



Inside Ed's Head

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Why Practicing Magic Isn't Like Practicing the Piano (Pianists Don't Need "Outs")

My last performance brought home an important lesson I learned a long time ago, and forgot about completely: Mistakes made while practicing a magic trick have to be dealt with incompletely differently than mistakes made practicing a piano piece.

Magicians must know that when we make a mistake during a practice session, we must stop immediately, and think about what we'll do if we make that mistake during a performance. Many times, we will find a way to finish our trick successfully; or segue into a different trick. I'll mention a few of these a little later on.

If you practice a musical instrument, you must pay particular attention to mistakes in your performance, and spend time working on your technique, so as to eliminate these mistakes. You can take comfort in the knowledge that if you hit the wrong key during a piano sonata, it happens in a half second, and (unless you hit a LOT of wrong keys) your performance will go well.

This approach doesn't work for a magician. It only takes a half-second to lose control of a selection, but if you do, you can't blithely continue your performance; you have no performance! You **MUST** develop an alternate plan for what you do if you make that mistake during a performance.

If you can't find a good "out" for a mistake in a trick, you should think long and hard about doing the trick at all. (Very good advice if you do "The Bullet Catch.") You can't shrug off the mistake and assume you'll do it right the next time. You have to find ways to help master that part of the trick, and to maintain concentration so that you'll apply the correct technique when it absolutely **MUST** succeed. (And again – if you find yourself making mistakes, and haven't come up with an "out," forego the trick.)

Recently, I was preparing to perform a trick of my own invention. In one part of the trick, I needed to lift the deck off the table, leaving two cards behind. While practicing it prior to my scheduled performance, I inadvertently left three cards. This surprised me, as I had spent a lot of time figuring out how to be sure of separating only two cards, and had performed this several times, and practiced it dozens of times, without incident. As I was so sure this was a fluke, I deviated from my old practice habits, and acted like a pianist: I just practiced the move several more times. Satisfied that I could do it properly, I headed for the show. Needless to say, during my performance, I lost concentration, and I left three cards. Unprepared for the mistake, I lamely tried to figure out which card to get rid of, put it back on the deck, and finished off considerably less brilliantly than I had hoped. Within **MINUTES** of finishing, I had figured out **THREE** different ways of handling that extra card that would have allowed me to finish the trick with the exact same impact as if I had performed the move correctly.

From now on I'm ALWAYS going to remember to practice like a magician when practicing magic! I hope you learn from my mistake, and do the same.

How to Avoid Losing a Selection (and what to do if you lose one)

I've heard many times that it's always a good idea to use a classic force to force a known card when you're doing a "pick-a-card" card trick. If you lose your selection, you can always finish the trick successfully, by looking through the deck.

This works, but there are better ways. Take two cards, and corner short the index corners of one, and the non-index corners of the other. (You can buy a photo corner-rounder at Staples or on the internet, and make corner-short cards to your heart's content.) You might also make a short card, and/or a narrow card. These can be made with paper cutters, or an exacto-knife and a good ruler. Continuing in this manner, you might also edge-mark one or two cards. Marks on the left edge of the long sides on one card, and the right edge of another will enable you to cut them by sight to the top or bottom of the deck. Finally, you could try a breather crimp, so you can cut to it by feel. (You probably shouldn't use a quarter crimp, or similar, that might be noticeable when the spectator takes the card.)

You now have seven cards that CAN'T get lost if they are forced on a spectator. In a tough trick where you absolutely positively must control the card, force one of these first. (Of course, any of these cards could also be used to produce a miracle by itself. Force one, give spectator the deck, and let him replace is card, and shuffle it himself. You'll probably fool some magicians with this one.)

So what happens when the classic force doesn't work or when you're using a borrowed deck? You need "out" tricks. The classic "out" trick is the Invisible Deck. Upon your failure to produce the correct card, casually ask the spectator for the name of the card he picked. Mention that you had a premonition the night before about a card that had been cursed, and that you turned that card face up in a deck to try to remove the curse from it. Remove the Invisible Deck from your pocket, and voila!

Similarly, any card to pocket trick can work well as an out. After learning the name of the card, express surprise, and run through the deck quickly, down-jogging the selection as you pass it. You can now control the down-jogged card to the top or bottom via a pass, sidesteal, overhand shuffle, or even a cut. (You can also accomplish this very cleanly with a Hofzinsler Spread Cull or a Jennings Wedge Cull.) From there you can palm it, **and** produce it from one of your pockets. (I like to use a Gambler's Cop, then "produce" the card from my left rear pocket. I don't even need to place the card in my pocket. Since it appears from behind the spectator's line of sight, I just have to pretend to remove it from my pocket.)

A magical transformation is also an excellent out. Ted Annemann's Jinx switch is very useful sleight that's perfect in this situation. After learning the name of the selection, get it to the bottom, and hold a break over it. Take the incorrectly produced card and place it back on top. Look the spectator in the eye, and as you mention that you rarely make mistakes, take all of the cards above the break, and place them on the table, leaving only the selection in your left hand. You now can finish at your own discretion.

One more? Get the real selection to the top of the deck, and use Ed Balducci's "Cut Deeper" force to have the spectator, or a different spectator, find the selected card.

But what do we do when we get that rotten spectator who refuses to tell you what his card is? Well, you can use Vernon's "Emotional Reaction" from Inner Secrets of Card Magic. (Also in Card College, Volume 3, by Roberto Giobbi, page 564, under the heading of "Lost Card.") This is just a key card trick, but it's designed to enable you to find a card that has been "thought of" by the spectator.

Finally, if you wait a month or two, watch this column for my trick, "One Way From Your Mind to Mine." I promise you this location of a thought of card will fool anyone you show it to.

A Shake and a Sandwich

I recently re-subscribed to Genii Magazine (www.gennimagazine.com) for three years, and for \$15 more, I got a copy of the book Talisman, which is a reprint of a weekly magic magazine that was published during 1970-71. Hideo Kato published several methods of sandwiching a selection between two "detective cards." What follows is a how you might present this sandwich effect, using a small variation on one of Kato's methods. I like this because there's virtually no handling once the spectator shuffles the deck.

Effect: You place a pair of black jacks face-down on the table, saying they'll be needed later. A card is selected, and returned to the deck, which is shuffled by the spectator. You point out how difficult finding the card is, so you cut the deck in half, and ask the spectator to place the two Jacks face-up on top of one of the halves. You cover the Jacks with the other half, and shake the deck vigorously, ". . . to give the Jacks a chance to find you card." The deck is spread, and a face-down card is seen between the Jacks: the selection!

Method: Have a card selected, and upon its return, control it to the bottom. Hand the deck out for shuffling and in the process, Gambler's Cop, or bottom palm the card. Get the deck back and reload the card on the bottom. (You can skip this step, but the Cop adds so much to the effect, and is so easy, you'd be remiss not to do it if your performance angles permit.)

Take the deck in right hand end grip in preparation for a swing cut, but as you do so, side-jog the bottom card an inch or less to the right (Photo 1, bottom view.) As you continue the swing cut you'll have half the pack in your left hand and the other half in the right, with a card (the selection – Five of Hearts) side-jogged to the right on the bottom. (It's a good idea to put your right index finger curled on the back of the deck after you do this; it might be helpful later.)



Photo 1 From below - Left hand not shown

Ask the spectator to put the two jacks face-up on the left hand half. Use your left thumb to spread these cards to the right, so the indexes are both visible. As you do this, apply a little pressure on the upper right side of the out-jogged card. This will buckle the card a bit, (Photo 2 and 3.) Move the right hand towards the left and point to the Jacks with your right index finger. You'll now find it easy to slide the selection under the top Jack as you place the right hand half on top of the left, and square the pack. (Kato does NOT buckle the card, and it certainly isn't necessary, but it does make things a little easier. Warning: If you are standing, and your spectator is sitting, be sure that you angle your hands downward, so the buckled card won't be spotted.)



Photo 2 Buckle exaggerated



Photo 3 Pinky Buckling Card

The trick is now done. Spread the cards, show the face-down card between the two Jacks, turn it over, and receive the adulation you so richly deserve!

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