

- » How to get comfortable in the spotlight
- » The importance of patter
- » A few goofy, funny tricks to warm you up

Chapter 1

All Form, No Content

If you've read this book's Introduction, you know that only a tiny percentage of a magic trick is *what* you do. The rest is *how* you do it: your sense of humor, timing, and conversation. Hate to break it to you, but behind the scenes, some of the world's greatest magic tricks actually look pretty dumb. Out front, they look spectacular — but you may have to overcome a certain self-consciousness when doing them.

How can I possibly stress the importance of *personality* in magic? How can I cure you of worrying that you might get caught doing something silly? How can I hook you on the rush of entertaining people, even if you've never been a show-off before?

Hey, I've got it: I'll begin the book with tricks that are *nothing* but showmanship. These tricks aren't even tricks. They're optical illusions, hilarious visual jokes, laugh-out-loud quickies. These tricks aren't about fooling people; they're about *entertaining* people — which, after all, is the goal of magic. Because there's nothing for the audience to figure out, you won't suffer that kind of performance anxiety.

These tricks will, however, get you into the habit of performing. Try them out. Get a sense of how people react to you. Practice being onstage. See how it feels to talk as you go. After you do a few of these, you'll be ready for the added excitement of astonishing *and* entertaining people; that's what the rest of the book is about.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PATTTER

Patter is magicians' terminology for "what you say while you're doing the trick."

Not every magician talks while performing; some stage magicians, for example, hit Play on a playlist before doing their stuff. You, however, may find it a tad inconvenient to whip out a Bluetooth speaker as you sit down at the restaurant table or stand in line for a movie.

No magician performs in absolute silence; it's just too uncomfortable. Because the music thing isn't ideal for close-up, impromptu performances, you have to talk while you do your tricks.

Patter can take various forms. If you can't think of anything clever, just describe what you're doing. ("Now I'm going to insert this steak knife, which you've previously examined, into the melon . . .") Sometimes you may be able to create a storyline that goes with your trick. ("Centuries ago, there was a magical steak knife from India who fell in love with a forbidden cantaloupe . . .")

If you're going to perform a trick before your speech at a business function, for example, it's usually easy to make up patter that ties in with your pitch. ("Now, most consultants are like steak knives plunging into a melon. They only tackle problems they already know they can solve . . .") The point is to say *something* as you go. Make it funny, make it serious and mysterious, make it New Age and life-affirming — just say something.

Because patter is a huge part of any good magic trick, I'm going to suggest patter for every trick in this book. If you use it, great. If you don't, replace it with your own homemade patter. Just don't perform in silence.

The Anti-gravity Pencil

You don't necessarily need a pencil for this trick. You could also call this trick the Anti-gravity Butter Knife, Letter Opener, Straw, Ruler, Magic Wand, or Other Long Skinny Doodad.

The effect: You clench a long pencil (or other long skinny doodad) in your fist. You hold it high above your head — and open your fingers one by one. But the pencil doesn't fall! It hangs there against your palm, defying gravity.

The secret: The only thing defying gravity is the index finger of your other hand. Like I said, this one isn't really designed to fool anyone older than about nine

years old (although you may be surprised). But it sure *looks* good, and it's great practice for overcoming the "The-secret-is-so-stupid-I-can't-believe-I'm-doing-this" syndrome.

1. **Rub the pencil (or other doodad) up and down against your clothing, as though you're building up a static charge.**

"Did you ever fool around with static electricity when you were a kid?" you might say. "We used to rub balloons against the carpet, and then they'd stick against the wall."

2. **Lay the pencil across your open left palm (photo A in Figure 1-1).**

For added effect, you might pull it away from your skin a couple of times, as though you're testing the static charge.

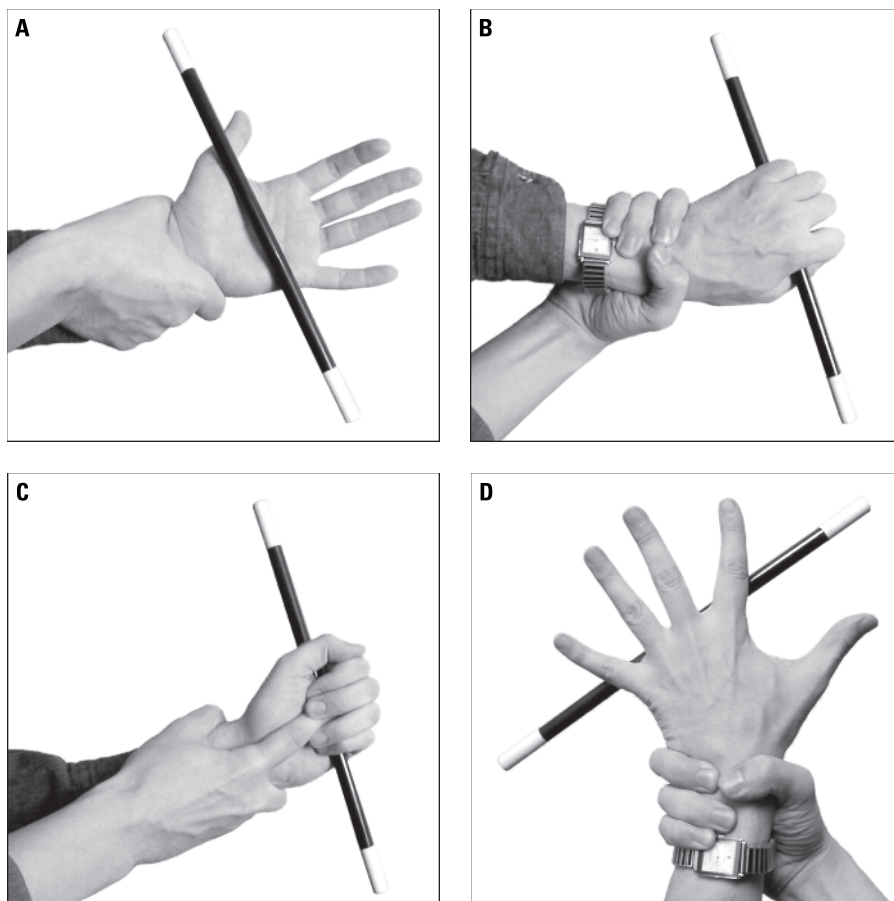


FIGURE 1-1:
At the outset, the setup looks innocent enough (A), here featuring a magic wand. After you've closed your left hand (B), your right hand (seen in C from behind) is missing a finger, although nobody will notice. And *voilà* . . . anti gravity (D)!



ACTING

3. **Close your hand into a fist. Grab your own wrist with the other hand, as shown in photo A. Turn your fist so the back faces the audience. As you do so, straighten your right index finger (which is out of sight) so that it pins the pencil against your palm (photos B and C).**

You'll have to open a couple of your fist fingers briefly to let your index finger in.

I know, I know — you're worried that people will see this move. They won't. First, your turning wrist blocks your index finger's movement. Second, your audience isn't even tuned in yet — as far as they're concerned, you haven't even started the trick yet! If you act as though nothing important has happened yet, so will the audience.

After you're in position, however, your attitude should change. Now get slow, deliberate, and highly mystical. Start *acting*.

"The funny thing is — when the humidity is just right . . ." (It's okay to not finish your sentences here. You're much too busy concentrating.) "I've found that even heavier objects can sometimes — here, I'll just . . ."

4. **Raise your hands to the level of your head. Look at your hands. With a great display of difficulty and danger, open your fingers one by one (photo D).**

Leave the thumb last; to the last moment, you want your audience to think, "Oh, big deal. The thumb is still holding the pencil." Then, when you finally do open your thumb (and the pencil doesn't fall), there's a moment of genuine shock or hilarity, depending on how seriously your audience is taking you.

At this point, spread your open fingers wide. You might decide to move your hand slowly around, maybe even shaking it. You might even *roll* the pencil mysteriously up and down your palm (with your index finger), although doing so immediately gives away the secret. (Which is fine if you're doing this for comedic effect or for children.)

5. **Finally, close up your fingers again and bring your hands down. Deliberately turn your left fist knuckles up — which perfectly conceals your right index finger sneaking back out of your fist and joining the other fingers on your wrist.**

You've just reversed the move you made at the outset. There's nothing left for the audience to see but your left fingers opening, revealing an ordinary pencil that, by now, has lost its static charge.

If anyone actually looks mystified, you can now hand over the pencil: "You wanna try? It feels really neat!"

Otherwise, if everyone's smiling and thoroughly entertained, you might decide to (a) get back to work, (b) break your pencil with a dollar bill (see Chapter 3), or (c) push the pencil up your nose (see "Pencil Up the Nose," later in this chapter).

TRUTHS OF MAGIC, PART 1: NOBODY QUESTIONS THE PROCEDURE

At one point in the Anti-gravity Pencil trick that opens this chapter, you're supposed to grab your wrist with the other hand. In 1,000 performances, nobody will ever ask *why* it's necessary for you to grab your own wrist! Deep down, they'll assume you're trying to stabilize your fist, help lift it into the air, guard against germs, or whatever.

But the more important lesson here is useful in overcoming your shyness about doing magic: When it comes to how you do something, the advantage is definitely the magician's. For some reason, audiences simply don't question the *way* you do something; they just assume that the rules of the trick are a given.

Look: If a stage magician were *really* magic, he'd just stand there in the middle of Times Square with his assistant and slice her in half with a power saw. But he doesn't. He puts her in a box. On a table, on a stage. With the audience seated out front, limiting their view of his assistant before cutting her in half.

But not a single person complains about all that setup. To them, a woman still got bisected, and it's a darned-tootin' miracle.

Pencil Up the Nose

Amazing isn't the right word for this trick. *Breathtaking* isn't the word, either.

Juvenile is more like it.

Still, nobody will forget the day you grabbed a sharpened pencil and shoved it all the way up your nose.

The effect: You grab a pencil and shove it all the way up your nose.

The secret: Not just any writing implement will do for this one. You need a longish pen or pencil. Above all, it must have a uniform size, shape, and color all the way down its shaft. Bulbous Mont Blanc pens are no good for this. Striped pencils don't work, either. You *can* use pencils with writing on them — but only if the *other side* is completely blank.

After you choose your weapon, you can start the trick:

1. Point out your sinus problem.

For maximum effectiveness (that is, maximum grossness), tie your patter into an attack of congestion. Let the “attack” interrupt something else you’re saying at a moment when several onlookers are available.

“So anyway, I was considering a 5.25 percent jumbo mortgage, but it was only adjustable after the first five-year term. So I thought I’d get something variable instead, and I — I —”

Start squinching up your nose and sniffing loudly, both inward and outward.

“Excuse me, I’ve got this — this congestion problem. It’s acting up again. Let me just take care of it. Here, can I borrow this pencil?”



ACTING

2. Position the pencil.

Grab the pencil’s eraser end with your right hand. Place the pencil tip just under your nostril, as shown in Figure 1-2, photo A. (If one side of the pencil has writing on it, the side with the writing on it should be away from the audience.) With your left hand, cover up your nostrils and the pencil tip, as shown in photo B.

Your right hand position is spectacularly awkward, I admit, but nobody said magic was going to be painless. You’re holding the eraser end of the pencil — but you’re not grabbing it from the side, as a sane human being would do. Instead, you’re holding it *from underneath*, so that your fingers and wrist are almost extensions of the pencil (see photo B). Your fingers are toward the crowd, your thumb is toward you.

3. Slowly slide your hand up the pencil, allowing the shaft to slip behind your hand and wrist.

Do this with a great deal of grunting and grimacing; you’re beyond words at this point.

Of course, the pencil never actually moves. Your left hand protects your nostril from actual impalement, holding the pencil point exactly where it is. You’re sliding your right fingertips up the shaft of the pencil, as shown in photos C and D; your hand and wrist conceal the pencil shaft (as shown in the transparent photo C). The whole sliding-up process should take about five seconds.

Because the pencil is the same color all the way down the shaft, nobody can tell that it’s not actually moving. (**Note:** Do not *actually* insert the pencil into your brain matter.)



WARNING



FIGURE 1-2: The tip goes near your nostril (A); hold it in place with your left hand (B). Keep the shaft hidden as you slide your right hand toward your nose (shown in C, transparently, and in D). After you've finished "clearing your sinuses," politely wipe off the pencil (E).



ACTING

The optical illusion is unforgettable — *if* you hold your right hand and arm so that they completely block the pencil's shaft from view, and *if* you simulate sufficient discomfort. Try it a couple of times in selfie videos before you perform it. Think: What would your face look like if you *really* shoved eight inches of plywood into your cerebral cortex?

After the pencil has been "shoved" deeply enough — see photo D — you may wish to rest for a split second, or even wiggle the pencil slightly (you know — to loosen up your phlegm).

4. **Slowly extract the pencil.**

Once again, you're really just sliding your right fingertips down the pencil shaft.

When your right fingers hit the metal ridges of the eraser end, grab it and pull it free from your nose. Look skyward for a moment and inhale deeply, as though to demonstrate how freely you can now breathe.

5. **Be polite! Wipe off the pencil on your clothing (photo E) and graciously offer it to the person who's watching.**

Say, "Here — wanna try?"

The Disappearing Anything

You won't get far in your study of magic without hearing about *misdirection*. That's when you make the audience look at the wrong thing, so they completely miss the real action of the trick.

You probably assume that misdirection is very difficult, especially with an audience all around you. Actually, though, misdirection is amazingly easy, thanks to this handy piece of psychological trivia:

People look where you look.

If you're talking to me at a party and I look sharply at something over your shoulder, *you* will turn and look, too. But if I'm looking you straight in the eye while I talk, you *must* look me in the eye. You can't help it. Meeting the speaker's gaze has been programmed in your DNA and reinforced every day of your life.

You probably assume, too, that you're new to misdirection. Actually, I doubt it. Misdirection goes on every day, all around you, in fields unrelated to magic. It happens in child-rearing. (**Thud*.* "Waaaaaahhhh!" "Ooh, look, Timmy! Here comes Mr. Teddy Bear!") It happens in politics. ("You had an affair while in office!" "Look out! There's a war in the Middle East!") It happens in relationships. ("You're late again." "Oh, yeah? Well, *you* forgot my birthday last week!")

You're about to see a trick that relies *purely* on misdirection. Mastering it will require a big mental gulp on your part — you won't believe you can get away with it — but it's super-easy and quite magical-looking. In short, I'll show you how to make *anything* disappear. Anything small, anyway.

KEEPING YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

Beware one common misdirection pitfall of beginning magicians. Painfully aware that you're doing something tricky, and deeply worried that someone will catch you, you may try to cover your actions by staring at your *audience*. That is, if you're at dinner, you might unconsciously stare into the *eyes* of your date.

They, like all humans, are helplessly programmed to meet your gaze. They will completely miss the trick. They'll also think something's wrong with you.

Instead, look above people's heads, as though you're going to chuck this poor croissant all the way to the restrooms. And it's not *staring*, anyway; it's *aiming*.

The effect: You grab something small — a dinner roll, a \$20 bill, a cork, a business card, an oyster, an egg timer — and toss it into the air, where it vanishes instantly.

The secret: It's all misdirection. You look where the thing is supposed to fly; everyone else will follow its trajectory. Too bad for them — it won't be where they're looking. The trick is over before they start paying attention!

The fake-out toss is probably the easiest to learn at a restaurant, where you're seated at a table. For this example, say you're working with a dinner roll.

1. Hold the object in your right hand.

"Hey, have you read any of the new research about the aerodynamic properties of dinner rolls?" you might say. "Check this out!"

Photo A in Figure 1-3 shows a dinner roll in pre-throw position.

2. Drop your hand back and down, as though you're preparing to throw a Frisbee.

This step and the next two all happen in one fluid motion, by the way.

3. Simultaneously, turn your head out and to the right and *look* where the roll would go if you were really going to throw it.

Again, this is exactly what you'd do if you were going to toss a Frisbee.

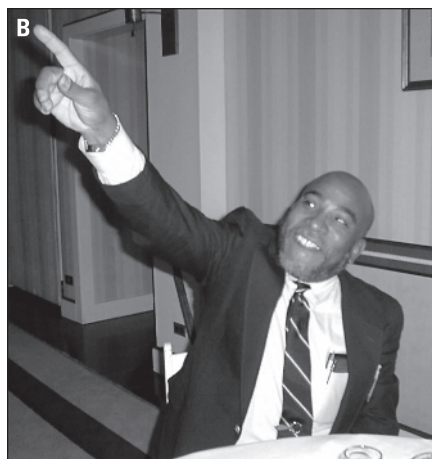
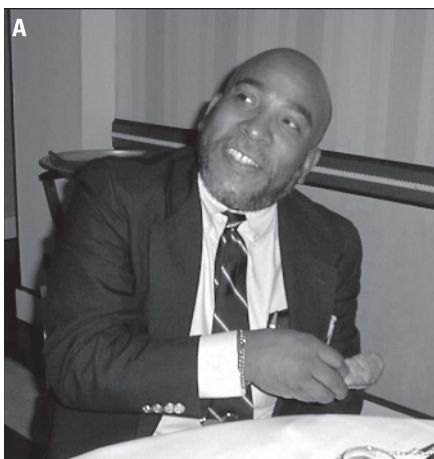
4. Drop the roll into your lap (the table hides it) and whip your hand in the direction you're looking.

Once again, your hand moves exactly as though you'd just tossed a Frisbee (photo B).



MISDIRECTION
MOMENT

FIGURE 1-3:
(A) shows the windup. You're looking where you're going to "throw the object." And then (B): It's all over.



Thanks to the power of your eyes and your violent hand motion, there's no way anyone can help jumping back and watching to see the roll's flight through the air. After about one second, they'll realize the roll is gone, and they'll immediately stare at your hands — which are, of course, empty.

The whole thing takes less than a second.



TIP

Don't be nervous, don't slow it down, and *don't look at the roll* once you've begun the windup. It's just a quick toss. Video yourself with your phone trying the trick; you'll see how incredibly convincing this illusion is.

The One-Legged Leg Vanish

Here's another gag that won't fool anyone, but will have everyone thoroughly entertained.

The effect: You hold a coat or towel in front of your legs for a moment as you sing corny circus music. When you lift the coat, one of your legs has vanished — leaving only the shoe behind!

The secret: Pull your heel out of your shoe before you begin the trick. You then simply tuck your leg up behind the coat.



PREP WORK

To prepare, grab a coat, towel, throw rug, or some other piece of opaque fabric big enough to cover your legs from the knees down. You'll have best results if you loosen your shoe before you take the stage.

- 1. Stand with your feet together. Lower the coat so that only your shoe tips peek out.**

"All my life I wanted to do magic tricks," you might say. "But people would always say: 'Hey — try making *yourself* disappear!' and they'd burst out laughing."

- 2. As you talk, pull your foot free of the shoe; your toe is touching the floor of the shoe for balance.**

Photo A in Figure 1-4 shows your starting position.

"The funny thing is, I took'em seriously. I'm working my way up to making my entire body disappear into thin air. Wanna see what I can do so far?"

- 3. Behind the coat, lift your free foot up, balancing on the remaining foot.**

Look down as you do this. (Remember: The audience looks where you look.)

- 4. Slowly lift the coat about two feet, enough for people to see that your leg is missing.**

It's actually a very funny sight — not what you'd call mystifying, but extremely weird (photo B). (Of course, it'd look a lot less weird if people could see you from *behind*, as shown in photo C.)

As you hold this position for a moment, you might fill the time by singing some corny show-biz tune, like the classic circus tune or (if you're old enough to know it) the "Twilight Zone" theme.

- 5. Slowly lower the coat to your shoe tips again. Slip your free foot back into its shoe and whip the coat away to reveal your fully restored leg (photo D).**

GRACE UNDER FIRE, PART 1

Kids, in particular, adore The One-Legged Leg Vanish. One six-year-old in my neighborhood nearly nailed me last summer, though. After a masterful performance of The One-Legged Leg Vanish, he yelled out, "Now make *'em both* disappear!"

So, I did what any self-respecting magician would do: I made something up. By sheer coincidence, I was standing directly in front of the kid's back porch. A railing came down parallel to the staircase, and it ended with a post just about at the level of my hips.

I did the same trick — except I loosened *both* my shoes. Unbeknownst to the kids, I actually sat on the railing post, lifted up both my legs, and — sure enough — convinced the kids that I was now floating in the air!

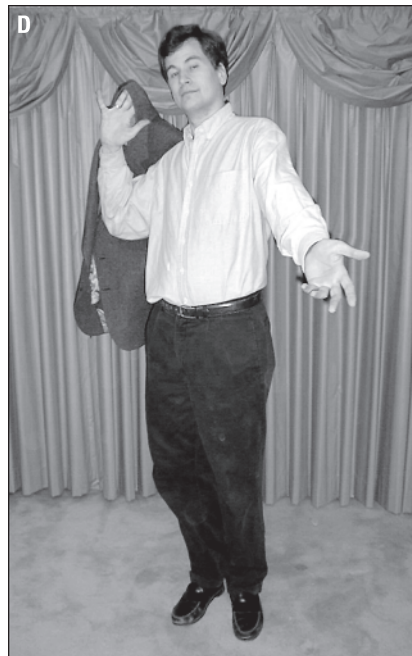


FIGURE 1-4:
The preparation
(A), the illusion
(B), the secret (C),
and the big
finish (D).

Fingertip Munch

This trick is tacky, juvenile, and completely revolting. It's one of my favorites.

The effect: You've got a hangnail. As everyone watches in grotesque fascination, you begin nipping at your finger with your teeth. Deeper and deeper your finger goes into your mouth as you bite, until suddenly — *crrrrrunchhh!* — you accidentally chomp your own bone. The sound of splintering skeleton is loud enough to hear from the next table.

The secret: The sound of disintegrating bone is provided by a piece of hard candy (cough drop, LifeSaver, whatever) you've previously socked away into your mouth. (Handy alternative: Slurp in an ice cube from your drink.)

The only tricky part to this whole affair is getting people's attention — and even that shouldn't be too tough. “DARN!” you can exclaim loudly. (That usually does it.)

1. When everyone's staring at you, stare at your index fingernail, picking at it.

“I hate getting these hangnails. You ever get those?” Now start nipping at the edge of your finger with your teeth.

2. Push your finger farther into your mouth and chew harder.

As the moment of truth approaches, ensure that your finger is actually *outside* of your teeth, between them and your cheek. You don't want to shatter your distal phalanx bone for *real*; your reputation would be more “idiot” than “hilarious magician.”

3. After about four seconds, kick the hard candy into position between your back teeth with your tongue. Bite down hard.

Figure 1-5 shows the effect.



ACTING

What makes the trick (in addition to the horrific cracking, crunching sound) is that you *freeze* in horror, motionless, eyes wide, and let out just a tiny whimper of excruciating pain.

After a moment of enjoying the crowd's aghast expressions, chomp two or three more times on the pieces of crushed candy, now pretending to enjoy the taste of fresh finger bone. Finally, pull out your finger, look it over, announce, “Got it!” and smile broadly.

FIGURE 1-5:
CRRRUNCH! The
shattering of your
bone has got to
be heard to
be believed.



How to Get Rubbery

You'll never get hired to do a Netflix special doing *these* tricks. You will, however, get people at the next table gawking and pointing. And you'll be able to entertain the kids on the airplane — you know, the ones in the seats in front of you who insist upon standing up and looking back at you all the way to London.

Here they are: two ways to stretch parts of your body in hilariously realistic ways.

The Stretchiest Thumb in the World

The effect: You grab your thumb and stretch it until it's nine inches long.

The secret: It's all in the twitching.

1. Hold your left hand out. Give a couple of twitches.

That is, flex all five fingertips twice, as though you're scratching an invisible dog's neck or slipping into a tight glove.

That's an important move; you'll repeat this twitching every few seconds throughout the trick.

"You wanna know why I'm such a great magician?" you can say. "It's because I'm double-jointed. Check it out."

2. Stick your left thumb into the bottom of your right fist. Here's the twist: Stick your *right* thumb between the right index and middle fingers.

When you plop your right hand on top of your left thumb, the *right* thumb looks like your *left* thumb sticking out. (Photos A and B in Figure 1-6 should make this all clear.)

After you're in position, twitch twice with all the "left hand" fingertips again. This time, however, your right thumb twitches with the left fingers, in perfect sync.



FIGURE 1-6: From your side, the setup looks like (B); from the audience, though, it looks like (A). With plenty of grunts and grimaces, pull until your thumb is stretched (C). You can end the trick, if you like, by yanking your thumb all the way behind your back (D).

3. Pretend to pull hard on your left thumb. Slowly pull upward with your right hand, so that it looks like you're stretching your left thumb.



ACTING

Make it look like you're really exerting yourself. Grunt. Actually, of course, your right fist is just sliding up the left thumb (photo C). Every half inch, pause and do two more fingertip twitches; those twitches go a long way toward making it look like your left thumb is still visible.

"See, I was born with this extra cartilage. It lets me stretch my fingers in unusual ways."

4. As you pull, bend and even twist your "left thumb" in hideous directions.

I like to turn mine, slowly, 180 degrees so that when I twitch, my thumb tip is pointing toward my shoulder, "Exorcist"-style. You can also try bending your "thumb" all the way backward so it touches your wrist. It looks really grisly.

If you keep stretching and twitching, eventually only the tip of your left thumb will still be concealed by the right fist.

5. **End the trick by un-stretching, slowly compressing your thumb back to its normal length, and then taking your right hand away and showing your left hand back in its normal proportions.**

Or you might make a sudden spasm, whipping your hands to either side of your abdomen, as shown in photo D. (Your real left thumb disappears behind your back.) Pause — and then twitch. It looks for all the world like you've just stretched your thumb all the way behind your back.

Medic!

The Stretchiest Arm in the World

For this grand finale for the stretchy portion of your performance, you must be wearing some kind of jacket or blazer. Anything with elastic at the sleeves won't cut it.

The effect: You point out to your audience that your coat is a few sizes too big; your sleeves are positively hanging off your arm. No problem, though: With your other hand, you dislocate your shoulder, grab the newly freed arm, and stretch it until it's a full foot longer than it was before.

The secret: It actually has more to do with sliding than with stretching, but still, you won't believe how freakish this stunt looks.

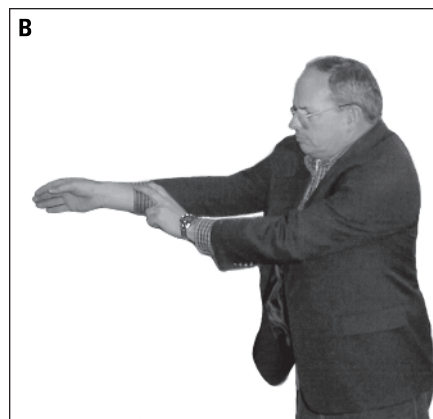
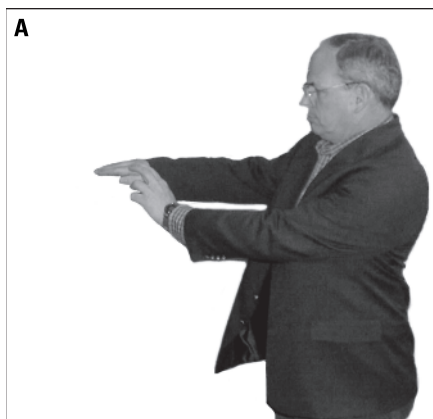


PREP WORK

Before you begin, tug your right sleeve downward as far as possible. Scoot your shoulder backward in the coat to help with making your arm look very short. Hold your right arm out horizontally.

If you've set up everything right, only the tips of your fingers should be peeping out. Photo A in Figure 1-7 shows this starting position.

FIGURE 1-7: Start with your arm as short as it goes (A). Start tugging. Stop when your arm is much too long (B).



“People sometimes wonder where I get all the money to buy my magic tricks. Simple: I save on clothing! See, I don’t care what size of clothes I get. If something’s too big or too small, I just stretch my body to fit. Like this. Let me dislocate my shoulder here . . .”



ACTING

- 1. Use your left hand to karate chop your right shoulder (make a corresponding “Aaah — !” sound).**

The idea is, of course, that you’re trying to detach or dislocate your arm.

- 2. Grab your right fingers with your left hand. With tiny, half-inch tugs, start pulling your right arm “out of its socket.”**

Let your right arm be tugged; help it along by shoving it farther and farther out of your sleeve. The optical illusion happens at your *sleeve edge*. People see the flesh sliding past that fixed vantage point — and get supremely grossed out.

With each left-hand tug, your right arm moves, so your left hand’s grasping point actually changes. Your first couple of tugs are on the fingertips; the next tugs are on the middle of the right hand; at the end, you’re grasping your right *wrist* to continue pulling it out of your sleeve. At this point, push your shoulder forward, too, to help with the illusion of added length. It takes me about eight tugs to get to the absolute end of my limb, but then again, I’m Mr. Lanky.

After you’ve stretched your arm to its max, hold for just a moment (photo B).

- 3. Drop your arm, shaking both arms, as though you’ve just run the marathon.**

“The things I do for fashion,” you can mutter as you walk away.

Off the Wall

For the next series of witty stunts, you need an ordinary object found in homes, schools, and offices all over the world: a wall.

Actually, you need a wall that ends in an opening, such as a doorway. And you need an audience on the other side of that wall.

It's a bird, it's a plane . . .

The effect: They're all in there, having their cocktails and discussing metaphysics. You're late. You're embarrassed. You want to make an unforgettable appearance. So, what do you do? Fly into the room, hovering three feet off the ground, floating halfway in, looking around, and floating casually out again.

The secret: No secret. Figure 1-8 explains it all.

1. **Stand just behind the doorway opening. Bend over as far as you can. Use one leg for balance (photo B).**

You'll be amazed at how far over you can bend — and how much of your body you can show. Use the wall itself for balance, too, leaning into it.

2. **Move into position gradually, arms outstretched, head down, so it really looks like you're flying (photo A).**

As you “hover,” look into the room. If nobody's noticing your levitation, clear your throat loudly.

3. **When you've had enough, pull yourself backward out of the doorframe again.**

FIGURE 1-8:
(A) It's a bird! It's a plane! (B) Actually, it's someone standing on one leg!



Social climbing

The effect: This one's a perfect follow-up to the previous stunt. This time, though, you enter the room by *climbing* in, as though you've just scaled the wall horizontally.

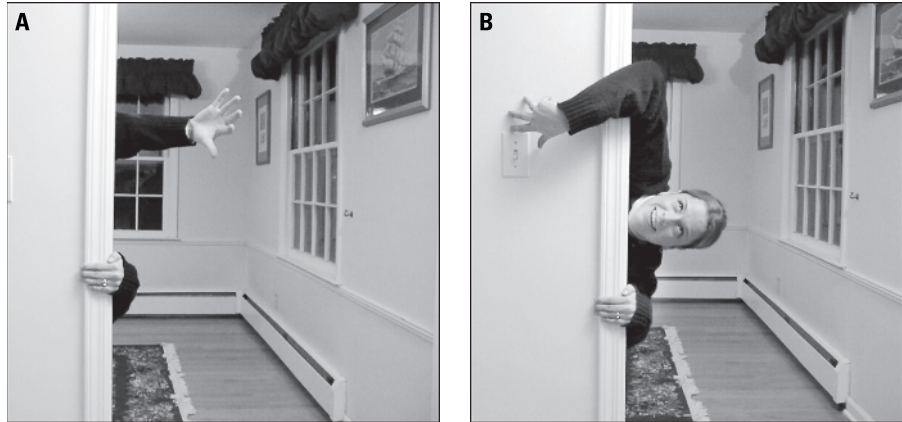
The secret: You're standing on one leg, just as you did when you were playing superhero.

Begin the effect standing a few feet behind the doorway opening. Stand on your left leg (if the wall is on your right). Bend over until your torso is horizontal. You're ready to make your appearance!

1. **Throw one hand “over” the wall . . . fidget until you’ve got a good grip and then throw the other hand over (photo A in Figure 1-9).**

Only a couple of heads in the room will have turned at this point.

FIGURE 1-9:
Who’s coming
over the wall (A)?
Bit by bit, it’s you
(B). Thank
goodness nobody
knows how silly
things look on
your side
of the wall.



2. **Strain. Pull yourself into view — just your head.**



Ham it up; a little exertion-based grimacing helps quite a bit. At this point, somebody in the room has certainly heard your grunting and directed the group’s attention to your efforts.

3. **Throw one elbow over, and then the other. Pause, look around the room, interrupt your panting long enough to say — “Oh . . . hi.”**

Photo B shows this happy moment.

But uh-oh . . . this wall is slippery!

4. **Suddenly, pull back behind the wall with an “Augh!” sound, catching yourself only by your hands.**

Feebly, strength fading, scrabble for a handhold with both hands. But in the end, it’s no good; pull yourself back to your side of the wall as though falling, letting your last remaining hand whip out of view.

(Crashing into the furniture a moment later, as you “hit the ground,” is optional.)

The mugger nobody knows

The effect: Okay, you’ve had your fun. You’ve got the group laughing and admiring your chutzpah. Now it’s time to get serious, to apologize for having interrupted conversations, to be yourself. As you stand in the doorway, smiling naturally,

assuring the crowd that the worst is over, a hand reaches from behind the wall and grabs you by the neck, pulling you off balance and out of sight. No matter how many times you reappear, this backstage mugger won't let you go.

The secret: Once again, you're doing all the work yourself.



WARNING

1. Stand in the doorway, your right shoulder just behind the wall. Reach over to grab your own neck with your right hand.

This final effect doesn't work at all if people can see anything between your shoulder and your elbow. So, stand close enough to the wall that nobody sees your upper arm (see Figure 1-10).

Acting skills are essential here. Look shocked and worried.

2. "Fight off" your assailant.

That is, after "he" drags you out of sight, reappear, mussed but okay — and now "he" has you by the face, or by the hair, or by the collar, again trying to drag you off your feet. With a little imagination — fueled by the riotous reactions of your audience — it's possible to carry on this way for 20 seconds or more.

And your reward? After you finally dismiss the mugger, you can pretend to be the victim of a very different kind of attack — a romantic one. The Hand reaches out from behind the wall, slowly, seductively, runs itself down your face and neck, and finally tugs playfully at your waist.

This time, you can pretend to be perfectly happy to leave the doorway.



FIGURE 1-10:
He's got me!