

THE TRULY IMPROMPTU BOOK TEST

A mentalism routine by **ALAN FISHER**

EFFECT: With the help of two volunteers, the magician is able to determine the exact word on a page in one of three borrowed books that one of the volunteers is looking at. All of the props are borrowed; nothing is supplied by the magician. None of the books are gimmicked and there are no stooges, codes or confederates involved.

NOTES: This routine is best performed at a private party or other social function in someone's home when magic is requested, and not as part of a stage show or performance where it could look like gimmicked books are being supplied by the magician. The effect is based on the "Himber Book Test" by Richard Himber, published in *Tarbell Volume 4*. Alan liked the effect but felt the choice of page numbers was too limited in that method. So, he created a spreadsheet, experimented with the numbers, and came up with the mathematical formula described below that he felt made the selection feel more like a totally free choice.

PROPS: Everything is borrowed; three paperback books, a pen or pencil, a piece of paper or notepad and two volunteers.

PRESENTATION: A volunteer selects any three paperback books from any shelf on the bookcase. It's a free choice. Paperback novels are the best to use; they're easy to hold and flip through. Also, they usually don't have any pictures or drawings in them. Borrow a pen or pencil and something to write on. When the volunteer returns with the book ask him to select another volunteer you through and I have both join you at a table with the books. Have both of them stand or sit to one side of you. Have the three books placed on the table along with the pen and paper. Pick up the first book and begin something through it as you ask the owner about the book. "What genre is it? Who wrote it? Is it any good? Would you recommend it?" These are examples of questions to ask. Put the first book down and repeat the same stuff with the two remaining books. I'll ask the first volunteer to select one book; have her pick it up. Has the second volunteer choose a book. Have one of the volunteers take the pen and paper. They will write down page numbers and do some simple math with those numbers. They can either give you their book or place it on the table. Taking one of the books, you begin to quickly flip through the pages of it, asking the other volunteer to stop you whenever they want. When they call stop, look in the book and announce the page number they stopped you on. Ask the volunteer with a pen to write this page number down. Ask to volunteer with a book to quickly flip through the pages of the book they are holding. This time you call 'Stop' at some point. Have them show the page number they stopped at to the volunteer with the pen and paper, but cautioned them not to say it out loud. They are to write this new page number down directly under the first page number. These two numbers are added together. Have the volunteer circle the last two digits of that total and to subtract that circled number from the first volunteers page number. Again, remind them to not say the answer out loud. This new number is now a random number that no one could have known. Have the pen and paper volunteer pick up the third book from the table and turn to the page that corresponds to the random number. Instruct the volunteer to concentrate on the first word printed in the body of the text on that page. After a few moments you announce the exact word that the person is looking at.

METHOD: Three numbers are used in our computation. **R** = Revelation page number; **M** = Magician's page number; and **V** = Volunteer's page number. The formula is $M = 100 - R$ while V must be larger than R but and less than $R + 99$.

The two sets of computations above are done in the magician's head as he thumbs through one of the books. It doesn't matter which of the three books is used. The magician secretly picks a page from that book (page number must be between 1 and 99); that book then becomes the Revelation book. Magician asks questions about the book. As he does, he memorizes the first word on the first line on that page. For example, the magician secretly selects page 20 (which is now the Revelation page) and memorizes the first word on that page. Will use 'rabbit' as an example.

Continuing with this example, if the Revelation page (R in our formula) is 20, and the Magician's page (M in our formula) is 80 ($M = 100 - R$ or $80 = 100 - 20$). Repeat the same physical movements of thumbing through the other two books and asking questions so it appears you are handling each book in the same casual manner. You can even read a sentence or two from each book as you ask questions about them.

Now you do a magician force to get the Revelation book to be left on the table. Since you don't tell the volunteers anything other than "pick a book", you are not committed to each book's final use. Based on which book they choose, proceed in one of the following ways.

The first volunteer picks the Revelation book. After the second volunteer picks a book, state that the remaining book will be yours and move it closer to you. Ask the first volunteer to be the one to write down the page numbers. Pick up the pen and paper and hand them to that volunteer, telling them to put their book back on the table.

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The second volunteer picks the Revelation book. After the second volunteer picks this book, state that the remaining book will be yours and move it closer to you. Ask the second volunteer to be the one to write down page numbers. Pick up the pen and paper and hand them to this volunteer, telling them to put their book back on the table.

No one picks the Revelation book. As you pick up the pen and paper, state that one of the two volunteers is going to need to write down page numbers and do some simple math. Let them decide which one of them will do this task. Once the person is identified, trade the pen and paper you are holding for the book they are holding.

Whichever force is used, you wind up holding a non-revelation book, one volunteer holds a non-revelation book; the other volunteer has the pen and paper, and the Revelation book is on the table.

When you flip through the book you are holding and the volunteer stops you, miss call the page as M (the Magicians page number). In our example it would be 80. Have the second volunteer write this number down and close your book. As the other volunteer to flip through their book. You must stop them at a page number that is greater than the Revelation page (in our example, greater than 20), but less than the Revelation page + 99 (in our example, less than $20 + 99$ or 119). You can stop them on any page in that range. That page becomes the Volunteers page number (V). Stress that they should not announce the page number. They should silently show it to the other volunteer. Turn your back if you want to further prove you are not seeing what the volunteers page number is.

Have the second volunteer write this page number down directly under your page number. For this example, we'll say you stop the volunteer on page 45. Have the first volunteer closed their book. Instruct the second volunteer to add the two page numbers together ($80 + 45 = 125$). Tell them that if the total is a three-digit number, they should circle just the last two digits because you will only be using them. In our example the circled digits would be 25. Now ask them to subtract this circled number from the volunteer's page number ($45 - 25 = 20$). Remind them not to say this new number out loud but they can show it to the other volunteer, if they choose.

Bring to everyone's attention the third book on the table, which is the Revelation book. Stress that this book has not been touched by anyone (even though you and possibly a volunteer touched it earlier, no one will recall that). Ask the second volunteer to remember the new number as their page number. Tell them to put down the paper and pen and pick up the book on the table. Instruct them to turn to their page number in that book and look at the first word printed in the body of that page. Act as if you are reading their mind. Tell them to concentrate on the word, to see it in their mind. After a few moments of hesitation, reveal the word you memorized earlier (in our example, announce that the words a person is looking at is "rabbit"). Take your bow. Thank the volunteers for their assistance, take the books from them as they go back to their places, and return the books and the pen & paper to whomever you borrowed them from.

FINAL THOUGHTS: On the next 2 pages you'll find the mathematical formula worked out for every possible combination of Revelation page, Magicians page, and Volunteers page.

It's also possible to immediately repeat the effect, if you choose to do so. Many times, people who say, "Hey, do that again!" If you set things up correctly at the beginning, you can do just that. As you are looking through the three books originally you would need to memorize a second Revelation page and word from one of the other two books. This does require you to be able to remember the second Revelation page number and the second prediction word the whole time you are performing the routine initially. But if you can do that, then you can repeat the effect immediately. Just switch books around so that the new revelation book is left on the table. Now do the effect again exactly as before, except using your second set of Revelation page, Magician's page and page range for the Volunteer's page. Before they pick up the book on the table (the 2nd Revelation book) to look at the word, ask them if the math the second time is different from the first time. Have them give you simple yes or no answers as you ask the following question. "The second time, was I stopped on a different page number than the first time?" They will answer yes. "The second time did I stop you on a different page number than the last time?" Their answer will almost always be yes. The odds on you stopping them on the exact same page number the second time as the first time is very rare. But even if you do, the end math will still come out different. "Is their page number, the one they're about to look at in the new revelation book, a different page number than what they looked at the last time?" Their answer will be yes. You can stress to your audience that this is obviously not one of those mathematical tricks where you always get the same page number or it's always a multiple of a certain number. These truly are all random numbers. Finish off the routine and take an even bigger bow.

I've been doing this routine for many, many years and it's always been a big hit. I hope you enjoy it.