

Approaching the Learning of Magic

By Enrico Varella

I have often been asked: Which is the best way to learn magic?

Before I answer that, let's clarify a few important things...

Learning involves instructions, methodologies and processes of practice, rehearsal, and training. **Practice** is for learning specific sleight-of-hand technique, as well as psychological ploys and misdirection. **Rehearsal** is the appreciation of a whole routine, memorizing every step in the performance of the illusion. **Training** is, essentially, for the preparation of a competition.

In the pure learning of magic, Generation X and Generation Y differ somewhat in their preferences. I emphasise: these differences are based on preferences, availability of knowledge, and technological media.

A comparison of books and DVDs (including videotaped instruction) may illustrate the relevance of each medium more clearly.

Recorded/Digital Technology	Printed Literature
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Instant, downloadable instructional files/DVDs over the Internet (e.g. Theory11)2) You can watch the performance from beginning to end; and rewind, forward, and pause at will3) You can learn the methods like a 'live' lecture or workshop4) You can control the flow of the delivery5) Limited by the camera angle, pace of delivery, clarity of the script and on-camera personality6) Restricts and limits imagination when/if all you do is 'watch' passively7) Whoever purchases the idea will be doing that effect in their repertoire; thus, making it popular and commonplace (e.g. ITR, Crazy Man Handcuffs)8) Most tricks are new, and may have not had extensive audience-testing9) The quality of instructions vary tremendously, i.e. the magicians	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Challenges you to read; and appreciate the details that we tend to overlook with visuals2) The lack of visuals (photographs & illustrations) may lead to wrong interpretations3) These incorrect interpretations may lead to, occasional, originations4) Encourages imagination because words and wordings can be challenging5) May incite creative problem solving6) Engaging and more interesting when it is a rare, or out-of-print document (e.g. Secrets of a Puerto Rican Gambler)7) A book is a medium where you can touch, feel, flip, carry, glance, study, and pore over8) There tends to be a concerted effort to give credit, where credit is due to, and recognition of precedence (under References or Chapter headings)

<p>does not speak English well, or there are typological errors in the accompanying instruction/graphics, poor recording, and poor scripting and pacing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10) Crediting, and recognition may not be extensive 11) Gaffs may be included, or not 12) 'Same old, same all' 13) Prices may be ridiculously high for only one effect; plus, one/two bonuses or a very scanty DVD 14) More gimmicky in the marketing of such instructions 15) Needs electronic devices to activate (and also a reliable power source) 16) You can watch the pace, rhythm, and hear the script of the performer 17) Easily exposes magic on public domain/Internet (e.g. YouTube, TS Video) 18) Easy to duplicate and distribute like illegal DVDs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9) Books do not come out as rapidly as DVDs/videos so the wait can be frustrating 10) It takes more reading of a book to get the gist of the trick 11) Books tend to be inexpensive, unless they are books on mentalism (where it can get ridiculously expensive for sometimes-theoretical material) 12) Books tend to be published by reputable publishers (Stephen Minch's Hermetic Press, Mike Caveney's Magical Words, Kaufman & Greenberg, Mentalism Unlimited, etc.) 13) Low-tech approach to using it (just turn over, flip and read) 14) You will not get to enjoy the performer's style, personality, language, misdirection, and script (when it is not described) 15) Less likely to be duplicated
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I prefer a holistic approach: mainly from books, supplemented by DVDs to watch the actual performance by the creator, and getting reliable feedback from dependable confidantes. Sometimes, you might even establish a relationship with the magic inventors where you receive original written instructions to test out.

Whatever your choice of preferred medium, do enjoy your learning: Practise, rehearse and train. All the best!

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