

The Case Against Test Cases

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“Test Cases” describe only a fraction of testing.

- Programming cases?
- Driving cases?
- Traveling cases?
- Parenting cases?
- Learning cases?
- Science cases?
- Living cases?

Activities are not captured by "cases"

Excellent testing is a rich and open-ended intellectual activity.
It cannot be encapsulated into discrete procedural units.

What is a test case?

- There is a lot of confusion.
- There's no specific definition in common use.
 - *"a computer executable script"*
 - *"a sequence of discrete steps"*
 - *"specific detailed input and action steps taken during the execution with predetermined expected results"*
 - *"inputs, execution conditions, and expected results"*
 - *"a set of input values, execution preconditions, expected results and execution post-conditions, developed to cover certain test condition(s)."*
- Different testers have different ideas about them.
- Sometimes, a test itself is called a test case.

What is a test case?

- An artifact.
- A container. (*"test cases are like briefcases"*)
- A model. (*a pattern, idea, spec, or schematic for a test*)
- Part of a suite.
- A **mystery**. (*"why did he write the test that way?"*)
- A **burden to the future**. (*is it broken? is it obsolete? is it limiting my imagination or stealing my time that I could be using to TEST BETTER?*)
- A **measure of testing progress**.
- A **unit of testing itself**.

What is a test case?

- I use this definition:

A **test case** is one particular instance or variation of a test or test idea.

- Compare to:

A **test procedure** is a way of performing a test.

A **test activity** is a line of investigation that fulfills some part of the test strategy. It can encompass many test cases.

A Testing Industry Pandemic: OCD

- *Obsessive Case Disorder*: confusing test cases with testing, such that “creating test cases” is assumed to encompass all the thinking of testing.
- *Obsessive Counting Disorder*: the belief that counting test cases tells you something meaningful about testing.
- *Overspecified Cases Disease*: the irrational compulsion to treat humans like dimwitted robots by creating recklessly specific test documentation.

In the absence of context...
Test Case Counts Mean NOTHING!

- How much testing is 40 test cases?
- How much is 400?
- How about 40,000 test cases?

You have no idea!

You shouldn't take
test case counts seriously because...

- Test cases are not independent.
- Test cases are not interchangeable.
- Test cases vary widely in value from *case to case, tester to tester, product to product, project to project, test technique to test technique, and over time.*
- Test case design is subjective, so counts are easy to inflate.
- Test cases do not—and can not—capture all the testing that occurs (example: bug investigation)
- Testers often don't follow the test cases, anyway.
- Automated test cases are fundamentally different from sapiently executed tests.
- Test cases represent what's *easy* to put into a test case.

Danger:
Testing should not be
TOO FOCUSED.

(unless you want to miss lots of bugs)

To test a *very simple* product meticulously,
part of a complex product meticulously,
or to maximize test *integrity*...

FOCUS!

1. Start the test from a *known* (clean) state.
2. Prefer *simple, deterministic* actions.
3. Trace test steps to a *specified model*.
4. Follow *established and consistent* lab procedures.
5. Make *specific* predictions, observations and records.
6. Make it *easy to reproduce* (automation helps).

To find *unexpected problems*,
elusive problems that may occur in the field,
 or more problems *quickly* in a complex product...

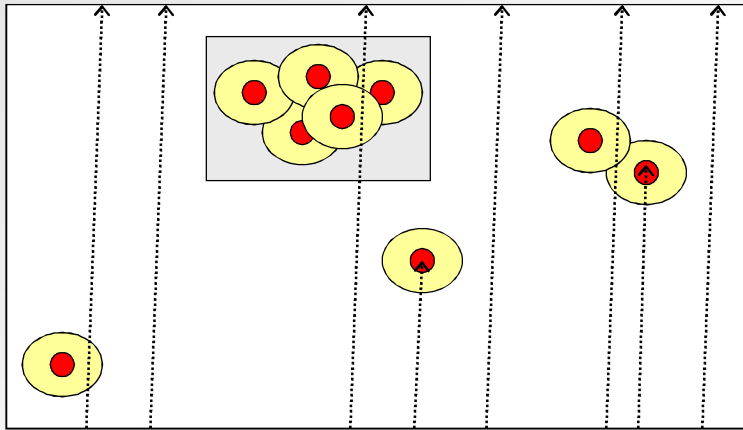
DE-FOCUS!

1. Start from *different states* (not necessarily clean).
2. Prefer *complex, challenging* actions.
3. Generate tests from a *variety* of models.
4. *Question* your lab procedures and tools.
5. Try to *see everything* with open expectations.
6. Make the test *hard to pass*, instead of easy to reproduce.

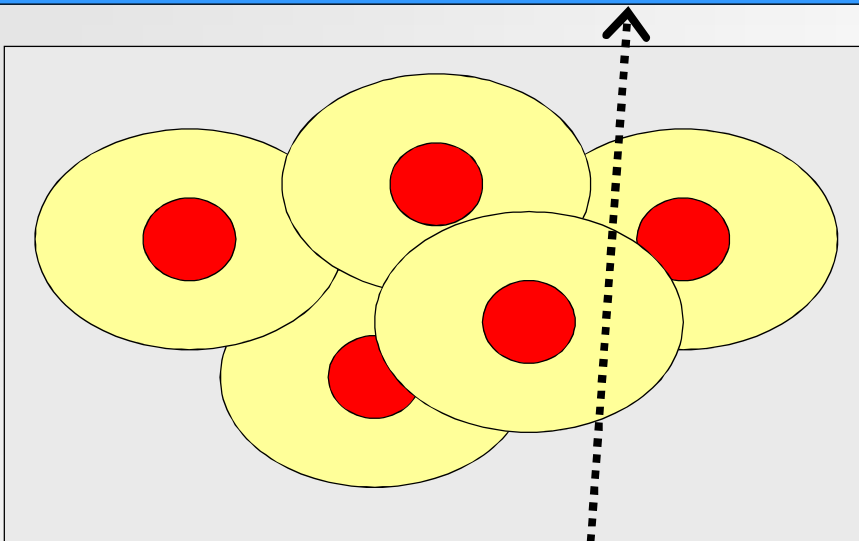
Exploiting Variation To Find More Bugs

- **Micro-behaviors:** Unreliable and distractible humans make each test a little bit new each time through.
- **Randomness:** Can protect you from unconscious bias.
- **Data Substitution:** The same actions may have dramatically different results when tried on a different database, or with different input.
- **Platform Substitution:** Supposedly equivalent platforms may not be.
- **Timing/Concurrency Variations:** The same actions may have different results depending on the time frame in which they occur and other concurrent events.
- **Scenario Variation:** The same functions may operate differently when employed in a different flow or context.
- **State Pollution:** Hidden variables of all kinds frequently exert influence in a complex system. By varying the order, magnitude, and types of actions, we may accelerate state pollution, and discover otherwise rare bugs.
- **Sensitivities and Expectations:** Different testers may be sensitive to different factors, or make different observations. The same tester may see different things at different times or when intentionally shifting focus to different things.

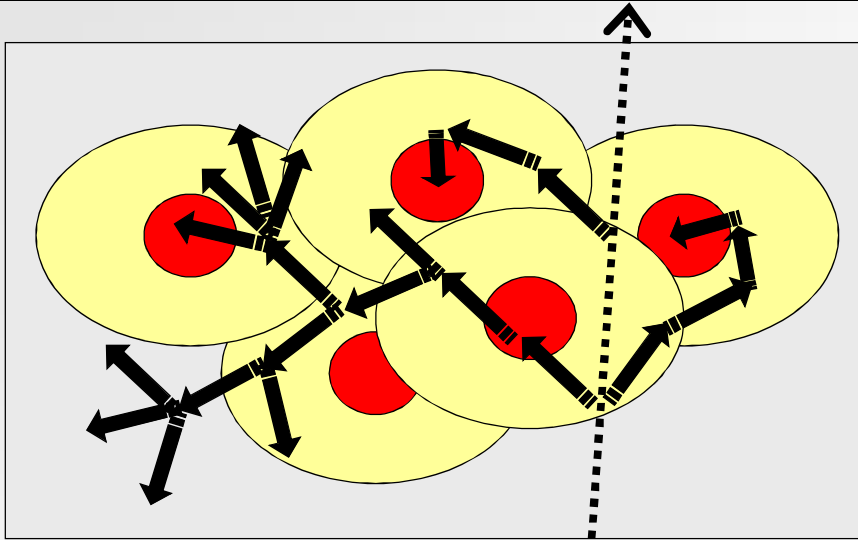
Testing is about searching an infinite space in a finite time



To do that, we must use all available information...



...as it becomes available.
We must *explore*.



The alternative to *artifact-based* testing
is *activity-based* testing.

- Manage testing as an activity consisting of manageable activity units.
- An activity is something a human tester does.
- This can be formalized:
 - *Exploratory Testing*
 - *Automatic coverage logging*
 - *Session-Based Test Management*
 - *General Functionality and Stability Test Procedure*
- Testing knowledge can be propagated formally and informally through concise documentation and on-the-job training.