

Game App – Response Gauge

Who would get this challenge?

This could go to any candidate: junior, intermediate, senior. The level to which you would judge the candidate in terms of how they approach the challenge will differ based on experience level.

How should I present this to the candidate?

“So we’re competing in the casual gaming space, which is actually quite a bit more demanding than people think. In order to meet some upcoming gaming competitions for 'short challenge games', meaning they can be solved in about five minutes or so. We need to ferret out the bugs and also determine if the game is at least challenging enough but without being too challenging. I’m totally new to testing and you're the experienced person so I’m turning to you for help. I’d like to pair test with you.”

Interview Notes

- The candidate is given a walkthrough. So they can solve the game immediately. But they are also told the game should present a challenge. So how do they determine that the game is “challenging” even though all the challenge has been removed from their viewpoint? Do they consider how well the player is clued in on what to do to solve the game?
- How would they write up a bug for one of the bugs in the game?
- How would they write up a test approach/plan for a situation like this? Would they write test scenarios? Test cases? What would they look like?
- Do they bring up questions about installing the game? Do they bring up questions about whether the game will be playable in a browser? I specifically mention that the game uses DOSBox to run, so this might suggest operating system compatibility issues.
- The important thing is to get the candidate talking about the game as they are testing it. You should be looking at their ability to read the information they are given – which constitutes a minimal specification – and how they attempt both “scripted” and “exploratory” modes of testing.
- There’s a lot that doesn’t work in this game. It’s designed to be a little frustrating, with lots of little niggling bugs. The candidate can easily get flustered if they feel they are making no progress. Test for that!

What should the candidate produce?

Bare Minimum Candidate Attempt

- The candidate should, at some point, try the actual walkthrough that is provided and make sure it works.
 - The candidate should notice that the second instruction ("TAKE KNIFE") is conditional upon (1) knowing the knife is there, since it's not obvious, and (2) having to move near to the box that contains the knife.
 - **(HUGE MONDO ADDITIONAL POINTS)**: If the candidate tries the assumption of the game fairly quickly (i.e., "OPEN THE DOOR" before doing too many other actions), the game will showcase a huge bug: namely, that the door isn't locked! The door does become "locked" after a few moves, so it's a potentially subtle bug. (Specifically, it becomes locked after the knife is taken.)
- The candidate should try the Escape (ESC) key to bring up the menu interface for the game. They should then try some of the options. However, the candidate should not get too stuck on checking all possible things here. If they do, they will rapidly use up all their time.
 - Also look at what the candidate seems to focus on. For example, if they look at the Colors menu item, do they bring up that it's not clear what the text color numbers refer to?
- The candidate should try the Tab key (TAB) to bring up the game character inventory. They most definitely should do this after the game gives them an indication that they have taken something.
- The candidate should try to save (F5 or "SAVE GAME") and restore a game (F7 or "RESTORE GAME") at some point. Ideally they will save, put the game world in a new state, and then restore to make sure that the old state is truly restored.

Testing the Game Design Criteria

- Testing Game Design Point (1), the candidate should simply try to walk the game character in front of or behind various objects. (Ideally they will also be testing this with the mouse and with the arrow keys.) The candidate should also try to see if they can get the game character to move beyond a wall or through any objects.
 - **Bug Note:** The character is able to walk "through" the briefcase, but only from two directions. The candidate will hopefully find this. The briefcase is the only object with this problem.

- Testing Game Design Point (2), the candidate should try various things here. Try a nonsensical verb (like "FJLSF") and then a sensible verb without a direct object (i.e., "TAKE"). The candidate should also try something with an object that clearly doesn't exist (i.e., "LOOK AT ELEPHANT"). Ideally trying a command with no input (just press enter in the command window) or with just a single space is also nice to see.
 - **Note:** Candidate should try a command that uses a word that can be both a verb and an adjective. For example: "LOOK AT THE OPEN BOX".
- Testing Game Design Point (3) should ultimately lead them to realize the game text never mentions the briefcase, paint can or barrel. (In fact, they might note that they're not even sure what the barrel is.) The candidate should try to LOOK AT any of those objects to see if they have a description at all.
 - **Note:** How does the candidate know there is a briefcase, paint can or barrel? Beyond visually, this is by reading the specification they were given.
- Testing Game Design Point (4), it's probably not immediately clear how or when a picture shows up in the inventory. Also there's a key phrase in there: things can be dropped. In fact, in the game nothing can be dropped. The command "DROP <object>" does not work.
- Testing Game Design Point (5) is simple: just try to examine objects that have clearly had some sort of state change.
 - **Note:** The box does not have a before or after state, even though the design says it should. The light bulb does.
- Testing Game Design Point (6) is simple: things should change. The light bulb should not be present anymore once it's taken. The light glow should also not show up. If the speaker is taken, it should disappear.
 - **Bug Note:** The player can try to take the briefcase even though the game shouldn't allow this. While the game indicates that the taking action does happen, it in fact does not. Candidate should verify that by checking inventory as well as noticing no visual change.
- Testing Game Design Point (7) should have the candidate trying various things:
 - Try to take the speaker when the character is too far away.
 - Try opening the door when the character is too far away.
 - Try examining objects after something has clearly changed.
 - Try to take the bulb when on the chair and off the chair.

Notable Things

- The "LOOK" command (without a direct object) does not work. However, alternatives are given in the specification. Note that it's only by looking that the candidate will understand what some of the objects are in the room. It's also the only way the candidate will realize that some objects are not indicated in the description; the only way to know the list of everything is by the spec or by a visual look (which can be misleading). That's a bug.
- When the character is on the chair, if the candidate types "CLIMB ON THE CHAIR", they get the "You're not close enough text." (If you are letting the candidate see the source code, they can see a text response should appear that says "You're about as on the chair as it's possible to be.")
- The candidate should note that "GET ON THE CHAIR" does not work. (The game seems to treat it like a "GET CHAIR" command, which translates to "TAKE CHAIR".) "GET OFF THE CHAIR" does something similar.
- "OPEN BRIEFCASE" or "OPEN CAN" has the player walk to the object -- but the text is displayed right away, even before the character gets there.
- The command "OPEN CAN" has the player walk to the same place that the "OPEN BRIEFCASE" command does. (If you are letting the candidate see the source code, they can see that the coordinates to walk to are the same for both commands.)
 - The candidate may try "OPEN CAN" when on the chair and will realize that the game does not automatically have the character hop down and perform the walk action.
- The score in the status line does increment appropriately but the player is not told how many points are possible. (The candidate will see things like "2 out of 0".)
- The candidate may ask why they can't use the CUT command at all. They have to USE KNIFE WITH SPEAKER and can't do CUT SPEAKER WITH KNIFE or even CUT SPEAKER.
- The candidate may ask "Where's the door?" The fact of a door is clearly stated in the requirements but it's not obvious -- unless they paid attention during the introduction.
- It would be good if the candidate recognizes it isn't clear what some objects are. (What is that big yellow thing behind the chair? What is that on the wall: a vent? A window? A speaker?)
- The candidate is given a proposed "user manual" that would be available with the game. Do they try each of the commands suggested there? Do they bring up any comments about how good or bad the manual seems to be?