



Guest Columnist:

Ray Haddad

Clearly Impressed

Effect:

Under impossible conditions, the magician or mentalist is able to discern things kept safely locked in the mind of a spectator who has volunteered to help. The date of a coin, the serial number on a banknote, the personal words from a diary or the combination to a safe are some examples of information that can be gleaned and revealed in a most mysterious manner during your performance.

Discussion:

While the effects described above may seem absolutely impossible, rest assured that I have not used the magic catalog copywriter's tack of misleading advertising (my apologies to Joe who never does that, either.). This is a working method that I use almost daily in performance.

For most of my life, carbonless paper has been in common use. Today, it's virtually impossible to find carbon paper at all. My curiosity about how carbonless paper worked led me to research it using the Delphion Patent Search pages on the web. They are located at <http://www.delphion.com/>, for those wishing to cruise around looking for information. You can search o a keyword like "magic" and turn up some very interesting items patented by Tenyo, Jim Steinmeyer or David Copperfield in that category.

My search for the secret workings of carbonless paper led me to hundreds of patents dealing with that now most common method of issuing duplicate receipts, etc. The types of paper and uses have varied from simple instantaneous copies to special methods using radiation to develop the images. For the most part, they all use the same method as a basis for making an image. The method led me to create what I believe is a unique way to gain information from the mind of a spectator before a performance. My apologies to anyone else discovering this method. To the best of my knowledge, there are no commercially manufactured devices using my method.

The basic method all of the patented carbonless papers use is to encapsulate a microscopic drop of a clear carrier dye into a very tiny wax or latex ball which is then placed on the back side or bottom of the top sheet of carbonless paper. They are far too small to see with the naked eye. On front side or top of the lower sheet, there is a similar coating of an encapsulated developer in tiny wax or latex balls for the making the dye in the top sheet visible. Without the developer, the clear dye will remain clear forever. Or, maybe not. This small point is the workings for the impression board I will describe now.

When you press down on the paper to write, the wax balls full of clear dye on top and developer on the bottom get mashed by the pen point and break open. The dye and developer mixing cause a visible copy to be made on the lower sheet. For those wishing

to read a complete and relatively understandable explanation for the basic process, I have selected one of the best patents. Refer to this page: <http://www.delphion.com/details?pn=US04003589>

Equipment Needed:

1. A clear acrylic, Perspex(tm) or Plexiglas(tm) clipboard
2. Eucalyptus oil and a soft, cotton rag
3. Non ammonia window spray and another soft cotton rag
4. Kyrpton(tm) bulb flashlight
5. A pad of carbonless paper sheets
6. Developing Powder or Liquid (optional - see text)

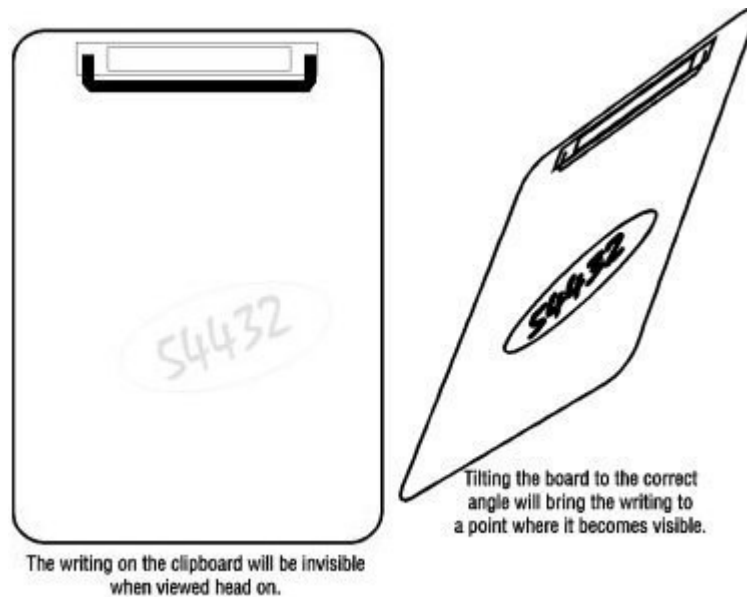


Method:

The clipboards come with a plastic covering that must be removed. The actual surface of the clipboard as it comes from the office supply store minus the protective plastic cover is absolutely pristine, scratch free and just right for taking an impression from carbonless paper.

Take the top sheet from the carbonless paper pair and clip it on the brand new clipboard. Make sure there is nothing between the paper and the clipboard. Use a fine tipped ball point pen to jot a few letters down for a test. When you remove the paper, a casual or even scrutinizing glance will not reveal anything other than a simply clear and innocent clipboard. But, due to the microscopic wax beads under that top sheet, there is evidence left behind of your letters.

After writing the test text, remove the paper and note the approximate location of your test area. Take the clipboard and tilt it sideways in bright light. Sunlight is best, quartz halogen lighting is good and a Krypton(tm) flashlight is excellent. Tilt the clipboard around until you see faint letters that are there from the wax and dye being transferred from the back of the carbonless top sheet to the surface of the clipboard. It may take some practice but at some point those letters will stand out and be clearly visible. I normally retire to the men's room, pick a stall and use the privacy there for reading the board. If the light isn't suitable, use the flashlight at a very sharp angle, almost flat against the clipboard with the light beam splaying out. The text will be brought out as looking different from the background not as pure black or blue. This is impossible to capture on film so the illustration below simulates what you have to do to see the writing.

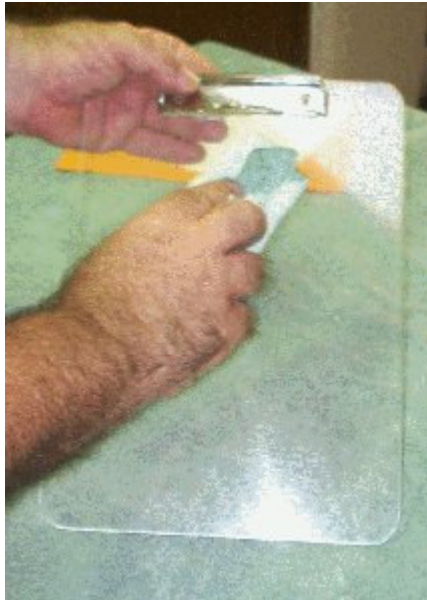


Depending on the type of carbonless paper you have selected, a piece of paper behind the clipboard may help in revealing the information. I carry a sheet of black, red and white cardstock paper to help bring out the very faint, but legible information. Colored cardstock is better than construction paper because the surface of the cardstock is smooth, not bumpy. As I've said, this may take some practice but once you get the idea, the information pops out at you quite nicely.

Clipboard Preparation:

A brand new clipboard needs no preparation but will quickly need to be "resurfaced." The following method works fine between performances. The wax and ink left behind first need to be removed. Since the paper manufacturers wanted to make certain that the duplicated words remained on the lower sheet of paper and not the top, the bottom paper had a bit of glue added to the little balloons filled with developer. The top wax balloons full of dye are still sticky but not as sticky as the lower wax. Wax transferred to the clipboard will not come off easily. This is why eucalyptus oil is required.

Take a clean, lint free cotton rag and wet it generously with eucalyptus oil. Using very sweeping strokes, clear off all lettering areas on the clipboard. A caution here is needed. The oil will soften the surface of the clipboard while the eucalyptus oil is wet. A generous coating is needed to properly resurface the clipboard so don't be afraid to use it. Don't wipe the clipboard more than one time for each stroke or try to wipe it dry. This will permanently smudge the board and render it useless as an impression device. Don't use this rag for anything other than the eucalyptus oil as it will damage the clipboard. If you need to wipe the board a second time, wait a few minutes. Re-wet the rag with oil and do it very carefully as the surface is already softened by the previous application.



Wipe one sweeping stroke per area.

Allow the oil to dry for a while. There will be a rainbow sheen on the surface if you have done it right. When dry, use the ammonia free window cleaner and a different rag to clean off any residue left behind. Again, be sure it is clean and lint free. An old white tee shirt that has seen many washings is a good choice for both rags. This resurfacing will result in a clean, scratch free clipboard. I store mine in a cotton bags between each performance to keep them pristine.

Selecting Paper:

Carbonless paper manufacturers try very hard to make their paper look and feel normal. Early papers had awful smells and texture. Unfortunately, this is the best kind to use for clear, easy to read impressions. It's getting hard to find those older style papers but one great source is two part computer paper for those old pin feed printers. A box of 3000 or so sheets can be had for around \$25.00. Less, if you can find a box at a garage sale or swap meet. The paper that works best is the kind that has that sort of citrus smell to it and a bit of blue showing around the edges where it has been cut.

In a pinch, you can actually make a nice, suitable paper yourself from ordinary paper by taking a candle, melting it flat on a cookie sheet in a warm oven and rubbing the flattened candle on the back of the paper. This is not as reliable and can't be "developed" later if the impression is difficult to read, but it will work.

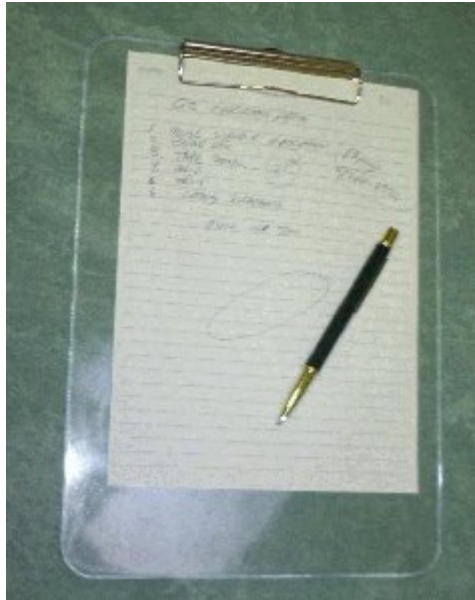
Developing Powder or Liquid (optional):

Sometimes, if the person doing the writing for you has used a soft touch to write, the lettering may be very faint. You can do a few things here if you know what type of paper you are using and the developer type on the bottom sheet. Most use an acid based developer so a squirt of lemon juice over the letters will bring the writing out. If you don't know, experiment a bit at home. Lemon juice works for just about all the papers I've tried. It will turn the impression quite dark in most cases.

If you want a bit less moisture in your prop case, try a squirt of graphite powder over the writing. The graphite powder method is much like reading a fingerprint. If you dust the wax and dye with graphite, the letters will show up as well as your fingerprints, smudges and any tiny scratches. If you keep the surface of your clipboard properly prepared background interference from scratches, etc., will be minimal.

Use in Presentation:

I use a Lee Earle technique for making the clipboard and the paper seem trivial and unimportant. Before use, I prepare the sheet this way. On a tabletop, not on the clipboard, I write a checklist for each show by hand on the two sheets of carbonless paper. My list looks like the one in Figure 3.



Here's a sample list.

I check all the items as if they were completed and then, removing the top sheet only, I place the paper on the clipboard. It then goes back into the storage bag until I do my preshow work.

When I need it, I get my volunteer to help me somewhere in private. I ask my questions about some item or other, then I give them the board after making a writing area for them by marking a circle, an oval or square on the board. I want them to place their text in an area where I know it will be when I search for it. Then, I ask them to take the paper explaining that they are to bring it with them when they come on stage later. I tell them that the sheet is for a reference only so they don't accidentally forget what they wrote.

Let's say we need to get the serial number of a banknote. I would have two spectators for that. The first would volunteer the note and the second would be my witness as to fairness and impartiality. Asking the first person for the note, I would ask them to hand it to the second person. On my clipboard, I would make an oval area asking the second person to record the serial number from the note to the oval area right there while I turned around. Directing him or her to return the note and take the paper for safekeeping, I would then retrieve my clipboard and ask them to each keep both items handy for later use. Naturally, I would impress upon the note holder to not spend that note or use it before the show. In fact, I give them a pay envelope and ask them to place it in there for safekeeping until I ask them for it later. I ask the person holding the sheet of paper to keep that handy for use later, when I call upon them.

Now, it's a simple matter of reading the impressed serial number in private and we're ready for some expert mindreading. Your actual mileage may vary but I get a few months use from a clipboard before it gets to the point where I need a replacement. The cost of replacement is minimal so I always keep a few on hand. In my prop case is a brand new one, complete with plastic cover, just in case my working board gets damaged somehow. A crack in the plastic is fatal to the effect.

The casual handling of the paper as a completed checklist ready to be discarded make it very innocent in appearance. Doing the initial writing of my fake checklist far away from the prepared clipboard is a safety net in case they write their information outside of the marked area. The marked area will be visible on the board to help you locate the actual writing. If it's not there, start looking elsewhere. They may have written it between your checklist lines or somewhere below or above your marked area. If you wrote the fake checklist on your prepared board, you'll find a jumble of data there

instead of one item.

Outs:

I wish outs weren't necessary but I've never had a foolproof method go wrong. Right? If you believe that, I have some great swampland for sale. Even though this method is very good, I've had a few folks who have simply refused to write down their secret information or have actually removed the paper, turned it over and written on the clear back side in spite of specific instructions to the contrary. Naturally, this makes no impression at all to read. Once, I actually forgot to prepare the board surface between performances and because of habit, I made the circle in almost exactly the same spot as the previous show. The confused jumble of letters from both shows made it impossible to read the newest impression.

The easiest out is to say that this effect will be sort of a bonus effect if there is time to do the item. If the impression is not readable, I simply skip the effect and apologize after the show for not using the participants. Thanking them profusely, I offer that I simply ran out of time having agreed to stick to 30 minutes or whatever time seems reasonable.

Another out is to have the spectator with the recording come up first and open the sheet. A quick peek is often all you need as you ask the other person to join you. This is not perfect but it may be worth trying if you think you can pull it off. For a short number or word, this should be easy enough. If you use this method, be prepared to use the note, coin, word or whatever in another way should a peek also fail. If you can't peek the information, use that spectator for another effect. They'll not know the difference since they have no idea of the outcome of the effect at that point.

In Closing:

Don't sell this impression method short without trying it. This impression clipboard is so innocent looking as to fool even the most savvy magician. Magician friends who have seen this are amazed at how deceptive this method can be.

Tips:
Don't be tempted to use a tinted clipboard. The image of the information can sometimes be clearly seen from a distance since the resurfacing makes a smooth surface marred only by the impressed information. The tinting helps both you and your helpers see the letters and that's not the intention here.

A laser pointer used at a sharp angle can be useful in seeing stubbornly hidden information but it also highlights the most minor imperfections on the surface.

Drying the eucalyptus oil after resurfacing the board can be accelerated if you wave the board up and down like a fan for a few minutes. Hold it very close to the edges to keep from marring the surface accidentally.

When you have short times between multiple performances it's normally best to have two or three clipboards made ready and kept in cotton bags.

Keep a sheet of clean typing paper over the resurfaced clipboards to protect the surfaces while in storage. The paper also serves to remind you that a board has been resurfaced and is ready for use. I use my three pieces of white, black and red cardstock for that.

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