What about Carl?

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Adapted from the work of Jason Gulya

Procedure:

Step 1: Get students in pairs or groups and give them the following scenario

> You're taking a class. You're about to complete a group assignment, with 3-4 other people. You get assigned Carl. Now, here's some information about Carl.
>
> Carl is a genius. But he's a specific kind of genius. He spends almost all of his time on the internet, looking for information. Now, he doesn't read much. But he does remember a lot of it, because he has a photographic memory.
>
> When you ask him questions, there's a 50% chance he'll regurgitate something he saw online. Sometimes, it's Wikipedia. Sometimes, it's another source. Sometimes, he's not even sure. It just comes to him. Now, about 25% of the time, he says something absolutely brilliant. He combines different sets of information or he says something that really resonates with you. The other 25% of the time? He makes it up. He puts in random pieces of information, or he says something that's inaccurate. Or he says something that shows his bias.
>
> One good thing about Carl: whatever you'll ask him to do, he'll do.
>
> Oh, and remember: Carl is kind of a weird dude. Every time you ask him a question, he has a strange tick. In order to think, Carl needs to flick a light switch and dump out a bottle of water. The ritual helps him concentrate.

Step 2: Ask students to think and write on their own: What are you going to do with Carl? What will you talk about and do in your group based on what you know about Carl?

Step 3: Ask students to share their answers with their partner/others in their group. Talk about what answers are similar and what are different and discuss their rationale. Ask them to come up with a consensus answer.

Step 4: Ask pairs/groups to report out and record important parts of those answers on the board/screen. Discuss implications - walk students through the connections between the Carl scenario and Large Language Models. The person who originated this scenario got these results from the group discussion:

Some students wanted to assign a fact-checker.
Some students wanted to give Carl a careful set of instructions.
Some students wanted to give Carl a "handler." They watch over him.
Some students wanted to ignore Carl, and not let him touch anything.
Some students wanted to have Carl complete the entire group project.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: students could read this NYT article (and/or this writer's experience) about the prevalence of "hallucinations" (errors) and discuss implications re: whether teachers and students should use LLMs, and for what purpose.

REFERENCE: this document includes references contrasting the ways humans think and how LLMs process language. 📄 Whatever AI is, it sure ain't human