20 magic tricks anyone can do (at home, the first time)

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Twenty easy magic tricks anyone can do at home the first time, with things already in the house, no grown-up step and no small parts. Ages and learning time for each.

Here are twenty magic tricks anyone can do at home the first time: each is an Apprentice trick from the Peabody Magic Shop, so it works the first try, and none of them takes more than five minutes to learn. They use a pencil, a deck of cards, a glass of water, or nothing at all.

The Apprentice level is a promise the shop checks in code: an Apprentice trick is learned in ten minutes or less and starts no later than 2nd grade. The Magic Shop has forty-four of them. To get to twenty I used one rule, applied by a script rather than by me picking favourites:

- Apprentice level only, so it works the first time;
- no step that needs a grown-up, and none of the shop's safety notes on the card: no small parts, nothing pointy, no cutting, no stains, no balloon and no special lamp;
- then the quickest to learn first, and when two take the same time, the one that fits the widest range of ages first.

Thirty Apprentice tricks pass the first two tests. These are the first twenty.

The twenty

- #: 1 · Trick: The Rubber Pencil · You need: A pencil · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 1 minute
- #: 2 · Trick: The Hole in Your Hand · You need: A sheet of paper · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 1 minute
- #: 3 · Trick: The Answer Is Always 3 · You need: Nothing · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 2 minutes
- #: 4 · Trick: Pepper Scatter · You need: Bowl, water, pepper, dish soap · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 2 minutes
- #: 5 · Trick: The Arrow Flip · You need: Glass, water, paper, marker · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 2 minutes
- #: 6 · Trick: The Bending Spoon · You need: A spoon · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 7 · Trick: The Crystal Ball Prediction · You need: Cards, paper, marker · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 8 · Trick: The Calculator Prediction · You need: A calculator · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 3 minutes

- #: 9 · Trick: The Grey Elephant Prediction · You need: Nothing · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 7 to 12 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 10 · Trick: The Stretching Finger · You need: Nothing · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 11 · Trick: Eleven Fingers · You need: Nothing · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 12 · Trick: The Magic Mind Reader · You need: A deck of cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 13 · Trick: The Salt Shaker Balance · You need: A salt shaker and salt · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 10 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 14 · Trick: The Ace Finder · You need: A deck of cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 15 · Trick: The Countdown Card · You need: A deck of cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 16 · Trick: The Rising Card · You need: A deck of cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 17 · Trick: The Levitating Card · You need: A deck of cards · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 18 · Trick: The Upside-Down Water Card · You need: Glass, water, an index card · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 19 · Trick: The Obedient Egg · You need: Egg, glass, water, salt · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 20 · Trick: The Instant Knot · You need: A piece of string · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes

Ten of the twenty fit a five-year-old, and every one fits a seven- or eight-year-old. Four need nothing at all.

The two-minute ones

The first five are the ones to start with tonight. The Rubber Pencil is a fast wobble that your eyes smear into a bend, then the pencil is handed straight over, solid. The Hole in Your Hand is a paper tube and a trick of the eyes: your audience looks down it with both eyes open and sees a hole through their own palm. Nobody can catch either one out, because there is nothing hidden.

The Answer Is Always 3 is the first mind-reading trick, sums in somebody's head that always end on 3. Pepper Scatter and the Arrow Flip come from the Potion Lab: pepper runs from a soapy fingertip, and an arrow behind a glass turns round when water goes in. Both are real science, and both pages say a potion is for looking at, not for drinking.

The three-minute ones

The Bending Spoon looks like the spoon folds in half against the table; it never bends at all. The Crystal Ball Prediction writes down a card before anybody cuts the deck, and is the trick the Magic School path starts with. The Calculator Prediction fills a calculator screen with somebody's favourite digit, nine times over.

The Grey Elephant Prediction, the Stretching Finger and Eleven Fingers need nothing at all. That makes them the ones to keep for a queue or a car.

The five-minute ones

The last nine take a few minutes of practice, still well inside the Apprentice promise. The card tricks are the heart of this group. The Magic Mind Reader finds a chosen card with a key card, and it fits the widest ages on the list, 5 to 11. The Ace Finder lets your helper do all the mixing and still ends with an Ace on every pile. The Countdown Card always lands on the ninth card, whichever number between ten and twenty is chosen. The Rising Card and the Levitating Card both use one hidden finger behind the cards.

The Salt Shaker Balance leans a shaker on its edge, held up by a few grains you blow away. The Upside-Down Water Card keeps water in an upside-down glass with only a card; put a towel down. The Obedient Egg rises in a glass when it is told to, once salt goes in. The Instant Knot ties a knot in a string without letting go of either end, because your arms were folded first.

What anyone means

"Anyone" here means anyone from about five or six who can follow four or five steps. The ages in the table come from the grades each trick is written for, and the shop's easy tricks page lists all forty-one Apprentice tricks if you want more. The shop's own top ten easiest uses a similar rule without my safety filter, so some of its picks differ from these.

If you would rather not choose, Pick me a trick asks four questions, with three boxes each, and Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, hands over one trick that fits what is on the table and how much time there is.

Questions grown-ups ask

Do these really work the first time?

Every one is an Apprentice trick, which the shop only allows when it works the first try. What can still go wrong is the performing, a card dropped or a sum done wrong, and each trick page has an out: the line to say when it does.

What should we start with?

The Rubber Pencil. It takes a minute, needs one pencil, and gets a reaction from anybody who has not seen it. Then pick one from each group above.

Do we need to buy anything?

No. Everything on the list is in most kitchens or desk drawers: a pencil, cards, a glass, salt, pepper, an egg, a piece of string. Four need nothing at all.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, and the Magic Shop needs no sign-up. What a child learns stays on their own device; the only thing sent is an anonymous count when a trick is marked as shown to somebody. When the show is over, the library has a story to finish on.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/magic-tricks-anyone-can-do