, josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary /certificate-from-joshua-seixas-30-march-1836/1.

the language enough to be certified as a teacher.[74] Pratt bested him on that occasion, indicating an upward limit to Joseph Smith's memory capacity. Overall, his youthful memory abilities seemed at least average, but not prodigious.

Research and specialized knowledge

Most available data support the idea that Joseph Smith possessed a limited understanding of the world beyond his immediate surroundings in 1829. He may have read his father's newspapers, which would have expanded his views. Orsamus Turner remembered: "Once a week he [Joseph Jr.] would stroll into the office of the old *Palmyra Register*, for his father's paper."[75] The *Palmyra Register* was published between 1817 and 1821, indicating that Joseph would have been between eleven and fourteen. William E. McLellin described Joseph Smith's knowledge of science in 1834:

> I was personally and intimately acquainted with Joseph Smith <the man who read off the> the translation of the book, for five years near the beginning of his ministry. He attended my High school during - <the winter> of 1834. He attended my school and learned science all winter. . . . When I took him into my school, he was without scientific knowledge or attainments.[76]

After hearing Joseph Smith speak in 1844, Josiah Quincy reported that Smith's "comments, though rambling and disconnected, were delivered with the fluency and fervor of a camp-meeting orator." And, "he talked as from a strong mind utterly unenlightened by the teachings of history."[77]

During the months and years immediately after the 1830 publication of the Book of Mormon, critics sought plausible explanations for the source of its words to counter Joseph Smith's claims of divine

74. Elden J. Watson, comp., *The Orson Pratt Journals* (Salt Lake City: Elden Jay Watson, 1975), 75. See also "History of Orson Pratt," *LDS Millennial Star* 27 (11 February 1865): 87, contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/MStar/id /8054.

75. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 214; italics added, archive.org /details/bub_gb_TUX698v8KGkC/page/213/mode/2up.

76. Mitchell K. Schaefer, ed., *Willliam E. McLellin's Lost Manuscript* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2012), 175–76.

77. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals*, (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 391, 399, archive.org/details/figuresofpastfro02quin /page/n3/mode/2up.

inspiration. However, among their accusations, no acquaintances remembered him writing or hiding a manuscript. None of the local storekeepers described him (or an accomplice) buying ink and paper in quantities not inconsistent with letter-writing or penmanship practice. No recollections from his contemporaries mention him visiting libraries or bookstores to read, borrow, or buy their books. Even ambiguous recollections of 1820–1829 might have been spun into evidence of Joseph's fabrication of the words. Yet, little or no supportive historical data has been found.[78] In addition, other documentable activities likely competed for his time and resources, like farming, clearing land, treasure-seeking expeditions, maple sugar production, schooling, and day-labor employment.[79]

Creativity, imagination, and world-building skills

Among the skills needed to replicate Joseph Smith's dictation of the Book of Mormon, AI chatbots repeatedly refer to creativity, imagination, and world-building. In her recollections, Lucy Mack Smith, Joseph's mother, recounted the family recitals that he delivered around 1823 when he was in his seventeenth year:

> During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them.[80]

If Joseph's stories originated in his imagination, this recollection could be evidence of his creativity and an effort to hone rhetorical

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78. See D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View,* rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998), 181–93. Quinn mentions availability of "sophisticated" books in Palmyra, but presents no evidence that Joseph visited any bookstores or libraries to borrow, study, or read their books.

79. See Donald L. Enders, "The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee," in *Joseph Smith: The Prophet, The Man*, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, BYU, 1993), 213–25, rsc.byu.edu/joseph-smith-prophet-man/joseph-smith-sr-family-farmers -genesee.

80. Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 92, archive.org/details/biographicalsket00 smit_0/page/92/mode/2up.

skills as a youth. That scenario does not fit recollections from Joseph's younger brother, William, who witnessed those recitals:

> Knowing that he [Joseph Smith] was very young, that he had not enjoyed the advantages of a common education; and knowing too, his whole character and disposition, they were convinced that he was totally incapable of arising before his aged parents, his brothers and sisters, and so solemnly giving utterance to anything but the truth.[81]

William also described how Joseph was incapable of authoring a "historey of a once enlightned people, their rise their progress, their origin, and their final over throw that once in habited this american Continent."[82]

Lucy Mack Smith also reported that the details he related in those family gatherings, including references to "the ancient inhabitants of this continent," originated with the angel Moroni.[83] Concerning Lucy's account, H. Donl Peterson notes: "From Mother Smith's report we can see that the visions that accompanied Moroni's instructions were vivid."[84] It is also possible that Lucy's memory faltered when recalling some details. Jeff Lindsay points out that the Book of Mormon

> has no descriptions of people riding animals in over 500 pages that include several major migrations and 100 distinct wars. It provides no notably detailed descriptions of clothing (other than armor) and no detailed descriptions of the structure of later buildings. The most detail we get involves descriptions of fortifications with palisaded walls and ditches.[85]

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81. *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: Herald Steam Book and Job Office, 1883), 9–10, archive.org/details/williamsmithonmo00smit.

82. Smith, "Notes," 12–13, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/7ce89849 -3bb8-4ca4-9627-3c283aec0bae/0/14.

83. H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni: Joseph Smith's Teacher," in *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saint Church History: New York*, ed. Larry C. Porter, Milton V. Backman Jr., and Susan Easton Black (Provo, UT: Department of Church History and Doctrine, BYU, 1992), 56.

84. Peterson adds: "Joseph's visiting faculty of celestial tutors numbered about sixty, with Moroni spending considerably more time than any other messenger carefully honing his maturing student," *Regional Studies*, 68.

85. Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph the Amusing Teller of Tall Tales: Lucy Mack Smith's Puzzling Statement in Perspective," *Arise from the Dust*, (blog), 26 April 2018, arisefromthedust.com/joseph-amusing-teller-of-tall-tales/.

Speaking, dictation, and storytelling

The historical record describes Joseph Smith's involvement in a few oratory activities n the 1820s. In 1893, Daniel Hendrix recalled that Joseph Smith "was a good talker and would have made a fine stump-speaker if he had had the training."[86] According to several sources, Smith attended Methodist meetings but never joined the church. Pomeroy Tucker wrote:

> Protracted revival meetings were customary in some of the churches, and Smith frequented those of different denomi-nations, sometimes professing to participate in their devo-tional exercises. At one time he joined the probationary class of the Methodist church in Palmyra, and made some active demonstrations of engagedness, though his assumed con-victions were insufficiently grounded or abiding to carry him along to the saving point of conversion, and he soon with-drew from the class. [87]

In 1851, Orsamus Turner recalled that Joseph Smith "was a very passable exhorter" at Methodist camp gatherings.[88] Joseph's informal involvement with the Methodists may have lasted only a few months, from the fall of 1824 to the winter of 1825.[89] As a nonmember partici-pant who spoke impromptu during Methodist meetings, he would have received little or no formal rhetorical training compared to that avail-able to exhorters with complete membership.[90] Turner also reported:

> Joseph had a little ambition; and some very laudable aspi-rations; the mother's intellect occasionally shone out in him

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86. Daniel Hendrix in "Origin of Mormonism. Joe Smith and His Early Habits. How He Found the Golden Plates. A Contemporary of the Prophet Relates Some Interesting Facts," *San Francisco Chronicle* (14 May 1893), 12.

87. Tucker, *Origin, Rise, and Progress*, 17–18, archive.org/details/originriseprogre 00tuck/page/n25/mode/2up.

88. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 214, archive.org/details/bub _gb_TUX698v8KGkC/page/213/mode/2up.

89. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5:396.

90. In contrast, William Davis wrote that Joseph Smith "for a time, trained in extemporaneous and semi-extemporaneous techniques of Methodist exhort-ers." See "Performing Revelation: Joseph Smith's Oral Performance of *The Book of Mormon*," alternately titled "Performing Revelation: Joseph Smith and the Creation of *The Book of Mormon*" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2016), 23, escholarship.org/uc/item/86h814zv. Davis provides no documentation for this claim, and none has been identified in the historical record.

feebly, especially when he used to help us solve some por-
tentous questions of moral or political ethics, in our juvenile
debating club, which we moved down to the old red school
house on Durfee street.[91]

Here, Turner described Smith as a capable debater but attributes
the skill to his "mother's intellect" when it "shone out in him feebly."
Overall, he seemed less impressed with the youthful Joseph: "He was
lounging, idle; (not to say vicious,) and possessed of *less than ordinary
intellect*. The author's own recollections of him are distinct ones."[92]

Richard Bushman observed that Joseph Smith "is not known
to have preached a single sermon before organizing the church in
1830."[93] He had no reputation as a preacher. James Gordon Bennett
recorded that Joseph Smith's father was a "grand story teller," but
wrote nothing similar concerning the younger Joseph.[94]

Other references to Joseph Smith's oratory skills before and after
the Book of Mormon dictation are varied. Jared Carter remembered
him in the early 1830s as "not naturally talented for a speaker."[95] An
unidentified critic from Henrietta, New York, described him in 1834:
"His manner is ungainly, his diction coarse, and his delivery slow and
labored. There is nothing in his appearance or language to excite
much attention."[96]

91. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 214, archive.org/details/bub_gb
   _TUX698v8KGkC/page/213/mode/2up?view=theater.

92. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement,* 213; italics added, archive
   .org/details/bub_gb_TUX698v8KGkC/page/213/mode/2up?view=theater.
   Repeating Turner's report of Joseph Smith's debating and exhorting skills—
   without contextualizing his "less than ordinary intellect" as described by
   Turner—is a tactic sometimes employed by naturalists defending the theory
   that Joseph Smith possessed the intellectual ability to create the Book of
   Mormon. See Wunderli, *An Imperfect Book*, 50–56; *Dale Morgan on Early
   Mormonism: Correspondence & A New History,* ed. John Phillip Walker (Salt
   Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 314; Davis, in *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 3,
   33, 36–39, 42, 44, 47, 49, 58, 66, 78, 82, 105, 111, 114, 120; Davis, "Performing
   Revelation," v, 105–6, 121–22, 125, 128, 129n291, 132–33, 135, 149–50, 175, 178,
   191, etc, escholarship.org/uc/item/86h814zv.

93. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling,* xx.

94. Leonard J. Arrington, "James Gordon Bennett's 1831 Report on 'The
   Mormonites,'" *BYU Studies* 10, no. 3 (July 1970): 355, 357, scholarsarchive.byu
   .edu/byusq/vol10/iss3/9/.

95. "Carter, Jared, 1801–1855," journal typescript, Church History Catalog,
   catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/994fb2fe-d8b1-4156-a452
   -3a8fecacf538/1/12.

96. M.L.F., "Interview with the Mormon Prophet," *Evangelical Magazine and*

Peter H. Burnett, who had served as Joseph Smith's lawyer in Missouri and later governor of California, recalled:

> His appearance was not prepossessing, and his conversational powers were but ordinary. You could see at a glance that his education was very limited. He was an awkward but vehement speaker. In conversation he was slow, and used too many words to express his ideas, and would not generally go directly to a point.[97]

In 1886, Sarah Pratt recalled:

> Joseph did not talk much in society, his talk was not very fluent. He used to make a remark now and then, letting the others talk. Whenever he spoke of Church affairs, his talk grew intelligent. He had no great choice of words, and generally expressed his ideas in a very humble, common-place way. . . . Joseph was no orator. He said what he wanted to say in a very blundering sort of way.[98]

This review of Joseph Smith's documentable skills should not be interpreted as evidence he was dumb or cognitively challenged. Joseph was intelligent, but this data show that in 1829, he was not proficient in any of the aptitudes AI chatbots predicted would be needed to dictate the Book of Mormon using only an author's intellect.

AI fail: Inability to document Joseph Smith possessed the fifteen skills

Although the fifteen skills identified by AI appear to be reasonable and valid, historical accounts indicate Joseph Smith did not possess them in 1829. These observations indicate that Artificial Intelligence has failed in this application. However, the reasons for failure are not empirically obvious.

Gospel Advocate 5, no. 14 (5 April 1834): 107, catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org /assets/d81ebbca-ecd9-47d5-9890-ec8ac165357b/0/2.

97. Peter H. Burnett, *Recollections and Opinions of an Old Pioneer* (New York: D. Appleton, 1880), 66, archive.org/details/recollectionsopi00burnrich/page /n3/mode/2up.

98. Wilhelm Wyl, *Mormon Portraits or the Truth About the Mormon Leaders* (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing, 1886), 26, 27, archive.org/details/joseph smithproph01wyme.

Identifying Two Historically Defensible Lists of Joseph Smith's 1829 Skills

Two contradictory but historically defensible lists of Joseph Smith's 1829 skills emerge from the discussion above.

Joseph Smith dictated the words therefore he possessed the skills

Multiple eyewitness accounts describe how Joseph Smith spoke all 269,320 words of the 1830 Book of Mormon. Employing this fact and the Latin phrase *res ipsa loquitur*, which means: "The thing speaks for itself," logical reasoning supports *he did it; therefore, he had the skills.*

Fawn Brodie employed this approach: "There is no doubt . . . that Joseph had developed a remarkable facility for dictation. The speed was not 'far beyond his natural ability;' it was evidence of his ability."[99] Robert M. Bowman Jr. agreed: "As a matter of historical inquiry, the proper question to ask is not how Joseph Smith could have written the Book of Mormon but rather whether the evidence shows that he did so."[100] This approach circumvents the need to dive further into the historical record, substituting deductive argument for documentation. Accordingly, answering "What skills were needed?" simultaneously answers "What skills did Joseph Smith possess in 1829?"

Eyewitness statements declare Joseph Smith did not have the skills

A second list of Joseph Smith's 1829 skills is derived from eyewitness accounts describing his capabilities at the time of the dictation of the Book of Mormon. As shown above, this approach fails to historically document any of the skills selected by the AI modules to any significant degree. This database of eyewitness statements also acknowledges that no one who knew Joseph personally attributed the words of the Book of Mormon to his abilities or intellect then or anytime thereafter.

Dealing with the two contradictory approaches

Latter-day Saint believers have capitalized on the disconnect between

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99. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 62.
100. Robert M. Bowman Jr., "The Sermon at the Temple in the Book of Mormon: A Critical Examination of Its Authenticity through a Comparison with the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew," (PhD diss., South African Theological Seminary, 2014), 476, archive.org/details/BowmanRFinal DissertationApril2015_201706/page/n475/mode/2up.

the predicted essential skills and the documentable ones. Hugh B. Brown included these observations in a talk titled "The Profile of a Prophet" in 1955.[101] Hugh Nibley expanded on the idea with his 1960s "Book of Mormon Challenge."[102] Other authors have followed this lead in book-length manuscripts.[103] However, these discussions included highly devotional content and were easily dismissed by secular scholars examining the origin of the Book of Mormon.

As the dialogue moves forward regarding Joseph Smith's ability to dictate all 269,320 words, contextualizing it to the skills needed or exhibited, provides essential nuance. If accurate, the fifteen skills identified by the AI chatbots could be helpful. They more precisely define the discrepancies between the skills he should have possessed versus those skills eyewitnesses attributed to him.

Summary

AI chatbots can produce data as a starting point for task-skills inquiries, but experts must validate such results. When AI chatbots are asked specifically about the skills needed to dictate a book like the Book of Mormon, a generalized list of fifteen skills is generated. According to several criteria, that list accurately predicts the composition and oratory skills an author would need. However, the historical record fails to corroborate that Joseph Smith possessed them in 1829, suggesting a need for additional research. As Robert N. Hullinger observes: "Even if one believes that Joseph Smith was at best a scoundrel, one still must account for the Book of Mormon."[104] Possibly, the greatest usefulness of the AI responses is that they provide a new tool to assist investigators in evaluating how Joseph Smith produced all the words.

101. Hugh B. Brown, "The Profile of a Prophet," (Devotional talk, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT, 4 October 1955), speeches.byu.edu/talks/hugh-b-brown/profile-of-a-prophet/.

102. Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 221–22, scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/88/.

103. See also Randall A. Wright, *The Book of Mormon Miracle* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2014), 188–89; Grace Guymon Jones, *The Challenge the Book of Mormon Makes to the World* (Provo, UT: Rock Canyon Publishing, 2018).

104. Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), ix.

Appendix A:
College-Level Vocabulary Words Missing from the Bible

The Book of Mormon includes dozens of vocabulary words not found in the Bible but rated at a college-level difficulty by modern standards.[105] Table 3 lists sophisticated words used in the Book of Mormon but absent from the KJV Bible and seldom found in other popular books of the day.[106] Word difficulty is scaled from 1 (low) to 10 (high). The abbreviation "n/a" signifies no data available.

Table 3. Comparison of occurrences of sophisticated words used in the Book of Mormon, Bible, and selected 1820s books.

Words found in the Book of Mormon	Difficulty	Book of Mormon	KJV Bible	English Reader	A History of the United States of America	Gospel Sonnets or Spiritual Songs	The Late War	First Book of Napoleon	Arabian Nights Entertainments, vol. 1
arraigned	10	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
derangement	10	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
ignominious	10	1	0	1	0	0	0	3	2
scantiness	10	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
breastwork	10	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
priestcraft	10	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

105. Level of difficulty is determined by the types of academic examinations that employ those words. Easy words are found in tests administered to elementary school students, while more difficult words are found in college-level exams in the early twenty-first century. "n/a" is "not available," apparently due to the lack of usage in the examinations used to construct the scale. See "Language Scoring" (website), twinword.com/api/language-scoring.php. This chart assumes these words would have also been difficult in the 1820s.

106. See Lindley Murray, *The English Reader: Or, Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected from the Best Writers* (1824); Charles A. Goodrich, *History of the United States of America* (1823), archive.org/details/historyofuniteds00in good/page/n5/mode/2up; Ralph Erskine, *Gospel Sonnets or Spiritual Songs*, (1750); Gilbert J. Hunt, *The Late War, between the United States and Great Britain, from June 1812 to February 1815*, (1816), archive.org/details/latewar betweenun00inhunt/page/n5/mode/2up; Modeste Gruau, *The First Book of Napoleon, the Tyrant of the Earth* (1809); and *Arabian Nights Entertainments: Consisting of One Thousand and One Stories* (1792).

Words found in the Book of Mormon	Difficulty	Book of Mormon	KJV Bible	English Reader	A History of the United States of America	Gospel Sonnets or Spiritual Songs	The Late War	First Book of Napoleon	Arabian Nights Entertainments, vol. 1
abridgment	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
cimeter [scimitar]	10	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
indolent	9	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
insensibility	9	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
interposition	9	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
typifying	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
condescension	9	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
stratagem	9	7	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
depravity	8	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
discernible	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
enumerated	8	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
frenzied	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
impenetrable	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
iniquitous	8	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
repugnant	8	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
serviceable	8	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
abhorrence	8	2	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
nothingness	8	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
flaxen	7	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
embassy	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
probationary	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
hinderment	n/a	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
overbearance	n/a	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
consignation	n/a	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
unwearyingness	n/a	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

An additional sixty-nine words occur only once in the Book of Mormon and are not found in the KJV Bible (with vocabulary difficulty score in parentheses):[107]

107. These data were compiled by the author using Microsoft Word and

> aggravating (7), appellation (9), apprised (9), astonishing (6), awkwardness (9), baseness (10), beggars (8), beguile (10), bliss (6), brazen (8), captivation (9), censured (8), coarseness (10), confounding (8), consecrating (9), consign (9), deformed (7), disowned (9), dispelled (8), dissenter (10), divulge (7), dormant (6), droop (9), earnestness (6), enact (6), engulf (9), exert (6), exhausting (7), exult (9), faction (6), frailties (9), garb (7), glimmer (7), havoc (6), incomprehensible (7), indolence (10), inexpressible (10), infancy (6), infirm (8), infused (8), insensibility (9), insurrections (8), intrigues (7), lonesome (8), massacre (6), misunderstand (8), monarchy (6), observance (6), perversion (8), pester (9), plunged (6), precarious (7), recollection (7), redoubled (9), relinquished (7), reluctance (6), reunite (8), scoffing (9), slackened (10), sprouted (8), stupor (9), subsistence (6), trifle (8), triumphant (7), tyrant (7), undaunted (9), unsteadiness (10), victorious (7), and wilfulness (10).

Similarly, the twenty-seven words below are used only once in the Book of Mormon and three times or less in the 783,137-word KJV Bible (vocabulary difficulty in parentheses):

> austere (8), avenging (8), babblings (8), banished (8), barbarous (9), barbarous (9), canker (9), conquerors (9), daunted (10), extolled (9), fain (9), foretold (9), garners (7), gnash (10), grudgingly (9), moisture (4), nurture (6), overshadow (9), overspread (10), orphans (6), providence (7), solemnity (9), tarrying (9), thicket (9), weariness (8), zealously (8), and wrestle (7).

Words appearing even once require the same vocabulary training and skill as words used dozens of times. "Both practice and repeated encounters with words seem to be important for the acquisition of vocabulary," observe Elfrieda H. Hiebert and Michael L. Kamil in their book, *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*.[108]

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transcripts of the 1611 King James Bible and the 1830 Book of Mormon.

108. Elfrieda H. Hiebert, and Michael L. Kamil, eds., *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary: Bringing Research to Practice* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005), 9.

Appendix B:
Documentary Evidence and *Visions in a Seer Stone*

In his book *Visions in a Seer Stone*, William L. Davis introduces a theory that attributes remarkable sermon-composition skills to Joseph Smith in 1829. It describes those abilities as emanating from his natural intellect but does not entirely discount the possibility of divine assistance.[109]

Joseph Smith's alleged 1829 skill of "laying down heads"

William L. Davis asserts that in 1829 Joseph Smith possessed a highly developed skill of "laying down heads," or the ability to create, memorize, recall, and spontaneously expand (vocally) outlines of the content to be communicated. However, the supportive evidence for this claim is sparse and problematic.

The primary corroborating documentation presented in *Visions in a Seer Stone* is Joseph's 1832 *History*.[110] Davis reports: "Smith's 1832 history begins with an opening paragraph that provides the reader with a sketch outline of the historical events that Smith wished to emphasize in his narrative."[111] Davis further explains:

> Smith's method of using a preliminary outline, or, as more commonly termed, a "skeleton" of "heads" (an outline formed with key summarizing phrases) to organize and arrange his 1832 historical narrative, was a standard technique of composition in the early nineteenth century. The explicit use of the skeletal sketch in the opening of the history, marking each stage in the sequence of the narrative with a summarizing phrase, provides one of several expressions of the method commonly known as "laying down heads."[112]

Davis refers to the 1832 *History* more than forty times in *Visions in a Seer Stone* as evidence of Joseph Smith's proficiency in laying down heads.[113] Additionally, the 1832 *History* is portrayed as an example of the technique and a manifestation of Joseph's "personal method and style of composition."[114]

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109. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, xi; see also x.
110. See "History, circa Summer 1832."
111. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 14.
112. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 16.
113. See search results for "1832 history" in Kindle version.
114. Davis, *Visions in a Seer Stone*, 89, 14.

Examining Joseph Smith's 1832 *History*

Nine subjects or "headings" can be identified in the 173-word opening paragraph of Joseph Smith's 1832 *History* (in bold brackets):

> **[1]** A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr. **[2]** an account of his marvilous experience and **[3]** of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Ch[r]ist the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also **[4]** an account of the rise of the church of Christ in the eve of time according as the Lord brought forth and established by his hand **[5]** \<firstly\> he receiving the testamony from on high **[6]** seccondly the ministering of Angels **[7]** thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of — Aangels to adminster the letter of the Law \<Gospel — \> \< — the Law and commandments as they were given unto him — \> and in \<the\> ordinencs, **[8]** forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinence from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and **[9]** demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God confered upon him and the continuation of the blessings of God to him &c — —

However, the nine outlined topics do not correlate well with the subjects covered in the ensuing 1,882-word account (see figure 1).

For the "laid down" headings in the opening skeleton outline to be helpful to the speaker, they must be appropriately sequenced and sufficiently specific to guide the ensuing speech. This does not occur in this example. For example, several headings are not covered: "an account of the rise of the church . . .," "thirdly . . .," "fourthly . . .," and "demonstrations of . . . ." Some of these hanging headings could result from Joseph Smith's inability to complete the manuscript as he originally intended.

However, a more significant disconnect becomes apparent as multiple topics in the remaining narrative are not predicted in the first paragraph, including his Bible learning and religious struggles, the aftermath of the First Vision and his transgressions, his marriage and move to Harmony, Martin Harris's journey to New York, or Oliver Cowdery's arrival. These mini-storylines comprise nearly half the remaining account but are not forecasted in any specific way in the outline headings. The order of presentation also reflects inconsistencies.
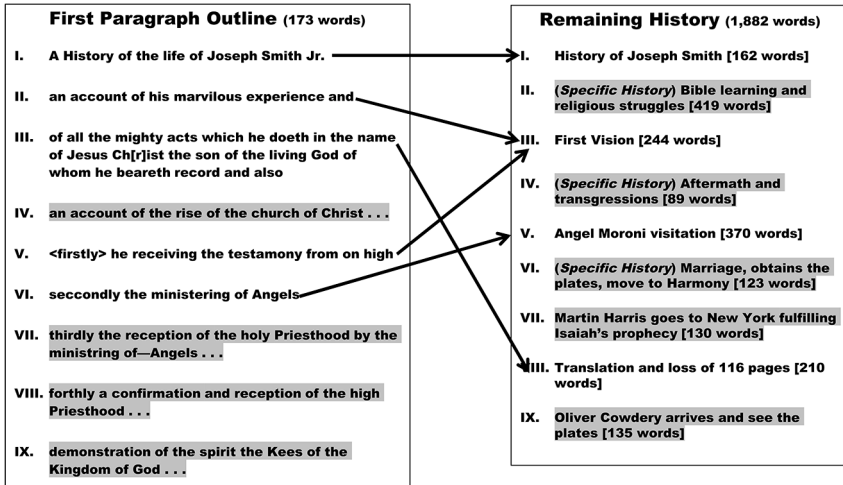
First Paragraph Outline (173 words)

I. A History of the life of Joseph Smith Jr.

II. an account of his marvilous experience and

III. of all the mighty acts which he doeth in the name of Jesus Ch[r]ist the son of the living God of whom he beareth record and also

IV. an account of the rise of the church of Christ . . .

V. <firstly> he receiving the testamony from on high

VI. secondly the ministering of Angels

VII. thirdly the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring of—Angels . . .

VIII. forthly a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood . . .

IX. demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God . . .

Remaining History (1,882 words)

I. History of Joseph Smith [162 words]

II. (*Specific History*) Bible learning and religious struggles [419 words]

III. First Vision [244 words]

IV. (*Specific History*) Aftermath and transgressions [89 words]

V. Angel Moroni visitation [370 words]

VI. (*Specific History*) Marriage, obtains the plates, move to Harmony [123 words]

VII. Martin Harris goes to New York fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy [130 words]

VIII. Translation and loss of 116 pages [210 words]

IX. Oliver Cowdery arrives and see the plates [135 words]

Figure 1. Diagram showing that the first paragraph outline (left) contains nine headings that correspond poorly to the headings of topics discussed in the remaining 1,882-word history (right). Items in gray are not addressed.

Handwriting analysis shows that Joseph Smith wrote 1,013 words of the 1832 *History* and dictated the other 1,043 words to his scribe, Frederick G. Williams, who wrote most of the first paragraph.[115] The divergences between the outline paragraph and the ensuing content raise the question of why Joseph didn't simply follow the written outline by referring back to it. It appears that strictly following the original outline was not his intent.

These observations demonstrate that Joseph Smith's 1832 *History* does not corroborate Davis's assertions that Joseph possessed expertise in laying down heads in 1829. Instead, the opening paragraph and subsequent narration contradict that conclusion, supporting he was either unfamiliar or inexperienced with that preaching style.

Supplementary evidence from late problematic sources

To bolster his theory, Davis also discusses two Nauvoo-era discourses. The importance of the fourteen and fifteen-year gaps between the evidence and the event it seeks to corroborate is minimized (see figure 2). Additional problems stem from the fact that the discourses were not recorded verbatim. Hence, the notes recorded reflect the style of the listener in each instance.

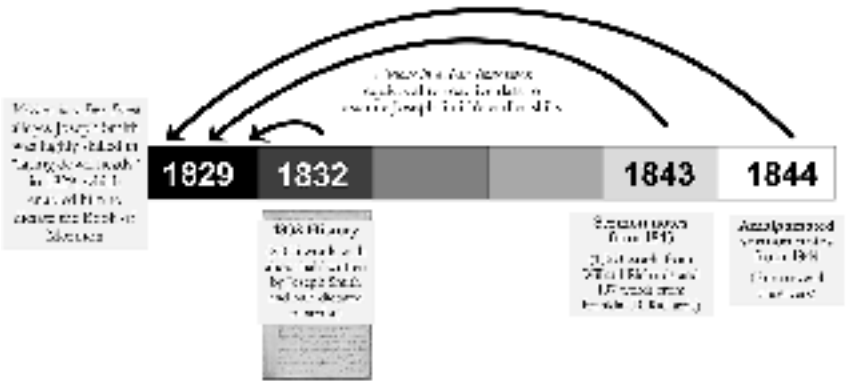115. See handwriting, "History, circa Summer 1832."

Figure 2. *Visions in a Seer Stone* seeks to document Joseph Smith's 1829 skills from a very small sampling, all from years afterward. Multiple additional problems can be identified (see discussion in text).

Visions in a Seer Stone draws detailed conclusions regarding Joseph Smith's 1829 skills from very small narrative samples. It also assumes that the skills existed retroactively and fails to address the possibility that they may have been learned after 1829.

It could be argued that the notes from listeners to Joseph Smith's discourses over a decade after dictating the Book of Mormon have minimal direct application to his 1829 abilities. He demonstrably learned new skills in the interim.

Undocumented skills in *Visions in a Seer Stone*

As noted in this paper, *Visions in a Seer Stone* also portrays Joseph Smith exhibiting many of the other skills listed by the AI chatbots. However, Davis presents little or no historical documentation to verify Joseph acquired them before 1829. Instead, by assuming the Book of Mormon flowed from Joseph Smith's intellect, Davis repeatedly uses its content as evidence of Smith's 1829 skillset. The resulting conclusions are based on circular logic and are less convincing. A second approach assumes that Joseph picked up skills through environmental influences without documenting that he did. Table 4 summarizes the assumed skills.

Table 4. Sources of evidence presented in *Visions in a Seer Stone* to document Joseph Smith's assumed 1829 skills. High correlation is ++++.

AI-generated list of skills needed to dictate a book with character-istics of the Book of Mormon	Source of evidence cited in *Visions in a Seer Stone*		
	Assumptions based on Book of Mormon text	**Assumptions based on environmental influences**	**Historical accounts of Joseph Smith's 1829 abilities**
Attention to detail	++++	++	+
Bible and theology	++	++++	+
Creativity-imagination	++++	+	-
Discipline-stamina	-	-	-
Editing	+++	+	-
Memory	++++	++++	-
Mental focus	-	+	-
Organizational	++++	++	-
Religious composition	+++	++++	-
Research-specialized knowledge	+++	+++	-
Speaking — dictation	+++	++++	+
Storytelling	+++	++++	+
Time management	-	-	-
Vocabulary-language	++++	++++	-
World-building	-	-	-

Summary

Visions in a Seer Stone is a significant contribution to Book of Mormon studies because it approaches Joseph Smith's 1829 dictation in terms of the literary skills he would have needed (and ostensibly possessed) to accomplish it. However, the primary evidence presented to support the skill discussed — "laying down heads" — is his 1832 *History*. It contains multiple disconnects between the headings outlined in the opening paragraph and those discussed in the remaining narrative. At best, it might represent a beginner's attempt to harness the power of laying down heads, but shows little or no proficiency with the process. *Visions in a Seer Stone* also quotes observations on discourses delivered more than a decade afterward. But such provide minimal additional persuasiveness.

Lastly, *Visions in a Seer Stone* portrays Joseph Smith exhibiting at least twelve AI-generated skills during the dictation, even though it does not openly acknowledge that such skills would have been needed. In so doing, it tacitly validates those chatbot responses. Most of these additional abilities are not corroborated historically. Instead, assumptions based on textual observations and environmental influences consistently substitute for documented evidence of Joseph Smith's 1829 skills.

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