

# BASIC TRAINING

## THE BOOK

A COMPLETE COURSE IN SLEIGHT OF HAND FROM M-U-M



# IAN KENDALL



# **BASIC TRAINING**

**THE BOOK**

Also by Ian Kendall

Basic Coin Magic (2004)  
Bastard Hard Moves Made Easy (2005)  
Basic Chip Tricks (2005)  
Tops, Seconds and Bottoms (2005)  
Mucking Hard Moves Made Easy (2006)  
The Virtual Sessions (2004-6)  
The Work: The Pass (2009)  
The Work: Top Change (2009)

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## **THE BOOK**

By

Ian Kendall

Original editing and layout by Mike Close and Lisa Close

# Acknowledgements

First off, a huge thank you to Mike Close for asking me to be part of the new team of writers at M-U-M, and giving me the opportunity to develop my skills at writing technical prose.

Thanks to the Nine of Diamonds group in Edinburgh for being a sounding board for many of my daft ideas.

A huge thanks to the various magicians with whom I have sessioned, gigged, argued and played over the last quarter century. You know who you all are.

The biggest and most ma-hoosive thanks go to Elisa, Susanna and Ben for letting me know what magic really is, and for pointing out when I get something wrong.

These lessons, or at least the first thirty six of them, were originally published in M-U-M magazine between 2009 and 2011, although I'm fairly sure that you are aware of this already. The last two are extracted from eBooks I wrote in 2009. That might be new to you.

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Bizarrely, you are allowed to rip it to shreds, wallpaper your study with it, write it out by hand (honestly!) or use it in one of those awkward 'bathroom emergencies'. I won't mind too much.

# BASIC TRAINING

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# Some words from the original Editor

In the fall of 2008, I signed a contract to take on the editorship of *M-U-M*, which is the magazine of The Society of American Magicians. I did so with a little trepidation; although I had extensive experience as a writer (the *Workers* series, *Closely Guarded Secrets*, *The Work* ebooks) and a columnist (I did the product reviews for *MAGIC* magazine for ten years), I had never been in charge of producing a monthly, full-colour magazine – a magazine whose quality had been lifted to a very high level by my predecessor, John Moehring.

My wife Lisa, who does the graphic design for *M-U-M*, and I had long discussions about how to provide useful, continuous content for the magazine. We both decided that having a group of regular columnists, each focusing on different subject matter, would help us avoid the dreaded “what are going to put in the magazine this month?” syndrome. I was fortunate that several fine magicians agreed to be part of the *M-U-M* writing staff.

In my initial plan for the magazine, I had envisioned a column that covered the core techniques of sleight-of-hand magic with small objects. But I wanted this material explained in a specific way. I can explain what I wanted by quoting from the introduction to my ebook *The Work Volume 1 – The Bottom Palm*:

“The world of magic instruction is changing. The written word has been the primary means of imparting technical information, but videotapes and DVDs have now supplanted books. The Internet is replacing magic clubs. Chat rooms and Bulletin Boards make everyone an instant expert. The amount of information is staggering. But throughout this explosion one thing hasn’t changed – the way magic is taught. Magic, particularly sleight of hand, is taught by explaining how to do something. Rarely is the student ever taught how to *learn* to do something. In other words, there is a lack of pedagogical information. (Pedagogy means “preparatory training or instruction.”) The world of the musician is full of information on the pedagogical approach to mastering a musical instrument. My file cabinet contains a large section of manuscripts by Hanon, Czerny, Dohnanyi, Liszt, Chopin, and many others, all of which offer methods for mastering the mechanical complexities of playing the piano. Where does such an approach exist in the world of magic?

“For the most part, it doesn’t. One excellent example of the pedagogical approach to learning a sleight is Bill Simon’s dissection of the strike second deal in his book *Effective Card Magic*. I attempted to emulate this example with a chapter titled On Palming in *Workers 3*. I tried again, with perhaps better success, in an ebook titled *Michael Close on the Faro Shuffle*. In each case the goal was to break down the mechanics of the move, allowing the student to learn in a systematic way.

“Why aren’t there more resources that offer this type of instruction? The reason is that there are few magicians who can *really* teach. (Actually, there are few human beings who can really teach.) Real teachers need three important skills: they need a deep understanding of the subject; they need to know how to break down the subject into

# Some more words from the original Editor

understandable components; and they need to know how to communicate these components effectively.”

Who could write a column that embodied a pedagogical approach? The first (and only, actually) name that came to mind was Ian Kendall. I had met Ian in Blackpool many years ago, got to know him better when I lectured in Edinburgh in 2005, and discovered that he shared my interest in the pedagogy of sleight of hand. (In an interview that appeared in the December 2011 issue of *M-U-M*, Ian discussed his life story, including how he developed his teaching method. I confess that, because of that interview, I cannot watch the TV show *The Big Bang Theory* without thinking of Ian.) I asked him if he would be interested in writing a monthly column devoted to that subject. Happily for all of us, he agreed, and managed (sometimes by the skin of his deadline) to deliver thirty-six columns of valuable information. Basic Training (the name of Ian’s column) was exactly as I’d hoped it would be, covering everything from the Elmsley count, to juggling, to the muscle pass. In 2009, in appreciation for his writing, Ian received the prestigious Leslie Guest award from the S.A.M.

And now you, oh lucky student, have all of Ian’s columns available in one place. Read, study, practice, and think, and you will establish a rock-solid foundation of technical skills that will serve you well as you continue your explorations in the fascinating world of conjuring.

Thanks, Ian.

Michael Close – Editor, *M-U-M*

## Some email words from the Original Editor

Can I expect something for May soon?

We're two weeks out from our upload date for the November issue. Please give me an ETA on your column.

Could use your column ASAP.

We're on a really tight schedule for the September issue. I absolutely have to upload the magazine on the 10th of August. So, please get your column to me as soon as you can.

If I can get your column by the end of the month, it would be greatly appreciated.

I really need this as soon as you can get this to me. And I'm only going to say this one more month. :)

## Introduction to lesson two

“ By the time I got to writing this lesson the first issue had not yet been published, so I was still very much in the dark as to how it would be received. Would I get panned? Am I being *too* verbose? Would the idea of the Basic Training course crash and burn?

This was another attempt to right some wrongs that I'd seen over the years. I've encountered professional magicians who handled two cards either like they were made of glass or heavy steel, and turned them over with a triple pirouette flourish that screamed MOVE!

On the plus side I got to introduce a few definitions that were used for the rest of the series, and it was the start of the 'miserable git' photos that would become the hallmark of the lessons.

”

# Lesson Two

## The Double Lift

### Introduction

Hello, and welcome back to Basic Training. Last month we looked at how to break a move down into its parts in order to simplify the learning process. This month we will continue that approach while learning a classic and extremely useful utility card sleight. We will then look at the correct blocking of the move, so we can direct attention away from the covert action when it happens. First, though, I want to define a couple of terms that I will use often, both in this lesson and in those to follow.

### Open Position

Look at Photo 1. This is Gary Kurtz's open position. I first encountered this idea in Gary's excellent (and highly recommended) book *Leading with your Head*. The deck is held loosely in the left hand, and both hands are at waist level. Other than having your arms down by your side (which is not always possible during a card routine), this position has the least amount of inherent "suspicion." Note also that the shoulders are relaxed and I am standing up straight. Whenever possible after a sleight you should return to open position.

Getting used to this (if you are not already) is really very easy – stand up straight and let your arms hang down by your sides. Shake your shoulders a bit, and then bend your elbows so that your forearms are parallel to the floor. That's all there is to it, but there is one error that beginning magicians sometimes make, and I feel I should mention it: if your upper arms are away from the vertical (another way to look at it is to check if your elbows are forward of your waist), then you are using your back muscles to hold them there. This will cause tension in your back, which will make your shoulders rise slightly. This will be noticed by the audience as a sign of tension. (I'll go into this in more detail in a future lesson,



Photo 1

but for now please take my word for it.) Also, holding your arms out for a long period gets tiring!

### The Cage

Now look at Photo 2. Although this simply looks like my hand and a deck of cards, there is more to it than that. I will refer to this position as the cage, and its use will become very apparent in a short while. The deck is held very loosely in the hand, with the index finger around the front of the deck and the other three fingers along the right long edge. The thumb rests on the left edge of the deck. The front right corner of the deck is about half an inch below the inner left corner, so that the cards are naturally resting on the first and second fingers. The advantage to the cage is that if a card is dropped, flipped, or thrown onto the deck it will slide square with the rest of the cards with no effort from you. This allows us to be more relaxed



Photo 2

about certain moves, removing the guilt factor (more on this later). For now, practice holding the deck in the cage grip and drop a card onto it, slightly injogged. When it automatically slides square, you know the correct angle at which you need to hold the deck.

### The Double Lift

Let's get into this month's lesson. The double lift is very possibly one of the oldest card moves extant, probably invented less than an hour after the first playing cards. It is described in almost every beginner's card magic book, and it plays a part in many routines, from classics like the Ambitious Card to small-packet tricks. Many versions of this move, however, require a "getready" – a break is obtained under two cards prior to the lift. Although these methods have been around for hundreds of years – and I will get a lot of flak for the following heresy – I feel there is a problem with this approach; in order to obtain the break it is necessary to come out of open position without any motivation, and in the inexperienced hands of a beginner this can cause a "jolt" of unnaturalness

that can frame the action. Another potential problem is that the action of the double lift often fails to mimic the genuine action of turning over a single card, and again this goes against the ideal of naturalness. In order to address these concerns I will show you a method that requires no getready, is relatively easy to learn, and closely resembles the single-card handling.

Pick up your cards and hold them in the cage grip. If you can stand in front of a large mirror, that will help immensely. I'm going to assume, in this lesson at least, that you are holding the deck in your left hand. If you are one of the few who hold the deck in your right hand, either because you are left-handed or John Carney, I'll assume you are well versed in transposing instructions. Look at yourself in the mirror, and get into open position. We are going to turn over the top card of the deck, but I want you to pay special attention to your forearms and wrists as you do. There are various ways that you can move your hands together, but only one involves no tension (and remember – the easiest method is *always* the most natural). Try keeping your left hand still and move your right hand over, then reverse that; move the deck to your stationary right hand. Both of these will look and feel wrong, which has more to do with our inbuilt love of symmetry than any physiological reason. So we know that we need to move the hands together, so that the deck meets the right hand in the center of our body. There are a couple of ways we can do this, so let's try them out so we can see which is more natural. First, bring the hands together without rotating the forearms. The first thing you will notice here is that your right wrist will be bent back slightly, which is not a natural position. Go back to open position and rotate your thumbs slightly towards each other so that the right edge of the deck is almost pointing to the floor. I hope you will see and feel that this is a more natural way for the hands to meet; this action is a major part of the lift. Look at Photo 3 for the approximate positions. Practice moving the deck from open position to this "closed" position (to give it a name).

Now it is time to standardize the handling for turning over a single card. By that I mean that we need to make sure that we can turn over a single card in the same manner as the double.

Look down at the deck in closed position. If you are holding the deck in a light cage, the deck will be bevelled forwards and to the right. Your left thumb will be resting on the extreme left edge of the top card, but not pressing down on the back of the card (at this point – there may be a time when you need to use the thumb, but we'll cover that later). There should be a gap of about half an inch between your left middle and ring fingers, and it is here that your right index finger contacts the extreme right edge of the top card. However, if the right hand simply comes up from below, we run the risk of pushing that card square, which is something we do not want. So, as the right hand approaches the edge of the deck, it goes a small distance *past* the edge, and the edge of the top card is



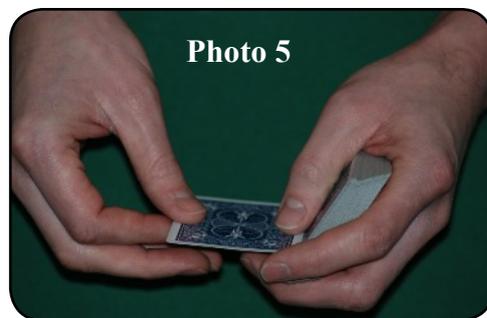
placed against the pad of the right index finger, about an eighth of an inch in from the first joint. If you move your left hand slightly to the left at this point, the top card will come away from the deck. Look at Photo 4 to see this.

In order to turn the card over, a few actions happen in one flow, so we will have to break them down. First, the right middle finger comes up to join the index finger underneath the card while the right thumb *lightly* contacts the right edge of the card, but the majority of the thumb pad is on the fingers beneath (it's a very similar grip to the one used in the Ghost count – refer to last month's column for more details). The right hand begins to move to the right, but the greater action is that of the left hand, which moves the deck to the left. During this action the left side of the top card will slide along the top of the deck, until it comes to rest on the left fingertips. See Photo 5 to see this. You'll notice that my left thumb is still in contact with the edge of the top card. This is not essential, but can be useful at a later stage. Feel free to practice both methods – all you need do is push your left thumb across the top of the deck while the left hand moves away and the edge of the top card will stay flush against the top of the deck.

There is a possibility, if your cards have a slight warp, that you will have difficulty separating the top card cleanly. If this is the case, simply move your left thumb onto the back left edge of the card and apply a small amount of pressure. Trial and error will show you just how much to use, as every warp and card thickness will differ.

Position check: you are in a closed position, with the single card face down on your left fingertips, held between your right index and middle fingers and thumb. To turn the card over you are going to flip the card by rapidly extending your right fingers and releasing the card with your thumb. The card will turn over, landing on the deck as you rotate your left hand outward back into the cage position. Because of the cage, the card will slide flush with the pack as you move your hands apart into open position. (If the flipped card lands a bit outjogged, it is a simple matter to pull the card flush with your left index finger.) You do not want to *place* the card onto the deck. It's one card – there's no need to treat it like china.

That's the one-card turnover. It seems like a lot of work just to turn over a card, but once you have this action smooth, the double



will be a piece of cake. First, though, we have to turn the card face down again. If your deck is in good condition, or you own a Porper clip, the reversed card will be flush with the deck and all you have to do is repeat the previous actions to turn the card over again. However, most of the time there will be a bridge in the cards, and this can be a good thing. Try this – if your cards are in good shape, put a slight convex longitudinal bridge in the reversed card – if you already have the warp, you are good to go. Press down on the left edge of the top card, and you will see a lovely natural break appear on the right edge. This makes returning the card so much easier, since you can press down with your left thumb as you move into closed position and the break is already there for your right fingers to pick up. Draw the card to the fingertips again, and flip it back over into the cage.

## At last – two cards

Before we go into the mechanics of picking up the double, I want to address the biggest problems beginners have with this move: undue *tension* and *attention*. To the audience, you are simply turning over a card. It is such an innocuous act that to give it any extra attention would be unnatural. Also, if we hold two cards in a vice grip, terrified that the edges will split, there is a greater chance that the edges *will* split. The secret is to hold the cards lightly; Photo 6 shows a very slight bend in the cards, which will keep them square. Photo 7 shows what happens if we have that vice grip – the cards have an unnatural bend to them, and, because there is so much pressure, there is a greater chance of the cards sliding apart.



Photo 6



Photo 7

You will need to get comfortable with handling a double, so here are some exercises. Take two cards and hold them in left-hand dealing grip. It doesn't need to be the cage, but the cards will naturally be square. Moving your left ring and little fingers out of the way, take the cards loosely in the same right hand grip that you

used to draw off the single card – two fingers below and the thumb in the pinch grip. Rotate your wrist to show the face of the cards, and then put them back into your left hand, all the while keeping them square. Repeat this, but this time flip the cards into the left hand using the same method as before. Play around with the double for about five minutes, and by that time you will have a much better understanding of how you can handle the cards in a natural manner. Remember that a looser grip is usually better, but not so loose that the cards fly apart!

We need to learn how to correlate what we already know into a double lift. The good news is that since we have gotten this far, the double itself is very easy. Start in an open cage position and bring the hands together as before. Pick up the top card, its edge slightly in from your first joint on your right index finger. This is the same as Photo 4. Now comes the sneaky part: with the *pad* of your right index finger, pick up the second card (Photo 8 shows this). Don't worry about the gap for now; at the moment, just make sure that you can pick up the two cards. In order to get the cards square, all you need to do is bend the first joint on your right index finger and the top card will fall flush with the second card (photo 9). Try it and see. From here, the action is exactly the same as before. With a *light* grip on the double, the hands separate slightly so that the left edge of the double slides down the deck. The double is flipped over onto the caged deck, just as you did in the two-card exercises. And that's the double lift.



Photo 8

Another place you will find the double lift is in packet tricks. Doing a deceptive double lift from a small packet is a wee but harder than from a full deck, but not so much that it should cause you concern. The mechanics are essentially the same; handle the cards lightly and everything falls into place. The knack bit is getting the double pickup. To practice this, start with about twenty cards, and go through the motions of the standard lift. This should give you no problems. Then go down to ten cards and try again. Once you have done that, remove one card at a time and try again. When you are down to four or five cards you will have a good idea of



Photo 9

the move.

As you practice you will be able to reduce the gap between the two cards during Photo 8, and in time you will be able to pick two cards as one. At that point you will have a truly useful sleight, but it will take both practice and the realization that there are no shortcuts. Sorry about that.

So what do you do during that practice time? I said at the start that we would talk about blocking, and this is where we will learn that the move is still useable before we have mastered the two-card pick.

## Blocking

Before I talk about the double lift specifically, I need to address one of the most prevalent misnomers in magic – misdirection. I would imagine that all of you have heard about misdirection, many of you will know something about it, and some will have a decent understanding of the basic principles. It is, after all, at the core of our work, but the name is all wrong. We need to be thinking about *direction of attention*, and we need to be thinking about it all the time. The term “misdirection” implies that the audience is looking at the wrong place; the “mis” stem of the word implies that. In truth, during a good magic performance the audience will be looking at exactly the *right* place, and that place is exactly where we want them to look. And we do that by *directing* their attention. Unfortunately, the misnomer has found its way into the language, so I will refer to it as misdirection from now on, while silently gritting my teeth as I type...

I’m sure you will have heard the two prevalent tenets of misdirection: “it’s in the eye” and “if you want them to look at something, look at it yourself.” (And John Ramsay’s corollary, “If you want them to look at you, look at them.”) To understand these statements, we need to digress into a small biology lesson.

You probably know that the eye has on its back wall a layer called the retina. You may know that the retina is made up of two types of cells: rods, which can determine light and dark, and cones, which can determine color. You may not know, however, that on the back of the eyeball, directly in line with your pupil, is a small indentation called the fovea. It’s not very big, but crammed into the fovea are about 90% of the cones in your eye. The remaining cones are scattered around the rest of the retina, along with 90% of the rods. The result of this is that we have a detailed field of vision of about twelve to eighteen inches, depending on the distance to the object being viewed, and outside this space we have a fuzzy picture at best. For another example of this, you may have noticed that in order to see something at night, you need to look slightly to its side. This is because there are not enough rods in the fovea.

The other aspect we need to consider is that humans (and the majority of vertebrates) use the eyes as a primary method of non-physical contact. This is why some police officers wear dark glasses – the lack of eye contact can be intimidating. Examples abound: face-to-face meetings are always easier than phone calls, denying eye contact can be a very effective punishment for small children,

a look from a friend or partner can lift your mood. The eyes are very powerful things. As an added bonus, we are conditioned from an early age to look at someone when they look at us, and we find it easy to follow someone’s gaze from a distance. And gaze can be a very valuable tool in misdirection.

The most important part of all this is that when we are in open position, the deck and our hands are out of the field of detailed vision when someone is looking into our eyes. They will be able to see the deck in their peripheral vision, but it is in no way a detailed image. As such, small discrepancies – like having a small gap between two cards – will go unnoticed.

So how do we use this? Look at Photo 10. I am in closed position taking the double, but because I am making eye contact with the camera (or spectator) it is very difficult *not* to look at my eyes. The spectators will be aware of the deck, but only after I have flipped the card into the cage do I look down at the deck (Photo 11). Because the audience had my gaze before, they will follow it down to the deck (I’ve broken eye contact), and they will see the card when I want them to see it. It goes without saying that I don’t look down until I can feel that the card is flush with the deck. I then look up again, and continue with whatever it was I was doing.

The most important thing to remember during all this is that you are turning over a card. No more, no less. It is such an innocent action that to pay it any attention would be unnatural. Make sure that you handle the double card lightly. Get rid of any guilt. If you have their eyes, they cannot clearly see the cards in your hand, which will forgive any small mistakes.

Take things step by step. Don’t rush ahead before you are completely comfortable with the preliminary training actions and you will have the move down very quickly. If you rush, you may learn some bad habits that will be hard to undue further down the road. Next month we will talk about a classic coin move. I hope you can join me. ♦





# Final Words

Well, that was Basic Training. I hope you enjoyed the lessons and got something out of them that will improve your magic. I had fun writing them (for the most part) and I'm proud to be able to send them out into the world one more time.

If anyone is interested, the lessons were originally typed up in Word and the photographs were adjusted in Corel Photo-Paint. The PDFs were extracted from the magazine proofs with Acrobat 9 Pro and then imported into Serif PagePlus X4. They were then re-read and edited using my eyes and formatting glitches were ironed out. The proof photographs were replaced with the originals, and the book was laid out. Then, I had to do everything again because the pages were not set to A4, which meant all the formatting and placement was skew-whiff. Then there were all kinds of page numbering issues which had to be dealt with and finally things were looking better.

For the *real* geeks, this font is Bookman Old Style, which I quite like, and the main lessons are set in Times New Roman. The final two lessons are set in Ariel and Cooper Black. This machine is a Dell Studio 540 with three monitors running Windows 7 and a whole host of other stuff hanging off it.

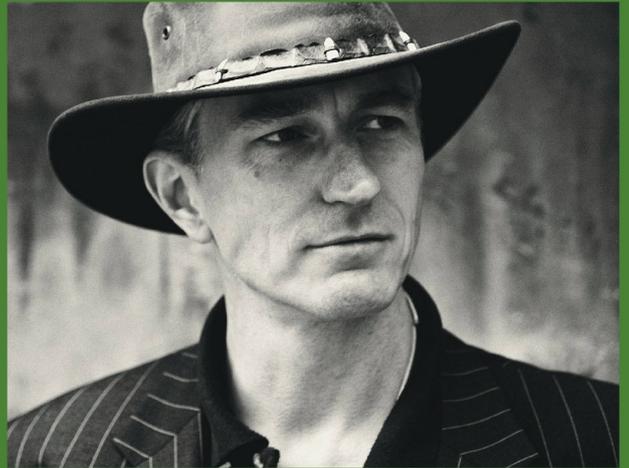
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[www.basictrainingthebook.co.uk](http://www.basictrainingthebook.co.uk)

“Why aren’t there more resources that offer this type of instruction? The reason is that there are few magicians who can really teach. (Actually, there are few human beings who can really teach.) Real teachers need three important skills: they need a deep understanding of the subject; they need to know how to break down the subject into understandable components; and they need to know how to communicate these components effectively.

Who could write a column that embodied a pedagogical approach? The first (and only, actually) name that came to mind was Ian Kendall.”

Mike Close (from the foreword)



Between 2009 and 2011 a very special column appeared in M-U-M, the in house magazine for the Society of American Magicians. Conceived to be an introduction to sleight of hand aimed at beginners, the thirty six lessons ended up being one of the most detailed courses in conjuring to date. The topics covered included all aspects of magic; cards and coins, balls, ropes and cups, stand up and close-up, interspersed with real world performance hints and tips from someone who has spent the time in the trenches.

This collection contains all the thirty six Basic Training columns, plus two extra lessons on the Classic Pass and the Top Change.

Ian Kendall has been a professional magician for twenty years, and has been teaching for longer than that. He has performed all over the world in many different types of venue. In 2009 he was awarded the Leslie P Guest award for Excellence in Magic by the SAM for his work on Basic Training. He lives in Edinburgh with his wife and two children and too many computers.

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