

by **James Warren**

SESSION THREE

Not every trick a magician learns goes into their performing repertoire. On the contrary, most magicians count themselves lucky if they spend \$50 for a 300-page magic book and learn two tricks that they really use! That's because tricks are not one-size-fits-all. Some tricks require advanced sleight-of-hand, others are for stage only and require special lighting, others just don't fit your performing persona, and so on.

In this third session (and in this entire course), I want to teach you a variety of different routines. I know you will not use them all; but if you a couple that suit your fancy you'll be able to use them year after year, and you'll tons of mileage from them.

So in this session let's learn *three* totally different types of magic routines!

BODY THROUGH PAPER

THE EFFECT

While technically this is not a magic trick, I have often used it over the years as part of my shows because it's surprising and fun, and amazing in its own way. You can have lots of fun with this in a classroom or counseling office, and as you'll see it's a great way to talk about thinking outside the box. This routine is fun for all ages, including adults!

(If you're already familiar with this stunt, please continue reading because I'm going to share my own way of presenting it, which is slightly different from the standard presentations I've seen.)

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You show a regular piece of 8 x 11 notebook paper (or colored construction paper) that has a long slit cut down the middle. Carefully parting the slit and peeking through it, you ask if it would be possible to squeeze your entire body through the opening. Of course, students will acknowledge the impossibility of such a challenge.

However, you then proceed to enlarge the opening in such a way that your entire body can easily pass right through the opening in the page!

THE METHOD

Get a piece of 8 ½ x 11" paper. Although you can do this with smaller (I've actually done it with a *playing card!*) sizes, regular notebook size will probably be the most convenient.



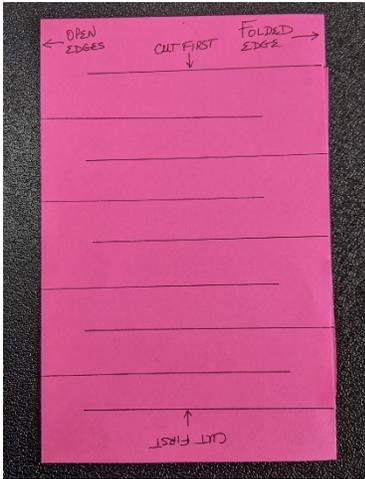
Fold the sheet in half lengthwise or widthwise – you can do it either way. With a pair of scissors cut two small slits about half-an-inch long at each end the *folded side*, as indicated in the photograph. The slits are about an inch inward from the ends.

Now open the page and stick your scissors into one of the slits. Cut straight along the center fold until you hit the other slit. You have now cut an opening right down the middle of the paper. You can cut this prior to performance, or you can do it in front of the audience.



Show the page with the slit down the middle and ask if it would be possible to pass one's entire body through the opening. Everyone will probably say no. Stress that you couldn't even pass your *head* through the paper, much less your entire body. "*But,*" you suggest, "what if we enlarge the opening?"

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Fold the page in half and proceed to make cuts along the lines shown in the photo. You can have these lines faintly drawn on the page to serve as a guide if you wish, but once you do this a couple of times you won't need guidelines. Just remember the following note.

Note: The two farthest cuts at each end start from the folded side and move towards the open side. I like to make the two end cuts first, then I make the middle cut, then I make the two cuts that are halfway between the middle and end cuts. Then turn the paper around and insert the cuts that run from the open side towards the folded side.

Notice that all the cuts go only about three-fourths of the way across the page.



When you are done making these cuts, all you have to do is open out the paper, and you'll find that you now have a HUGE RING through which you can indeed easily pass your body (or, if you're doing this in-person for a class, you can probably even pass the ring over *two* student bodies!)

Note: The standard way to present this routine is usually to begin with an uncut piece of paper and cut all the crossways slits first – then you make the long slit down the center. I do it the opposite: I make the center slit first. I do this for two reasons. Number one, it's easier. Once you have all those back-and-forth cuts in the page it's difficult to cut the long slit because you have to cut one segment at a time while everything is flopping around like an accordion.

Number two, and more importantly, cutting the long center slit first fits with the dramatic presentation in which I pose the challenge of passing a body through the slit. Displaying the slit in the paper creates a strong image of impossibility in the audience's mind: it's visually obvious that no one could put even their head, much less their body, through the opening. Starting with that impression enhances the surprise at the end when it turns out that you can indeed do it!

PRESENTATIONS

Presented simply as a kind of bizarre curiosity, this is very entertaining. It's intriguing because the audience doesn't really know what you're up to when you start making all those cuts, and the ending is delightful and surprising. All ages will find this to be an entertaining puzzle.

For older students, I like to use it as a powerful object lesson to stress ideas like:

1. Thinking outside the box;
2. Problem solving;
3. Challenging what we assume is impossible.

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These are skills that both teachers and counselors want their students to learn, and I'm sure you can see how this routine illustrates such ideas. You can use this to talk about how we limit ourselves, how we don't take the time or put in the extra effort of thought that will lead us to solutions not immediately obvious.

We also limit ourselves when we're locked in by our *assumptions*. The students *assumed* that passing a body through the slit was to be accomplished with the paper *as is*: it didn't occur to them that they might make suitable modifications, so long as those modifications don't harm the integrity of the page as a continuous structure.

This routine teaches students that in order to solve problems they have to *ask questions* ("Can we modify the paper in any way?"). In science as well as in other subjects, it is often necessary to call into question the way the problem is framed and defined. For older students these are marvelous lessons! Please try this and have fun with it!

ONE OUT OF THREE

THE EFFECT

A student is asked to make a simple choice of three objects. When the choice is made, you offer the student a chance to change his or her mind. Once the student has made a final and certain choice, you demonstrate that you knew all along exactly what choice the student would make.

The description above may not sound like much, but, trust me, if you present this properly it will be a mind-blower – and, as a bonus, it is infinitely customizable for almost any subject matter or message.

To give you a better idea of how this routine might play out, let's say the three objects are ready-to-hand items on your desk: a ruler, a book, and a pair of scissors. You'll also need a notepad and a stapler.

Let's say you are a school counselor working with a group of kids, and you want to talk about teamwork. You need the kids to think of themselves as a team. (Obviously, if you are a Phys. Ed. instructor or coach, this is a theme you will also be very interested in.) You address one of the students: "Aiysha," you say, "for a team to work well together, the members of the team have to know each other very well. They have to communicate effectively, and learn to anticipate each other's needs and the choices they will make."

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"If you and I were part of a team, Aiysha – let's say a volleyball team – I should be familiar with how you play and be able to anticipate the kinds of choices you will make. Let's see if I can do that right now!"

Call attention to the three items which are sitting next to each other on your desk (ruler, book, scissors), and hand Aiysha the stapler.

"Aiysha, I want you to place the stapler on the ruler, the book, or the pair of scissors . . . your choice. But before you do, I want to be clear: *I already know which item you will choose!*"

Aiysha chooses (let's say) the ruler, and places the stapler on the ruler. (If you are doing this routine on Zoom, you would ask Aiysha to make a choice and then *you* would place the stapler onto the item yourself.)

"Aiysha, the ruler was your first choice, but I'm going to give you a chance to change your mind. Do you want to want to move the stapler onto one of the other items instead?"

Aiysha decides to move the stapler onto the book. "Aiysha, we make a good team because I anticipated you would do exactly what you did. Open the book where the bookmark is inserted and read what it says on the bookmark."

Written on the bookmark are the words: "Your choice will end up being the book."

THE METHOD

So simple, yet so deceptive. You already know what happens if Aiysha chooses the book: you direct her to the bookmark, which says: "Your choice will end up being the book."

But what if Aiysha places the stapler on the ruler? In that case, you ask Aiysha to turn over the stapler and read what it says on the bottom. There is a piece of paper taped to the bottom of the stapler that says, "Your choice will end up being the ruler."

If she places the stapler onto the scissors? In that case, you say: "Aiysha, do you see the notepad that has been sitting on my desk the entire time? Turn it over and read what I wrote on the bottom of the pad." On the bottom of the pad it says, "Your choice will end up being the scissors."

The only thing you have to remember is *where* each prediction is written. If she places the stapler onto the ruler, you have to remember that the prediction for the ruler is under the stapler; if she places the stapler on the book, you have to remember that the prediction for the book is on the bookmark (pretty easy to remember that one!); and if she places the stapler onto the scissors, you have to remember to direct her to the notepad (also easy to remember: just form a mental association between scissors cutting the paper notepad).

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Don't worry: no one will think that you have alternate predictions hidden in various places. Present this with confidence. Practice it a few times so you can direct the student to the proper prediction without hesitation.

Again, this is a very simple effect, but it is precisely the simplicity that makes it powerful. It would be no more powerful if you offered a choice of a dozen objects. Using just three objects only adds clarity to the effect, which is that you predicted an obviously completely free choice. (And the beauty of this trick is that the choice really *is* free! You don't force her to choose any particular object, and she will feel that in her gut. That's why, psychologically, this trick packs a real wallop.)

PRESENTATION

I've given you just one of an unlimited number of possible ways to present this routine. When thinking of how you want to use this, the first thing to realize is that *you can use whatever objects you wish*. That means you can use objects that fit in with a lesson. However, you will need to be creative about where you place your predictions. ***Every prediction needs to be revealed differently.***

For example, if your objects were three different books, you would *not* want to have a bookmark in each book containing a prediction, because that's the first thing the audience would think: they'll grab the other two books and look at the bookmarks. So, if you want to use three different books, you could do it like this: the first book has a bookmark prediction; the bottom of the stapler predicts the second book; the notepad predicts the third book.

Of course, you don't have to use a stapler; you could also use a wadded-up paper ball instead. Hand the paper ball to a student and have them place it onto one of the objects. *One of the three predictions is written inside the paper ball*. This is a good method to use if your choice-objects are things one can sit a paper ball on top of, such as three books. (Literature teachers could use three novels; history teachers pick three books from the era you are discussing.) As for the other two predictions, one could be written on the bookmark (only one book has a bookmark in it), and the third prediction could be written in HUGE LETTERS on the back of the desk blotter on which the three books sit; or it could be in an envelope that has been sitting near the books in full view the whole time.

Here's another way to present this type of trick: ***no objects, just items listed on a paper tablet.*** Here is where you can *really* go for customization of this routine. All you need are three ideas associated with your topic that can be reduced to one word, or perhaps three names. Write each word on the tablet in large print, each word occupying one-third of the page. Hand the student a paper ball to drop onto the word of his or her choice. Let's say, for example, that you have three Spanish vocabulary words: La Casa, La Cocina, El Piso. Here is how you might prepare the predictions:

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Write "You will choose La Casa" *inside the paper ball*.

Write "You will choose La Cocina" *on the backside of the top page on which the choice words are written*. (Just make sure you can't see the writing bleeding through the page.)

Write: "You will choose El Piso" on the *cardboard back* of the tablet.

If they place the ball on La Casa, have them open the ball. If they place it on La Cocina, have them tear off the top page and look on the back. If they place the ball on El Piso, have them flip the tablet over and read what's on the back in large, thick letters.

No matter which method of revelation you have to use, dispose of the evidence quickly but casually. If it isn't going to be the paper ball, toss it nonchalantly into a waste can before you even make the revelation – that's one piece of evidence already out of the way. If the back of the top page will not be revealed, first make your revelation, then casually tear off the page and throw it away, with the attitude of "the trick is over so I'm just getting rid of the clutter." If you don't end up revealing the prediction on the cardboard back, put the entire tablet away as soon as possible after the climax of the trick. Don't rush it – you don't want to create suspicion where none exists. But you do want to get rid of the dirty work as soon as possible.

Using words on a tablet instead of actual physical objects allows unlimited scope for customizing this routine for your lesson or message. Just think about your topic; or maybe the issues the student in your counseling office is struggling with. See if you can come up with three related words.

This routine can be done for an entire class or one student. It can also be done in person or online. If online, you will be the one who places the ball (or stapler) onto the object or word of choice; but that will not distract from the amazement. Just be sure to make it very clear to everyone watching that the person making the choice truly has a totally free choice of object or word. Be slow and deliberate with your movements when you place the stapler or paper ball onto the chosen object/word, so it's clear you did nothing sneaky. Make sure all your actions are carried out within the monitor frame. For example, when you pick up the paper ball to place it on the student's object or word of choice, make sure your hand doesn't accidentally dip off-screen, or they will think you switched paper balls.

NOTE: By the way, if your subject matter cries out for *four* objects or words instead of three, no problem. Just be creative and figure out where you could hide a fourth prediction. The prediction will need to be written in a *different type of place* than the other three (*this is true of all the predictions: each one must be revealed in a unique way*). Also, however you decide to reveal the fourth prediction, it should be in a way that is logically and naturally related to the "field of play." For example, you can't say, "Go down to the principal's office and ask the secretary to give you an envelope." Because, of course, everyone will think the secretary had multiple envelopes and you secretly communicated to her which one to give the student. The predictions all need to be revealed in ways that make sense within the immediate environment; otherwise kids will get the idea that you have predictions buried all around the school or classroom!

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If you know in advance what student you are going to use for this routine, here is a fantastic way to incorporate a fourth prediction – or use it as one of three. Write the prediction on a piece of paper and *tape it under that student's chair!* Should the student end up choosing that object, direct the student look under their chair.

Of course, to incorporate this idea in your classroom you'll have to know in advance which student will be your volunteer. But imagine you're a school counselor and you have an appointment with a certain student in your office at 11:00. You think this routine will help drive home the theme of the meeting and help you establish rapport. Definitely use the chair method as one of your revelation options! *Just be sure the student sits in the right chair, if you have several chairs in your office.*

Final Note: You've probably realized that this is not a routine you can do twice for the same student or group.