Magic tricks for beginners: the first ten to learn, in order

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The first ten magic tricks for a beginner to learn, in order: three that work by themselves, three with a helper, then four that need a little practice.

The first ten magic tricks for a beginner to learn are three that work by themselves, then three done with a helper, then four that need a little practice in a mirror, in that order. Every one comes from the Peabody Magic Shop; nine are Apprentice tricks that work the first try, and the tenth is the first step up.

The order matters more than the tricks. A beginner's first job is not fooling anybody; it is standing in front of somebody, saying the words and pausing before the reveal. So the first tricks should be ones where nothing can go wrong with the hands, and the moves should come later, once performing feels normal. I put this list together for my kids from the Magic Shop, using the shop's own levels, ages and learning times.

The ten, in order

- #: 1 · Trick: The Answer Is Always 3 · Stage: Works by itself · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 2 minutes
- #: 2 · Trick: Pepper Scatter · Stage: Works by itself · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 2 minutes
- #: 3 · Trick: The Calculator Prediction · Stage: Works by itself · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 3 minutes
- #: 4 · Trick: The Magic Mind Reader · Stage: With a helper · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 11 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 5 · Trick: The Crayon Mind Reader · Stage: With a helper · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 6 · Trick: The 21 Card Trick · Stage: With a helper · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 10 minutes
- #: 7 · Trick: The Rubber Pencil · Stage: A little practice · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 1 minute
- #: 8 · Trick: The Floating Pencil · Stage: A little practice · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 9 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 9 · Trick: Thumb Off · Stage: A little practice · Level: Apprentice · Ages: 5 to 8 · Learn it in: 5 minutes
- #: 10 · Trick: The Jumping Rubber Band · Stage: A little practice · Level: Conjurer · Ages: 6 to 11 · Learn it in: 15 minutes

The ten fit ages 6 to 8 all the way through; six of them start at five, and the other four start at six. None has a step for a grown-up or anything small enough to need the shop's choking note. What you need for all ten: a calculator, a bowl, pepper, dish soap, a deck of cards, a box of crayons, a pencil and a rubber band.

Stage one: tricks that work by themselves

Magicians call these self-working: the method does everything, and the magician's whole job is to perform. That is exactly what a beginner should practise first.

1. The Answer Is Always 3. Somebody thinks of any number and follows some sums in their head; you tell them the answer is 3. The steps cancel their number out. There is nothing to hide and nothing to drop, so your child can concentrate on looking mysterious.

2. Pepper Scatter. Pepper floats on a bowl of water, a friend touches the middle and nothing happens, you touch it and the pepper races to the edges. A dab of dish soap on your fingertip breaks the water's skin. It is real science, and the page explains it in a child's words for afterwards. Like every potion in the shop, it is for looking at, not for drinking.

3. The Calculator Prediction. You type a strange eight-digit number, somebody names their favourite digit, and one multiplication fills the screen with it. The number is chosen so the maths can only come out one way.

Stage two: tricks with a helper

Now the trick needs somebody to pick, hold or choose. A helper raises the stakes a little, and teaches the second skill: asking nicely, using their name, and letting them take the clap first.

4. The Magic Mind Reader. Your helper picks any card, buries it and cuts the deck themselves, and you find it. A peek at the bottom card before you start is the whole secret. It is the trick the Magic School path uses for its lesson on helpers, and three other card tricks in the shop build on it.

5. The Crayon Mind Reader. Your helper puts any crayon in your hands behind your back, and you name the colour. A little scrape of crayon under your thumbnail tells you. This is the first trick on the list with a tiny secret move, and it is a gentle one.

6. The 21 Card Trick. Twenty-one cards, three columns, three deals, and your helper only ever tells you which column. After three deals their card is always the eleventh down, and ABRACADABRA has eleven letters. It takes ten minutes to learn, mostly getting the dealing smooth.

Stage three: a little practice

The last four are about hands and angles, so a mirror helps. By now your child has performed six tricks and is used to being watched, which is when moves are worth learning.

7. The Rubber Pencil. One minute to learn, but it looks better after a few goes in front of a mirror: a loose grip and a fast wobble make a solid pencil look bendy. It sits here, not at the start, because it is the first trick on the list where the hands are the trick.

8. The Floating Pencil. A pencil stays stuck to your open hand while a finger from your other hand holds it from behind. It only works from the front, so this is where your child learns to think about where the audience is sitting.

9. Thumb Off. The top of your thumb slides off and goes back on. The Magic School path uses it for its lesson on practice: do it in a mirror until it feels boring, and then it is ready.

10. The Jumping Rubber Band. A band jumps from two fingers to the other two when your hand opens. It is the only Conjurer trick of the ten, fifteen minutes of practice, and a good sign your child is ready for the shop's middle level.

After the ten

The Magic School path is our free magic class: eight steps, each one a short lesson, a trick, a three-box check and showing somebody, ending with a graduation show and a diploma to print. Four of its tricks are on this list, so a child who has done the ten has a head start.

For a trick chosen for your child rather than from a list, Pick me a trick asks four questions with three boxes each. Flick, the rabbit who runs the shop, hands over one trick that fits their age, what is on the table and how much time there is, and they never hand over one your child has already performed while another fits.

Questions grown-ups ask

How long will the ten take to learn?

Add up the table and it is under an hour of learning, spread over as many evenings as you like. The longer part is performing each one for somebody, which is the part that counts.

Should my child learn card tricks first?

Not necessarily. Cards are great for helpers, which is why three of the ten use them, but the first tricks should be the ones with nothing to fumble. A calculator or a bowl of pepper is a gentler start.

What if a trick goes wrong in front of people?

It will, sometimes, and that is fine. Every trick page has an out: the line to say when something goes wrong. The Magic School path has a whole step on it, and a child who knows their outs stops being nervous.

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. On the nights the practice is done early, the library has a story to read together.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/magic-tricks-for-beginners