

Bad Interview Questions

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(please hire me!)

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Bad Interview Questions

- Examples of bad questions
- Why they're bad
- Better questions to ask instead

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Please think of
your favorite
interview question

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But first . . .

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What about those
elections?

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That was a trick!

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Two Kinds of Bad Questions

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Two Kinds of Bad Questions

- Discouraged

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Two Kinds of Bad Questions

- Discouraged
- Prohibited

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- Discouraged
- Prohibited
 - Like asking about politics

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Two Kinds of Bad Questions

- Discouraged
- Prohibited
 - Like asking about politics
 - Going to do these first

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Prohibited Questions

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Prohibited Questions

- Age

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids
- Religion

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids
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- Political affiliation

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- **Medical history**

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Medical history
- **Personal habits**

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Prohibited Questions

- Age
- Marital status / Kids
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Medical history
- Personal habits
- **Other similar things**

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Why Can't You Ask These?

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Why Can't You Ask These?

- They're unlawful

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Why Can't You Ask These?

- They're unlawful
- Or they might get you sued

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Why Can't You Ask These?

- They're unlawful
- Or they might get you sued
- Or they're just plain rude

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So Don't Ask Them!

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Discouraged Questions

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Discouraged Questions

- Let's start with some examples

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What does `tsort` do?

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OK Smarty-Pants . . .

- Just what is a “topological sort” anyway?
- Well?

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What does “ls -X” do?

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What does “ls -X” do?

- Or is it “ls -x”?

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What does “ls -X” do?

- Or is it “ls -x”?
- It's both
 - Depending on which version of Unix

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What does “ls -X” do?

- Or is it “ls -x”?
- It's both
 - Depending on which version of Unix
- But why do you care?

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What does “ls -X” do?

- Or is it “ls -x”?
- It's both
 - Depending on which version of Unix
- But why do you care?
 - Hint: You don't!

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What command works
only on stdin?

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What command works **only** on stdin?

- `tr`
- But why?
- And, again, why do you care?

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What commands
do not accept
command-line switches?

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What commands do not accept command-line switches?

- It's a long list
 - Including `true` and `false`
- And I still don't know why you care!

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So Why Are These Questions Bad?

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So Why Are These Questions Bad?

- They ask about trivia
- But you care about **knowledge**
- And **understanding**
- Not to mention **trouble-shooting skills**

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What to Ask Instead

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What to Ask Instead

- “What command lists the contents of a directory?”
 - “Lots of output options; what are some of them?”
 - “Can you change the sort order?”
 - “On which keys?”
- Which leads to . . .

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Filesystem Questions

- “What / how many ‘times’ are stored about a file?”
 - atime, ctime, mtime
- “What do they mean?”
- And this leads to . . .

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Inodes

- “What is an inode?”
- “What’s stored in the inode?”
- “Is the file name stored in the inode?”
 - “If not, where is it stored?”
- Which brings us to . . .

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Links

- “What’s the difference between a hard link and a symbolic link?”
- “Can you make a hard link to a directory?”
- “Can hard links cross filesystems?”
 - “If not, why not?”

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See the Difference?

- Trivia questions test, well, trivia
 - And don't go anywhere
- Good technical questions probe both the depth and breadth of a candidate's knowledge and understanding
 - There are those words again

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Other Possibilities

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Other Possibilities

- Describe a problem

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Other Possibilities

- Describe a problem
- Ask the candidate to talk through the solution

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Why?

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Why?

- Shows you how the candidate thinks about problems

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Why?

- Shows you how the candidate thinks about problems
- And how they go about solving them

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Why?

- Shows you how the candidate thinks about problems
- And how they go about solving them
 - Which gives you some idea of how well they understand the technology

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Why?

- Shows you how the candidate thinks about problems
- And how they go about solving them
 - Which gives you some idea of how well they understand the technology
 - Which is different from what trivia they know!

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So . . .

- Is your favorite question good or bad?

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That's All, Folks!

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This Has Been a
Try to Talk As
Fast As Rob Pike
Production

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Mr. Moskowitz's
wardrobe by
King Kog Creations

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After Today . . .

- If you have more questions:
 - *<adamm@menlo.com>*
- Get these slides:
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So what does
“Is -X”
do anyway?

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