



# Magic and Perception: The Art and Science of Fooling the Senses

*Bob Friedhoffer*

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An excerpt from the beginning of the first chapter:

## WHAT IS PERCEPTION?

When I first started doing magic tricks, I thought it was awesome that I could fool people. I could do things they couldn't do. Not only couldn't they do them, they couldn't figure out how to do them.

Being the nosy kind of guy I am, I wanted to know how and why people get fooled. If I knew that, I thought, maybe I'd become a better magician. So I started studying different things, both in school and out-things such as acting, stagecraft, and the history of magic and science.

It dawned on me, after a while, that there are many scientific reasons for why magic fools people. Some of them have to do with laws of physics, which I've discussed at length in some of my other books. Others are based on principles of chemistry and biology, which I've touched on in other books. But quite a few of the reasons have to do with the science of the mind, better known as psychology, and the science of the brain, neurology. These are the areas this book concentrates on.

Right about now you might be wondering, "How can knowing anything about the science of the brain help you fool someone?" The important part of a magical performance, I discovered, is not what you do, but what people think you do. In other words, what counts is how the audience perceives the trick.

So what the heck is perception anyway ? The tenth edition of *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* gives one definition of the word as "to become aware of through the senses." That gives a good general idea of perception, but it doesn't tell the whole story.

To be precise, perception is the interpretation by the brain of information gathered by the five senses — sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste. The organs that allow us to perceive are our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. The input to these organs is called stimuli. Once received by our organs, the stimuli is sometimes called *sense data*.

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