

When You're Tested

Techniques for giving (and taking) the “audition”

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BCS SIGIST

June 21, 2005



Why this talk, right now?

- We **are** software, but don't realize it
- There are a lot of people looking for work, and maybe you're one of them
- Companies are looking for good testers, and maybe you're working for one of them
- I have some audition techniques (and surprising data)

Surprises

- Technical people don't make the best testers
- The resume doesn't matter much in the audition
- Very few candidates ask questions
- Many "qualified" candidates don't write bugs well
- People leave the interview saying they had "fun"

What has worked well for me

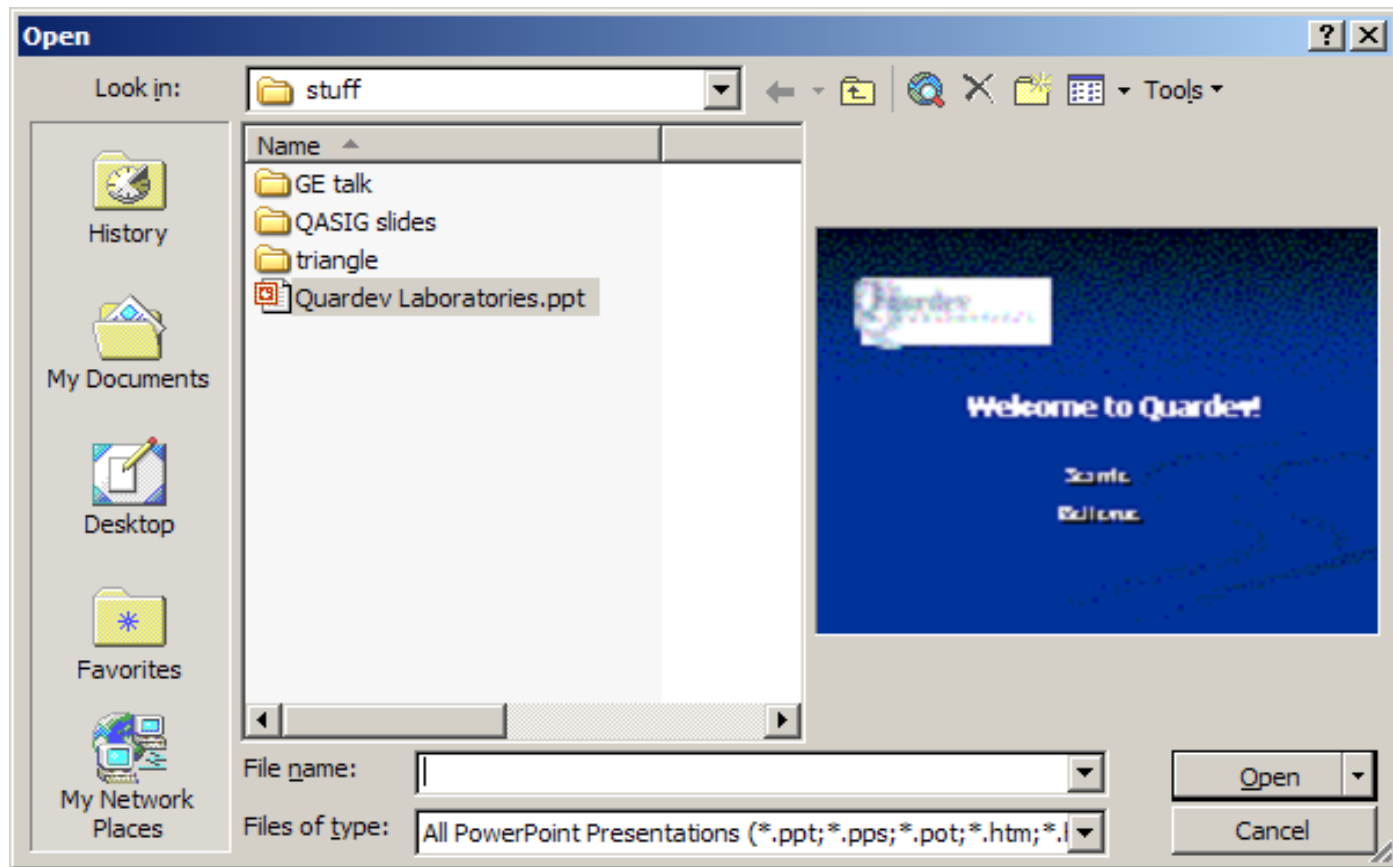
- Role-playing in the audition
 - Developer
 - Test Manager
 - Product Manager
 - CEO
- Looking for important behaviors
 - Cautious
 - Critical
 - Communicative
- Audition examples...

The audition: set the stage

- 1) Preamble: “I will be role-playing the different people on a software project. You are free to ask me any question that comes to mind, and I will answer.”
- 2) Laptop in front of them, with shortcut to app
- 3) “This is [product]. It was shipped to us on CD yesterday. Your mission is to find bugs in the next 15 minutes.”
- 4) Via whiteboard or clipboard, interviewer is statistician, telestrator, and voice-activated software which tracks 4 things: Bugs, Issues, Test Ideas, Tests Ran

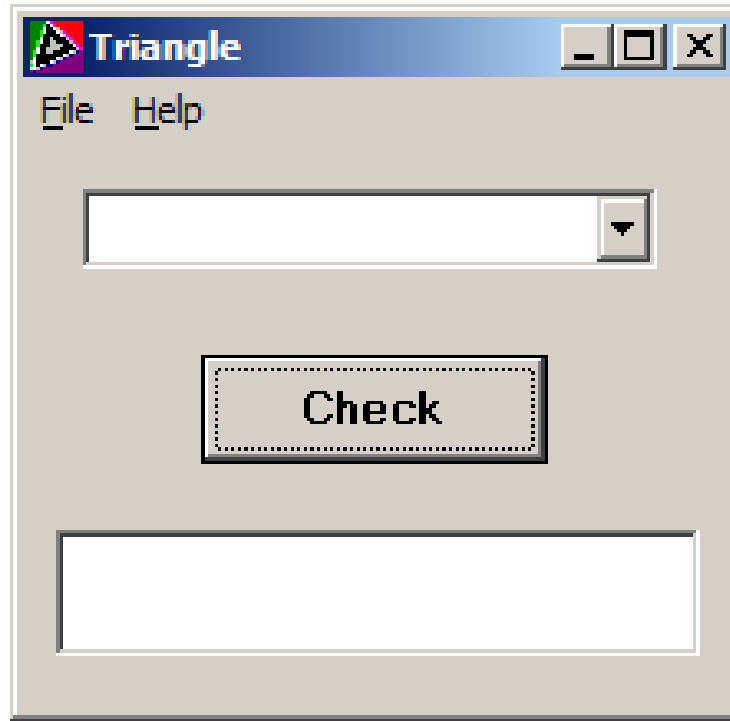
Technique #1 – File / Open

The “classic”, lots of stuff to test!



Technique #2 – Triangle

Keep it simple: there's lots to talk about with even the simplest program



Technique #3 -- TaskMaster 1.0

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet titled "TaskMaster 1.0.xls". The spreadsheet contains a task list with the following data:

Task Item	Due	Pri	Driven by	Days left	Progress made / comments
Sample Task #1	5/18	1	Staff meeting	-3	
Sample Task #2	5/21	2		Due today	
Sample Task #3	5/23	3		2	

The spreadsheet also includes a "Today's date:" field set to 5/21 and a "Stuff to do" header. The status bar at the bottom indicates "Ready" and "Tasks" is selected in the task pane.

Technique #4: Lindsay machines



Evaluation Criteria

- 1) Technical skill**
- 2) Testing skill**
- 3) Project experience**
- 4) Communication**

What you're really learning

- Can I work with this person?
- Do they run out of ideas?
- Do they fall into traps too easily?
- Do they have some technical skill?
- Do they get flustered?
- Do they have imagination?
- Would they make life easier for me / us / them?
- How would I feel if they worked for our competitor?
- Do they take good notes?
- Can they file a bug report?

Are they good enough?

For who, what, and when?

- 1) Sufficient benefits
- 2) No critical problems
- 3) Benefits outweigh problems
- 4) Further interviewing is more “harmful” than helpful

Considerations for interviewers

- Check in. Auditions can be stressful, but don't need to be endurance contests.
- Debrief. Dropping your role from time to time gives them a chance to see what kind of manager you'd be
- Praise? This is controversial, but I've never seen any ill-effects of telling someone that they came up with a good idea (especially if it's true), as long as they know there's a larger deliberation process at work
- Be fair. Are they adequately testing you?

If you're a candidate...

- Remember that you're a tester -- asking questions is vital to get information
- Use the whiteboard without being asked
- Are they meeting **your** expectations?
- Point out your own weaknesses
- Think aloud

If you're a candidate...

- Your primary job in the audition is to promote confidence that you'll be useful
- For speed and agility, memorize a test heuristic (SFDPO)
- Take notes as you test
- Your confusion is a weapon, not a liability
- If they don't call back, it may not be personal

What the experts say

“A degree does not mean someone learned what they need to be successful in your open position. A degree means someone had the perseverance and the money to stick through 4 years of college. That's all. It doesn't mean they learned anything they can use on your job.”

Rothman, *“Tips for Reviewing Resumes”*

What the experts say (2)

“The ideal tester is bright, articulate, attentive to detail but able to appreciate a larger picture, assertive without being obnoxious, creative and possesses a blend of management and technical skills.”

Kaner, *“Testing Computer Software”*

What the experts say (3)

“Being a [tester] requires that you come to terms with this basic truth: you might be wrong. It’s because you know you could be wrong that your voice doesn’t sound icy and condescending when you speak. You sound confident, but not insufferable.”

Bach, *“Explaining Testing to Them”*

Sources / More info

Kaner

“Testing Computer Software”

<http://www.kaner.com>

Rothman

“Hiring Technical People”

<http://www.jrothman.com>

Bach

“Explaining Testing to Them”

<http://www.satisfice.com/articles.shtml>