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What are the best magic books for beginners?

by Chris Wasshuber

This is actually a very hard question to answer, because there are all kinds of beginners with all kinds of interests. I will limit myself to the performance of close-up where I gathered my own experience doing magic, and there I will focus on magic with cards, coins, and mentalism. If you want to take a short cut and not read through the rest of my opinion check out my beginner CDROM [Triple Classic: Cards - Coins - Mental](#), which gives you three all time classics on one affordable disc.

CARD MAGIC

If I would have to suggest one book or one series of books I would pick [Roberto Giobbi's](#) "Card College", which comes in five volumes. This is a modern classic which will guide you from the first time you hold a pack of cards in your hands to the heights of card magic. It teaches you much more than sleights and tricks. It covers a lot of theory, misdirection, audience management, routining - all the things which make a trick a miracle, or a guy doing magic a performer and entertainer. Most likely you wouldn't need all the moves explained in "Card College" and you can find other great routines in other great books. But having everything compact in one place, written and explained thoroughly and consistently by one professional, makes a difference. I use "Card College" as my desk reference. Whenever I need to look up the mechanics of a move, or whenever I feel like brushing up on my pass, I read it. Roberto goes into lots of details when it comes to teaching. He tells you all kinds of little tips, hints and checkpoints to master a technique. And the effects he teaches together with each technique are fantastic. Some are classics others are gems you will treasure for the rest of your life.

Sure, all five volumes is an investment of about \$170, not particularly cheap. My suggestion, if money is an issue, is to buy only [volume 1](#). Study it, absorb it and when you think there is nothing left to learn, buy [volume 2](#), a.s.o. A word to paper versus electronic version. The electronic version has one big advantage for beginners - the video clips. Being able to see how Roberto, an accomplished master of the pasteboards, performs each move is invaluable. Also you will find out some years down the road in your pursuit of magic, that an electronic research library is a sweet thing to have. If you stay long enough with magic, you will inevitably accumulate a sizeable library. You will forget where you have read

things. Then you will wish you could search. Ebooks allow you to search easily and efficiently. That is not to say that the paper version isn't excellent. It is up to you to decide if you rather stick to paper or start building your e-library.

If Roberto's first volume is still too expensive for you, or you are scared by the word 'College' - might remind you of some unpleasant times - you could consider the following books: "[The Royal Road to Card Magic](#)" by [Jean Hugard](#) and [Fred Braue](#) is an all time favorite and excellent book. It is available very cheaply as paper back or from Lybrary.com as ebook. Before "Card College" this was the recommended book for card apprentices. The "Magic Book" by Harry Lorayne covers less sleights and approaches the teaching from a different angle. It is very well written and highly readable. It focuses more on the routines themselves and describes moves along the way. For more advanced card work I suggest you read "[Expert Card Technique](#)" by Jean Hugard and Fred Braue and "[Card Control](#)" by [Arthur Buckley](#). These are more move heavy books. They still cover some excellent routines, but their main value is derived from various techniques. Card magic is such a vast field that you will find lots of material to study from. But keep in mind that there is also a lot of garbage out there. You can never go wrong with books by and about the following folks: [Dai Vernon](#), Ed Marlo, [Jon Racherbaumer](#), Simon Aronson, Ken Krenzel, Gene Maze, ... Check out online forums, ask people you admire and visit conventions to develop an understanding of what is valuable and what is not. You can always send me an email, too. If you like to learn gambling type of routines then read "[The Expert at the Card Table](#)" by Erdnase or books by Darwin Ortiz. For some Erdnase is the best book ever written on cards. Dai Vernon, the professor, thought so and some of the greatest performers thought so, too. It is definitely a great book and given the fact that it was written more than hundred years ago and still arouses so much attention and annotations proves its value. But it is not an easy book and probably in general not a good book to start with. If you are a card nut, and you are determined don't let anybody tell you where to start. Erdnase is a must read. It is up to you to decide when to read it in your career. Just make sure you do read it thoroughly.

Besides learning a lot of moves you should seriously study mathematical principles, ruses and subtleties which allow one to perform so called [self-working card tricks](#). With these tricks you can focus on the presentation, timing and spectator management, because you do not need to worry about difficult moves and sleights. My personal favorite here is "[Card College Light](#)" by Roberto Giobbi. But it is closely followed by "[Scarne on Card Tricks](#)" by [John Scarne](#) and anything by [Rufus Steele](#).

COIN MAGIC

Bobo's "[Modern Coin Magic](#)" is the classic book you should have. Even if you do not work through all sleights and routines it is an indispensable reference book any serious coin worker should own. David Roth has written another excellent book on coins - "Expert Coin Magic". It is particularly strong in coinbox routines,

where the next one is completely void of. "Coinmagic" by Kaufman is geared more towards the intermediate and advanced level but has to be mentioned as one of the coin books you should own eventually. He structures his book in chapters dedicated to a particular performer, David Roth, Dai Vernon, Slydini, Derek Dingle and Kaufman himself. The Roth and Kaufman books are quite expensive. Bobo's is available as ebook, paper back, and revised hard back. If you are looking for a smaller less intimidating introduction to coins look into "[Introduction to Coin Magic](#)" by Shigeo Futagawa or "[Coin Magic](#)" by Jean Hugard. Before I close the coin section you should also seriously consider "[Principles and Deceptions](#)" by Arthur Buckley. It has an excellent section on coins, as well as cards, billiard balls and theory.

MENTALISM

Probably the overall best resource for mentalism is the Jinx magazine. It is available second hand, reprinted in bound volumes and on CDROM. A good part of Jinx's contents can be found in the [Annemann](#) books "[Annemann's Card Magic](#)" and "[Annemann's Practical Mental Effects](#)". However, Jinx is not a structured teaching tool. It is more a resource pool in which you can dive any time you like and pull out some nuggets. The bible of mental magic is "Corinda's Thirteen Steps to Mentalism". A much more recent must read for any mentalist is "[Fundamentals](#)" by Bob Cassidy. "[Gems of Mental Magic](#)" by John Brown Cook and Arthur Buckley is a highly underrated book. Among many other wonderful routines you can find the explanation to David Copperfield's Graffiti trick. Of course the trick is not called 'Graffiti' but the method and structure of the effect are identical to the one Copperfield popularized. A more recent tome is T. A. Water's "Mind, Myth, and Magick". Modern and psychological based methods can be found in works by Derren Brown and Steve Banachek. Other Authors you should be checking out are Larry Becker, Max Maven, [Bob Cassidy](#), Eugene Burger, Tony Binarelli, Richard Busch, [Ted Lesley](#), Kenton Knepper, [Al Mann](#), [Leo Boudreau](#), Luke Jermy ...

THEORY

Many good books have significant portions dedicated to theory. Actually, it is one indication that a book is a good book, if it also covers theoretical aspects. For example "[Card College vol 2](#)" has a long theoretical section. The "[Tarbell Course](#)" has a lot of important information besides moves and effects. "[Pocket Power](#)" has a wonderful chapter on misdirection. Books that are mainly dedicated to theory are "[Our Magic](#)" by [Nevil Maskelyne](#) and [David Devant](#), "Strong Magic" by Darwin Ortiz, "Magic and Showmanship" by Henning Nelms, "The Books of Wonder" by Tommy Wonder, "[The Worker Series volume 3 and 5](#)" by [Michael Close](#) and Eugene Burger's books are also great resources for this kind of information.

GENERAL REFERENCES

If you are looking for books which cover a wide range of magic then you should definitely own the "[Tarbell Course](#)". Although it was written in the late 1920s, it is still a reference every good magician uses. If you read Tarbell from the beginning to the end you will know more about magic than the average magician. You will never need or use everything, but a knowledgeable magician should know these methods and principles. I think a card magician should also know something about big stage illusions and vice versa. Tarbell teaches you everything from balls to ropes to silks to mentalism to thimbles, cards, coins and big illusions - and much more. A much smaller but equally excellent introduction to magic is [Henry Hay's "The Amateur Magician's Handbook"](#). I would venture to say that at least a third of the living population of magicians got their start through this book. It was written with genuine love for magic. There are also a number of excellent beginners books which you can get from your local or online book store: "Now You See It, Now You Don't" by Bill Tarr, "Self-Working Series" by Karl Fulves, "Magic For Dummies" by David Pogue, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Magic Tricks" by Tom Odgen and "Mark Wilson's Cyclopedia of Magic" or "Complete Course in Magic" by Mark Wilson.