

title: **How do I not freak out, and fail, timed tech tests?**

num_comments: 39

num_up_votes: 81

upvote_ratio: 1.0

Post Text

Looking for my first junior developer role. Just done my first timed tech test for a job. All I remember is the noise of rushing water in my ears and becoming fascinated with how the word 'tasks' is spelt. Oh, and there were some questions I absolutely flunked (all of them), and an on screen timer I kept noticing and hearing as a bomb count down in my head. I spent the whole time feeling and breathing as if I was about to explode when the timer went off. Anyone got any tips? Anyone asked a company for a different style of assessment due to your ADHD? Did it work? My main issues are being a later in life career changer with -1000 confidence in my abilities.

Comments

Commenter_2

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 20

Not a programmer but familiar with test "anxiety" (maybe not the best term?) and have ADHD.

Have you tried recreating the conditions of the test? Put on a timer and give yourself x amount of time and maybe even add either like gross amounts of silence or a bunch of background noise - whichever would stress you out more.... Basically, you want to put yourself into a stressful space but where there are no stakes (its just practice). So you get accustomed to having that timer there AND you've timed yourself many times so you know how long it usually takes you... repeat this as much as you can! Repetition is key here.

If you can do your work in a stressful space but with no stakes, you'll be able to train your brain to calm down faster and ignore the timers quicker. You'll be able to say - oh my heart rate is high, and my ears are actually the ocean, but I KNOW I've done this before and have been able to get past this feeling... and focus on that trust in yourself because you'll have done it before. It doesn't need to work the first time you try, but once you try and fail the first time, and see that nothing bad happened because this is just practice, your brain is going to learn it's 'safe' and you can try again...

We always try to avoid stress, but really, we need to show ourselves that we can enter that state AND still come out of it to do the test we all know we have the knowledge to ace.

I've had lots of success with this method myself and I also recommend it to my students with test anxiety and adhd, and it's been helpful.

Good luck!

Commenter_3

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 14

I am a FAANG engineer who started my tech career in my 30's. I have asked for a different kind of assessment. I told a company I was willing to send in a sample API I had done for another company. They accepted, but I didn't get the job. I think you can try, but you'd be more successful doing what this poster recommends. Do leet code problems and really time yourself. You need to get used to the pressure that timed tests put you under. You may also want to know that you'll need to study all over again when you're considering switching roles. Unfortunately tech interviews aren't like day to day and it doesn't look like that's going to change any time soon. Good luck!

Commenter_4

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 17

I'm a senior software engineer and I assess technical capabilities. I also have ADHD.

We primarily use a relatively freeform take home test assignment because we believe it is more representative of the candidates skills than white boarding or timed challenges.

In the follow up technical interview I forgo whiteboarding / coderpad and instead ask questions about their take home test submissions. Throw in a few knowledge questions. And give them the opportunity to talk about their favorite coding accomplishment.

It may sound easy but I still end up rejecting about half of the candidates. Burns me out every time though.

Commenter_5

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

The first time I did an open book test I laughed thinking how easy it would be.

Wasn't not laughing the second time.

Commenter_6

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 9

In the most recent interview I was in (for the job I now have), I was upfront with the hiring manager and told him I have test anxiety, and that the assessment may not show my skills in the best light. The assessment was a live-coding challenge where I was given an exercise and coded it in front of the hiring manager, team lead, and another team member. Not the same as a formal timed coding test but had similar effects to when I've been in timed assessments. I also asked the hiring manager in my interview with him what benefits he saw in a live-code assessment, and he later told me that it was a great question that made him think, and challenged his view on interviews a bit.

When I was in college and taking tests, I found a LOT of help with running a timer of the amount of time I would have during the assessment, even when I wasn't studying, so I got used to how long that block of time feels like, and eventually I would do practice-assessment work during that time allotment (sometimes I'd pick a certain amount of leetcode or hackerrank questions to do in the specified time).

It may also be helpful to just accept that you will always have some degree of nerves during these assessments that's more than your peers. Once I accepted that this is just part of my set of struggles, I felt a lot of pressure being taken off myself, which was actually fueling my stress. I felt like I had to do better constantly, and go in PERFECTLY confident, and when I would feel debilitating stress going into an assessment, I was already feeling like I failed, so I was already starting behind; I felt stress and panic before I'd done anything. That's not to say you'll never calm down during these assessments, or that you can't, it just might help to reset your baseline to "Stress during assessments is something that happens to me" so its expected and not catching you off guard or messing with your head each time it happens.

Hope this helped!

Commenter_7

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 6

> Anyone got any tips?

Do em at home. Do one. Do two. Do hundreds. Over and over and over and over. Keep doing them. Do subjects you know really well. Do subjects you kinda know. Do subjects you don't know well at all. Practice, practice, practice.

> Anyone asked a company for a different style of assessment due to your ADHD?

No. And as someone who has sat on both sides of the hiring table, I cannot imagine how that would help you (or anyone).

I hate to say this. If it were up to me, I'd provide all sorts of different criteria for people who are ADHD.

But its usually not up to me alone. The corporate world can be a cruel, cut throat place. Its better to learn how to deal with it on its (admittedly fucked up) terms than to ask for special treatment.

And I know people disagree with me on this, and I don't entirely disagree with them. I could be wrong, but I don't think I am.

Commenter_8

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

Are you medicated?

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

I am medicated, but I still have problems getting into -code mode- any tips? I've tried tomato timer. And journals. I'm just asking cuz it's 20mg addy xr and I'm not allowed anymore by my insurance.

Commenter_8

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 6

Sounds like it's not working. Can you get your doctor to override insurance, sometimes they can do that eg they fill out prior authorization. 20 mg is average dose but there are folks who need more than that. If insurance won't cover more I'd consider also going out of pocket (generic shouldn't be too bad at Costco) to see if it will help.

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

I'll see what he says next time I see him. This is month 5 of trying to get this to work.

Commenter_8

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Yea it's definitely not working you should know within a few days if it's going to work for you

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Like, what would it feel like?

I know it's a silly question but I don't know what I'm looking for. It helps in somethings like when I'm working, I'm a machine at work. I work in a warehouse tho, so. Not what I want to do

Unknown_User

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 5

I changed careers at 30; I'm not sure if that's considered later in life.

That said, I've never asked for a different style of assessment. Instead, I tend to avoid companies that use Hackerrank- and LeetCode-style assessments because they're so stressful for me and I do much better with take-home assignments. I make an exception if it's for a company that I really want to work for or if my

current job is so awful that almost anything would be better.

I don't knock companies that use them and I understand why some prefer them over take-home assignments. But I feel that my time is better spent doing things like reading Go's source code or learning how dicts and sets in Python are implemented, so I try to find companies with interviewing processes that mesh well with my strengths.

If you have a doctor that you trust and these assessments are unavoidable, could you ask for beta blockers? They're commonly used for performance anxiety and they're not as tightly regulated as benzos. I had decent luck with them during undergrad, when I'd struggle to finish math tests even with time and half accommodations.

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

It seems like all companies are doing these things nowadays....

Commenter_10

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Things might be different where you are, but I've had good luck with smaller companies and staffing agencies.

With the former, a lot of them don't have the budget for the timed assessments and they're well aware that those tests don't measure culture fit/culture add, which is arguably more important in an environment that has fewer people to get more work done.

With the latter, if it's a contract-to-hire role, then your performance on the job is itself an extended assessment. And given that you're usually working with a recruiter for the agency, they'll know not to send your résumé to companies that require timed assessments.

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

The problem with the smaller companies is, they put a laundry list of languages/platforms/api's and if you don't have experience with all these things on your resume, then you don't get interviewed. Even if you do get interviewed, they focus on tiny irrelevant details like what you're wearing in the zoom call. Also, small companies don't pay as well as large companies.

Commenter_11

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 4

1. Practice problems. Have a friend help you out.

2. There's a saying in the service industry. Slow is smooth, smooth is fast.

Don't focus on being as fast as possible, focus on using your problem solving tools as effectively as possible.

Commenter_12

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 3

Do you remember what you had to do? When I get timed anything I freak out unless I feel prepared. I'm an SSE and I still have trouble interviewing. But the thing that made me feel more prepared now is learning what the interviewers are actually looking for. Thought processes and patterns that are common in solving programming problems. Not just being able to hack the idea together.

Commenter_13

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

I'm a later in life career changer too, and have also felt crippled during timed tech tests searching for my first role. It sucks.

I'm no master, but practicing problems on leet code helped me a ton. First I'd just practice without thinking too much about time. Then once I got more comfortable with a certain type of problem I would give myself ample time, like maybe 45 minute to an hour. If I didn't have a working solution at about 45 minutes I'd look up the answer and try again with a time box. Eventually I found I could answer most types of problems (leet code easy or medium level) in about 30 minutes.

So, I guess what it came down to for me was practice until I felt more confident. As you practice you eventually recognize patterns in the problems and learn what type of solution you need for new problems you encounter.

Commenter_14

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

Honestly if you can get accommodations for having extra time that super helped me. Knowing I have the extra time stops me from panicking so I can actually read the question correct and think clearly too. I think so far I've only used the extra time once but normally it just helps me panic much less.

Commenter_15

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

This is an answer I put 100% of my support in. Ask for accommodations be upfront and transparent about your needs. Here's why:

- * Asking for accommodations will let your possible employer know that you know that you know yourself, which honestly a lot of people are lacking
- * Providing transparency by being vulnerable initiates trust.
- * Letting them know that you have test anxiety reduces actual anxiety about taking the test.
- * Giving them this information will help them decide if you are a good fit at their company
- * Giving this information will help **YOU** decide if they are a good fit for you, this is the most important
- * If they don't accommodate for you when you're willing to accommodate for them should be a red flag about the company. They will need to depend on you and provide you the tools so you're successful and in turn will help create successes for the company.

Be your biggest advocate.

Commenter_14

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

I fully agree with everything you've said too! How an employer reacts to accommodations can tell you a lot about the company.

Commenter_15

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

lol my hyperfocus got so crazy writing this I was about to put a rant post up in this sub about timed coding tests and how they need to be phased out. lolol but I have to finish writing some reports up for my manager that's due in a few hours.

Commenter_16

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

If you're in the United States,

they technically have to provide alternate time limits or no time limits at all, or offer a different examination arrangement. ADA states that any employer is bound to make 'reasonable accommodations.'

ADHD is a protected disability in the US.

Edit:

To be clear, I know you're looking for a role and they aren't your employer but if they aren't flexible on the examination then they are discriminating against you. If you don't want to be upfront about ADHD (which is understandable) then this is not the right angle for you.

Commenter_17

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

yeah but in real terms you've just revealed a weakness to a potential employer who won't hire you now.

Commenter_18

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

And if that's the case, then they've revealed themselves too and now you don't need to waste your time on them.

Commenter_16

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Yeah I definitely understand that is not a comfortable angle for everyone. The other side of it is that if they make a big deal out of that then I feel like the alternative - hiding our condition and hoping they don't figure it out - will be an even worse outcome.

I feel like if one approaches the world and expects scarcity, it'll be scarce. Finding a healthy environment probably also means being honest. Is it more work? Yes. Is it worth it? Probably.

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Maybe there's a way to sue them. At least get some money out of them rather than a paycheck.

Commenter_17

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Realistically, no, especially in the USA if you are in an "at-will" employment state. They can just claim you smelled funny or whatever.

Commenter_19

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

See this test as a data point.

You were anxious about failing and you did fail.

Try to go into the next test knowing that you can't do worse than last time. Just take the test as a thing to do, not a thing to pass. Having completed 5% more than last time will be a win.

It may sound flippant, but this mode of thinking has helped me and pupils I have advised when they were taking toilet breaks during exams due to nerves.

Commenter_20

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

> Anyone got any tips? Anyone asked a company for a different style of assessment due to your ADHD? Did it work?

I'll go against the grain and say yes, you can and should ask. Don't mention ADHD though. I had people at my company ask for a different style of assessment and it's fine. If they say no just move along.

Take home challenges reflect how you would actually perform in the role. Even a simple todo app allows you and the interviewer to fill an hour with questions about implementation, design choices, etc.

No one works with someone holding a stopwatch to their face in an actual software role. Timed leetcode style tests are just a terrible practice that needs to die in this industry. Imo they have a place for the initial screen, and even then they should be very simple to just ensure the candidate can actually code.

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

How can we get companies to stop making people take these tests?

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 2

I just passed a timed test for a relatively large gaming company with 15 mins to spare. I can't believe it. This is the first time I passed a codility test. You gotta make sure your brain is working right before hand, and then just power through it. It's almost like the pressure actually helped me this time, because normally when I try to practice, I'm unmotivated and just say screw it, I don't feel like doing this, this is boring. Whereas, when there's a job on the line, the reward salience (something our adhd brains have trouble with) is clearer than if you're just sitting there grinding leetcode. In a way, the pressure gave me adrenaline which kind of acted like meds. I had to pep talk myself with confidence, like how Elliot on Mr Robot says to himself "you got this, you got this".

Commenter_21

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

I don't really have any advice on what to do in the moment. As soon as I am working with someone watching all I can think about is them being there. I almost completely shutdown.

When I interviewed for my current job I utterly bombed everything. But what I did was I wrote down the second guy I did a code test for's email and when I got home I completed the test fairly easily and emailed him back and said something like "hey, I just wanted to see what you thought of my solution I came up with for that". Sure enough I got a second interview and didn't do much better that time but they took a liking to me and ended up taking a chance on me.

I've been with them over 3 years now. My coworker that interviewed me told me a while later that my willingness to finish the task and general curiosity of how to do it right is what made them hire me.

There are other ways you can show them that you have potential.

You go this man. Also, believe me when I say that a lot of companies value culture fit more than you could imagine.

Commenter_22

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Personally, practice helped a bit, but if I am doing like a competition, I mentally separate the "competition" and the "programming" as much as possible. When I'm coding I'm coding and when I'm looking at the competition website, I am strategically planning on what I am going to code next and I don't mix those two. This isn't perfect, sometimes I start thinking about how the word "input" must have been made but it

helps

Commenter_23

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

I literally just ghost recruiters when they ask for me to take 1-4 hour tests, probably not the best strategy but I did find employment where they didn't do that crap

Commenter_18

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

Getting your first role is the most difficult barrier, in my experience, so it's difficult to make demands in the beginning. There are lots of things you can do to practice this skill, and there will be more opportunities available to you if you're able to improve at it. That being said, I'm very passionate about this topic, as it's something I've hit again and again and think it's such a fixable accessibility issue! I perform terribly under these circumstances, but I can kick butt at a take-home challenge. At this point I'm more senior level and have more confidence in my skills and worth, so in my last round of job searching basically had the attitude of "If that's how you want to evaluate me, then it's mutually a bad fit, byyyyyy." Sometimes I'll give it a shot just in case it'll go ok, and sometimes I decide it's not worth the time and anxiety.

You can let them know that this format isn't the best way for you to demonstrate what an asset you would be to their team. If you want to give it a shot first, but end up bombing and it's a position that you were really excited about and think you'd be a great fit for, you can follow up and let them know. At that point there isn't much to lose, and hopefully they can also grow and improve a bad hiring process. There was one challenge I received and looked over it and was like NOPE not for me, which I let them know and it turned out they had a new one in the works more suited to the role and were able to get that to me instead. Alternatively, there was a remote pair-programming exercise in the interview for the job I ended up accepting, and I fully expected to blow it and ask for a different option, but ended up doing great!

Good luck!!!

Commenter_5

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

The only way to combat fear is with knowledge. Fail where it doesn't matter so you don't fail when it does.

ADHD or not, it's the effort you put in before the test which has the greatest impact on the result.

Commenter_9

ID: REDACTED! ~(o.o)~ <3, Upvotes: 1

The same thing happened to me in an interview. I had been grinding leetcode for months, and it all came up to one moment. The pressure was too much and I choked, even though the problem was easy, my brain just wasn't working and I went down this dumb path of solving it, wasting a lot of time. At this point I can't even practice leetcode anymore, I look at the problem and my brain goes to sleep like "yeah, that's boring, that's not fun, I don't feel like doing this" and I literally can't do it. It's so depressing, no one will ever hire me :(