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Here's the Real Trick: Practice Makes Presto

"Boogidee, boogidee," Noland Montgomery commands. And just like that, two foam balls become three in a clinched fist.

It's magic, and if you ask him his secret, he won't tell you. That's the golden rule of magic: no telling how the trick is performed.

Telling "takes the fun out of it for the person who just saw it," Montgomery says.

Montgomery, 56, started learning magic when he was about 12 years old. His father was in the Foreign Service. His family moved frequently and lived all over the world. Montgomery was an avid reader, and after he came across a book about magic tricks, he was hooked.



"I read it from cover to cover many times," he says.

Montgomery says that mastering a magic trick was for him similar to how some kids play video games. He would practice over and over again until his performance was flawless.

After years of perfecting his tricks and showing them to family members ("You wear your family out pretty quickly," he says), Montgomery made the leap from amateur to professional.

After many performances, he overcame his nervousness.

Eventually, Montgomery quit his job as a legal assistant to dedicate all his time to being a magician, performing for children and adults.

Rather than commuting to work through heavy traffic, Montgomery wakes up, has a cup of tea and practices. Most of his performances are in the evenings and weekends, so he spends his days preparing.

Three rooms of his house are dedicated to his work, and one includes a video camera that he uses to film his routines. When he watches his performance on tape, he is able to figure out what he can do better. Being a professional magician has its challenges. It can take years to master some tricks, and each trick requires a lot of practice. And there is always a danger of messing up or performing a trick that audiences don't react to. "You deal with it as best you can," Montgomery says with a shrug.

Montgomery has learned from his peers, but for the most part he has taught himself. His hard work has paid off. He was named the best magician in Washington four of the past five years. He has even performed at the White House!

There isn't a class to take in high school, he says. You have to read books; watch other magicians perform; and practice, practice, practice. Montgomery says that anyone, at any age, can be a magician.

"You become a magician the first time you learn a magic trick," he says.

— **Amy Orndorff**