

The **(bad)** state of Software Testing interviews in India

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My **eligibility** to speak confidently about this topic

- I claim to have attended interviews in more than 249 organizations in India for the post of software tester and senior software tester.
- On an average 3 rounds per each organization which includes telephonic and technical interviews (excluding HR interview)
- Some of the companies that have interviewed me - Microsoft, Cisco, Motorola, LG Soft, Infosys, Wipro, Flextronics, CTS, TCS, Huawei, McAfee, to some unknown names like Teneoris, Verismo.
- I am one of the most affected person by bad interviewers.
- I have interviewed over 99 candidates for the post of tester, senior tester, trainer lead and manager as a hiring manager/consultant.
- Today organizations hire me to conduct interviews to get good talent.

Interviewing is an **ignored skill** by the IT industry!

- Have you ever seen any organization in India mandating managers or senior members of test teams to possess this skill ?
- Have you ever heard of a story that a tester was fired or denied hike because he/she did not interview candidates in a good manner to attract talent ?
- Have you ever heard of an organization educating their testing staff about interviewing ?
- Have you ever heard of questions that check skills of a tester than just his knowledge of the confusing literature of testing ?

The **striking** question!

When testers are not going to be affected in any way for conducting bad interviews; **Why would they ever bother to improve on it?**

Who cares?

Here is a **typical** interview for a tester in India?

- The interviewer(s) gets excited about interviewing someone and assumes themselves as experts. [e-GOooo]
- The candidate thinks interviewer (s) as an avtar of God and assume they know everything about testing.
- The interviewer asks questions on software testing literature that has more than a 1000 possible answers based on different contexts BUT expects one answer in a context that interviewer doesn't communicate.
- The candidate is lucky when he gives *that* answer (or an answer close by) and is unlucky if its from the 999.
- Out of 20 such questions, if the candidate hits bulls eye for more than a couple then usually, he/she is in.

Where do they (interviewers) pick questions from?

- They pick questions from Orkut testing groups, Yahoo groups on testing, Google groups on testing and other forums that discuss about interviews on testing and tools.
- They pick questions from their past interview experience as candidates.
- They pick questions that they could or could not answer in any interviews they attended/ heard about.
- They pick questions from other competing organizations that conduct similar interviews.

Candidate's myth!

- The interviewer knows everything about testing.
- If I don't answer a question, I lose the job.
- I should not be asking questions to the interviewer at any time.
- I should accept whatever the interviewer says about testing.
- If I go through some yahoo groups and orkut, I should be able to crack the interview.
- I should impress the interviewer even if it demands me to be stupid.
- If I am rejected by big companies then I am not good.
- I don't have any control in the interview.

Interviewer's myth!

- I am interviewing because I am an expert.
- The candidate I interview knows less about testing than me.
- If a candidate is not able to answer my questions, that candidate is not a right fit.
- If a candidate gives different answers than what I think, are right answers on testing, then the candidate is likely wrong.
- If a candidate asks me questions when I ask a question on testing, that candidate doesn't know the answer.
- If I select a candidate, its because the candidate gave magically right answers.
- If someone appears to be smarter than me then it is is a threat to me or is simply boasting.
- I have complete control over the interview.

Frequently asked (horrible) questions! (that determine if a candidate clears an interview)

- Difference between smoke and sanity testing?
 - The difference is spelling
- On a scale of 1-10 where is your expertise in testing?
 - 4.6320123 – Those who ask this question usually don't know what 5 or 6 means but they ask.
- Why is automation testing better than manual testing?
 - What do you want to know?
- How many test cases will you write for a given scenario?
 - Five billion sixty thousand three hundred and forty two point six test cases if I can be alive till then.
- Let me know some bugs you found in your current assignment?
 - I am sorry, I have been bound by an NDA
- Why did you not become an automation tester despite being in this field for X years?
 - Because I think that's a brainy job and I am not capable to do it.
- What would boundary conditions be for a system which takes 0 to 100?
 - My neighbor's kid knows how to add plus one and subtract one from any given number.
- Is automation testing better or manual testing better?
 - Not to think about such a question is better if you know what testing means.
- What is the difference between bug/defect/error/?
 - In what context?
- How much will the quality improve by your testing?
 - 0 percent if developers chose not to fix the thousands of bugs I find.

Lets discuss on a **decider** question?

Difference between smoke and sanity testing?

If a candidate doesn't know to give an answer to this question,

Should they be rejected?

***No tester, to my knowledge in India
can ever convince other testers
about the difference between them!***

Who is to blame for this **pathetic** situation?

- 100% blame on managers, 100% blame on interviewers and 100% blame on candidates, 100% blame on HR. Includes me and you.
- If candidates come to know they are being checked for skills of performing testing, they'd want to learn, practice and better that.
(at least for the sake of interviews and they may put at work, too)
- How many experienced testers in India know what human testing skills are?
- Domain knowledge and tool knowledge / programming are the only two (or three) things considered as skills by most Indian testing communities.

Today's candidates are tomorrow's interviewers!

Here is an **example** of a question I ask

I was a hiring manager at an organization. My mission was to hire fresh candidates who can learn things quickly, explore, and are quite OK in communicating results of their tests.



“Could you operate that switch board and list the learning you have as you operate them?”

How did candidates **respond** to that?

- Some candidates were intrigued by that and was wondering how to do it.
 - I don't want those who keep wondering at complexity or ignore simplicity.
- Some candidates tried their hands on but weren't conscious of what they were learning by operating those switches.
 - I don't want those who aren't completely conscious of what they were doing.
- Some candidates had some interesting experiments to do but were not able to communicate the results of their experiments.
 - I don't want those who can't communicate what they are doing.
- Few candidates diversified experiments and communicated as and when they think they learned something about the switch board.
 - I want those people but I set traps with questions like: How do you know that connects to that light? Maybe I am operating it in parallel and trying to fool you.

So who got **the job?**

A candidate did the following:

- Took a marker pen and numbered the switches for better communication.
- Switched ON one by one, two at a time, switched off one of by one, randomly, observed the change of state of light and A/C in the room and asked a wonderful question, “Is this switch board mapped to any device outside the room?”
- Listened carefully and responded to traps by changing her experiments to prove or disprove her experiment results.
- Used the white board in the room to make a list she learnt.
- Stated that she didn't have any devices that she can plug into socket showing her awareness of the environment and needs to carry out further experiments.
- Influenced the interview panel that she deserved that job by answering other questions that were asked to her. (We had decided to hire her well before we asked other questions)

*In the history of testing in India,
fresh testers were paid more than fresh
developers, in that organization, because
my boss was happy to pay for the value they added.*

How did I **learn** to interview?

- One day, I thought about all the interviews I attended and jotted down the bad and good things about them.
- I bumped into Interviewing Software Testing Candidates by Dr Cem Kaner at <http://kaner.com/pdfs/QWjobs.pdf> and was influenced and struck by ideas of Cem.
- I practiced human testing skills as a part of Rapid Software Testing – www.satisfice.com/rst.pdf
- I interacted with people who had been attending and taking interviews to probe them with questions.
- I made studies of how bad hiring has affected the performance of test teams.
- I interviewed people, as a part of my job and was conscious to observe each ones reactions.
- I considered it as a skill and wanted to get better at it. I practice it.
- I actively research on this topic, probe people, learn from their experiences, ask for feedback from candidates, and plan what to do and what not to do during my next interview.

All of which anyone reading this can do!

Here is a secret – **Candidates have control over the interview**

The football (soccer) analogy!



Who has the control over the situation depends on the skills!

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Some **uncommon** resume **(re)** writing tips!

- For a moment, behave like an alien: Don't mention what you don't know. Say truth in your resume!
- If you are good at documentation skills, your resume should reflect it and not contradict it.
- Don't use any words/terms/tool names/ techniques that you don't know or don't want to learn.
- Don't give confidential information like client's name in your resume.
- Ask someone to critique your resume before you send it out.
- Be receptive to feedback.

What are best practices to conduct/attend interviews?

There are no "best practices" in testing!
Don't be fooled!

Another secret: **Organizations suffer** with bad resources because they ask for it!

Here is a typical example of a job description from Naukri (India's one of the famous job portal)

Job Description: We are looking for the Test Engineers with at least 4+ years of experience in web based testing. This is a Permanent requirement. Candidate will be required to join by 7/15/2008

Desired Candidate Profile : Testing, Testing, Black Box Testing, White Box Testing, Testing, Performance Testing, Performance Testers

Company Profile: A CMMI Level 5 company

Ha! So, if you use such keywords of buzzwords like “performance testing, black box testing and white box testing” in your resume – You are likely to be called for an interview. You now know what happens in an interview and the kind of questions asked.

- **Does anyone talk about skills that help a tester to find bugs? No!**
- **Does anyone talk about bug investigations skills for a tester? No!**
- **Does anyone talk about test reporting skills for a tester? No!**
- **A lot more they just don't ask!**

Do you expect anything that you didn't order to be served at a hotel?

Applying re-phrase heuristic

Organizations suffer with bad resources because
they don't know how to ask for good resources.

or

Organizations don't want to learn
that they are suffering with bad resources.

Here is why this situation **wouldn't change** (soon)?

“If we ask for bug investigation skill, who will assess it during an interview?
How would a person know how to assess the skill of bug investigation?
The person taking the interview should possess the skill to assess it.
As we don't have persons to assess the skill, we don't want to ask for it”

Bang on target!

So who would change the future?

**You and then someone else. They wont start unless you start.
It starts with you**

If not YOU then no one else will

Have a question?
Shy to ask? Don't be!

Everyone lack some (a lot of) skills but very few try improving – just like how I am trying to improve on making power point presentations that look much better than this one.

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