

The Art of Magic

Welcome to the world of magic!



This article is to give you the opportunity to learn what magic is all about – and to also learn how to do magic even though you’ve never done a magic trick before.

It is difficult to learn a trick from just reading directions. I’ve included videos on my website, www.zalmanthemagician.com, linked to Youtube.com, that give you the opportunity to play them over and over until you have mastered the technique of how to perform them.

You have to be a good actor before you can become a good magician

The next menu item is “Magic for Sale”. All of the types of effects I have chosen have appeal to a wide audience and can be learned in a short time . . . if you do a little practicing – after all – what can you do well without practicing?

It’s about performing

This tutorial is not about just learning how to do tricks. It’s about learning how to be a performer, an actor. You need to create the setting, the mood, and your audience’s perception that you truly are a magician who can perform miracles right in front of their eyes. And in so doing, you can bring them back to their childhood when they were truly amazed and mystified by magic.

Any prop used is only the vehicle by which an audience associates it with the performer. Jack Benny had his violin and his mastery of timing. Victor Borge had his piano and his droll sense of humor. The Smothers Brothers had instruments and their specialty was their Abbott & Costello ‘smart & dumb’ play-off of each other. Each performer had a ‘known-for’ quality for which they were recognized.

The entertainment factor did not come from the props they used but by their acting ability. If you want to be a good magician, do not emulate another magician. Find an entertainer who you like and use him as a model, then develop your own personal style of doing magic.

Another important point: never buy a trick because you like the way it was done or how you were impressed by it. Buy a trick and practice it because it fits your personality, or learn how to manipulate cards, coins, rope, anything – with a routine that fits your ability to create patter, or a story about it. Too many tricks lay in drawers that will never be opened simply because after they were bought, the person realized the trick wasn't for him.

What's the difference between a trick and magic?

A trick is when you fool someone's eyes. Your spectator says, "You tricked me."

Magic is when you fool someone's brain! Your spectator says, "I saw it and I don't believe it."

Allow your audience to do the judging

You can never judge whether any effect you do for someone is a trick or magic to that person. It depends solely upon the perception of that person. The same trick can be viewed either way to two different spectators. Let's face it: There is no perfect trick! A trick is a trick is a trick. But in the right hands, that trick can be magic. I can tell you that I'm the greatest magician in the world. How do I know? Because my audience tells me so!

I never judge myself when I'm working. I always let my audience tell me how good I am at the end of my performance, and my specialty is close-up work, right in front of someone. I don't do magic on stage with large illusions. I also do platform magic for a small audience. It's all close-up work with cards, coins, sponge balls, dice, rope, etc. It's with whatever I'm carrying in my pockets which are everyday items.

How do you entertain more than one person?

You don't! The name close-up means that you do it no more than 2-4 feet away from one person. You must be focused on one person and concentrate on entertaining that one person as a participator and not be concerned with who is watching you. That is the secret of doing magic for more than one person. Everybody else is a spectator watching you do magic for that one person who is the participant. When you focus your attention on one person, you will never have the jitters no matter how many people surround you, only be careful of the angles when you are doing a trick where angles will give it away.

I was once hired to do magic at a picnic in Florida for all hospital employees who were not on staff that Sunday afternoon at the hospital. There must have been a thousand people at the picnic. I borrowed an intern's white jacket and a stethoscope which I hung around my neck, and with a deck of cards and some coins, I did magic for everyone at the picnic. How did I do it? I walked around like a doctor and started to do magic for just one person. In a few seconds I had a large crowd around me watching what I was doing with that one person. I repeated the process until everyone at the picnic saw me perform.

What's the difference between an amateur and a professional?

In a nutshell, an amateur has to learn a lot of tricks for a few people. That means, his circle of friends are few and they will continually say, "Show me a new trick." A professional magician has only to learn a few tricks to do for a lot of new people, wherever he performs. When I started out learning new tricks, I weighed myself down with at least 25 different effects. As time went by, I started discarding them as they were too bulky to carry and I forgot how to do most of them. I didn't have the time to practice them all. At present, all I carry is about 4-5 different tricks, mostly with coins, dice, and cards. This leads into the next question.

How many tricks do you do for a spectator?

From my experience, I do just three, at most. Why? If you do any more than that they become just tricks. Your first trick has to be a knockout. The second trick now has their attention, and the third trick must tie them in a knot – and you're finished. No matter how they beg for more, put your stuff away. That's why you'll be called the greatest magician by your audience. And please, don't do three card tricks, one after the other – it's boring.

Starting out, after only eight months of practice, I had three tricks down pat and could do them anytime, anywhere, when I was living in Brooklyn, NY. I had the good fortune to be asked to perform at Windows on the World, the famous restaurant atop the world trade center on Thanksgiving day, 1980. It would be my first gig and I was very nervous. Much to my surprise, it took me about four minutes to do the three tricks, walking around stopping at each table. That was all the time that was needed, as the patrons were in the middle of eating. If you plan to do restaurant magic and expect to get tips, then use money as your last trick, as that's the tip-off to the table that you expect a tip!

So I continued to do those same three tricks, and it worked! And I received some very good tips too. To this day, when I do restaurant magic, I only do three tricks per table, although I may vary the tricks only because I get bored doing the same ones over and over.

Learn 3 tricks well & you will be the world's greatest magician!

Why do I say this? Because if you can really do three tricks well then you have shown the ability to persevere and put in the hours and hours of practice to learn them and others and create the patter that goes along with each trick. You have paid your dues! And in so doing, you can practice any number of tricks. Now all you need to do is pick out three tricks from the many that are available on my website, choosing what appeals to you most. The internet abounds with magic shops all over the country willing to sell you books, tapes, videos, and tricks to buy. You may even choose some of them from the tricks I show you on my videos.

I had the good fortune in 1982 to be introduced to Tony Slydini, who at that time lived on 8th Avenue and 38th street in New York City. You may have caught him on one of Dick Cavett's shows in the late evening doing his 'paper balls over-the-head'

routine or his 'coins across.' He agreed to take me on as a student. He hollered and badgered me for six months every Saturday morning for an hour and a half while I attempted to learn his coin and card tricks. I loved it! I don't do any of his tricks now. What I learned then and continue to do now is emulate his style, his brand of magic, and that is – the use of misdirection.

You must decide whether you want to buy a trick or learn how to manipulate using cards, coins, ropes, and everyday objects. This distinction will separate the magicians from a person just doing tricks. Every one of the tricks that I do is a manipulation, involving some dexterity in learning them. I even make up my own tricks. All the trick I sell come with explicit instructions as to the technique in learning them, and how to perform them.

Technique

Never do a trick unless you have the technique down pat, to the point that it will work 100% of the time. No pauses, no interruptions, no excuses. This is a good time to talk about a heckler, or someone who is a control freak and has to know how it's done. Remember, magic is the vehicle by which you entertain your audience and some spectators simply do not wish to be entertained.

With a heckler, simply stop, put away your trick, and walk away. To someone who in the beginning or the middle of the trick says something like, "I know how you're doing that," stop doing the trick and say, "OK then I don't have to do it," and put the prop away. You must always be in control of the situation.

To someone who says, "How did you do that?" I say, "very well!" To someone who says, "Do that again," I say, "I wish my wife would say that." In time, you will create your own patter and answers to spectators' comments that will both amuse them and also give them an answer that they can accept.

There are many sharp eyes around and once in a while someone will say, "I saw how you did that." You will not be able to fool everyone all the time. Turn the situation around and make that person feel good by saying, "Great, you have good eyes, good watching."

Presentation

This is the second leg of a tripod that will give you a firm foundation for becoming a magician. Notice in the videos how I present the trick, the lead-in, the manner in which I set it up; the story around it. I never start with, "Let me show you a trick." You have to establish a relationship with your audience no matter how short a time that is, so that they will trust what you are going to do or say.

Never forget that the magician has the ability that no other performer has, and that is, he can make his audience feel foolish in front of everybody and that is something that you must NEVER do. You must always come across that you are working with your audience not against them. I take the approach that I'm doing the trick for the very first time and personally I don't know how it's going to turn out, so watch me do it with you.

This is a great method for introducing a trick, asking someone to help you by watching you do it and to tell you if you make a mistake. You start out like a novice and wind up being a consummate magician. It's an old ploy but a good one and it's called, 'magician in trouble', where you look like you don't know what you're doing and you miraculously get out of trouble and succeed in pulling it off.

The Effect

The last leg of the tripod refers to the question, what is the effect of the trick upon your audience? What are they expected to feel and understand about what you did. Was it a sudden vanish of an object in front of their eyes? Was it a change from one object into another? Are you really able to read minds?

You must be very clear about what it is that makes the trick appealing and entertaining to your audience. Too often, a spectator will say to someone, "The magician was very good but I don't remember exactly what he did."

There are 7 different types of magic. You don't have to be proficient in all of them, perhaps two or three and here they are:

The 7 types of magic effects

1. Vanish (disappearance of an object)
2. An appearance (from nowhere)
3. A transposition (reappearing at another place)
4. A transformation (one object turning into another)
5. Defying the laws of nature (unnatural phenomena)
6. Secret motive powers (objects moving by themselves)
7. Special mental abilities (ESP, mind reading, etc.)

Explore these types of magic to see which ones you more comfortable in doing. It's up to you to begin having fun in a hobby you've always thought of learning and now you can!