

Starting back in 2017 I started tracking how “memorable” a trick was. That may seem like a hard thing to quantify. That’s because it is. I mean, if you go up to someone and say, “Remember when I vanished your bill and it appeared in a lemon?” They might say, “Uhm, yeah.” But just acknowledging something after being reminded that it happened doesn’t mean that thing was “memorable.” So I used a different metric, as I wrote about on [New Year’s day of 2018](#).

[O]ne thing I could track, to a certain extent, was resonance. When someone talks to me, or texts me, or calls me long after the trick and mentions it, I can make note of it. When 6 months after a performance someone tells me they had a dream about it, that can be seen as a data point. Even on a shorter time scale, if someone brings up a trick later that same night, that’s obviously a more enduring trick for them than something they never think of or mention again.

And the idea behind tracking this was to identify what aspects of a trick might make that magic feeling linger. Would something visual endure more than something cerebral? Is something mildly magical that happens in their hands remembered longer than something incredibly magical that happens in mine? Or is it the other way around? Is a card trick more memorable than a coin trick? Or are they equally forgettable?

So, for over five years, I’ve tracked in the databases that housed my repertoire of tricks, how frequently someone would mention a trick after it was performed.

Not every trick got mentioned, of course. It broke down into about thirds. 1/3rd of the tricks wouldn’t come up again after the interaction. 1/3rd would come up later that day. And then another 1/3 would be mentioned at some other interaction down the road, days, months or even years later.

I decided to look at Resonance (Memorability) vs Time (How long the trick takes to perform). I went into my database and added a column for approximately how long each trick takes. When I compared the two variables, I ended up with a correlation that looks like this...

The lowest part of that dip (the lowest “Memorability”) were for tricks in the range of 30 seconds to three minutes.

The effect of the length of the trick on Memorability was most pronounced when tricks that were under 5 seconds (essentially instantaneous tricks) or tricks that were greater than 5 minutes.

A couple things were interesting about this to me.

First, I would guess that *most* tricks magicians perform fall into that 30 second to 3 minute deadzone. We're not doing ourselves any favors with the pacing of our tricks.

Second, even when I had a trick with with a very strong, or interesting, or funny story to go along with it—if it was too short—it often wouldn't "stick" with spectators. As good as the presentation may be, it needs some time to germinate.

Third, even if a trick was mostly dead time, as long as there was enough time between the start of the trick and the end, it still had increased resonance. You don't need to do a 45 minute continuous one-act-play for your spectator. When performing casually, you can introduce the concept of a trick, let that sit for a while. Come back at a later time to demonstrate the trick and maybe it doesn't quite go right. Then come back a final time and fulfill the premise of your trick. And even if the total length of those interactions was a couple of minutes total, it will be *considerably* more memorable than a trick that takes 2 minutes in real time.

As the graph suggests, there was also a spike in Memorability for tricks that were over very quick. A bill change with little to no preamble. Changing the color of an object. Vanishing something you no longer need. Essentially the sort of thing I do in the Distracted Artist style.

From my experience, what people remember are quick, laser-focused moments of magic, or extended immersive experiences. With the immersive experiences ultimately providing the greatest memorability.

Does this mean I don't do any 45 second or 2 minute tricks?

No. But I do ask myself, “Can we concentrate this effect down to something punchier? Or can we broaden the experience to something more engrossing for a longer period of time?” Sometimes you can, sometimes you can’t. Some tricks really aren’t intended to be anything more than a sort of brief moment of entertainment. But if you’re hoping to do something *particularly* affecting, you may want to play around with the time element.