



## Share the Spark

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Taste the Magic  
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In the **Magic** multiverse, a person generally only becomes a planeswalker through a traumatic experience. Some sort of incredible stress, like the loss of a loved one, a near-death experience, or an astonishing revelation, shocks their planeswalker spark to life, and kindles in them the potential to walk the myriad planes of the multiverse.

But here on Earth, a person's planeswalker spark can awaken in an afternoon of playing cards. The process is rewarding, fun, and a great use for those excess pages of your grimoire. On top of all that, it's an experience infused with flavor. Today we're talking about welcoming new players into the game, and how flavor can help.

Play along at home. Here's what you need:

- Two newbie-friendly decks (see below)
- A "spark kindling" kit (see below)
- Someone who you might think possess the planeswalker spark (i.e., might be interested in **Magic**)

### Decks for Fledgling Planeswalkers

The first thing you'll need to awaken a friend's planeswalker spark is a pair of decks. Judge your apprentice's abilities closely, and build decks that you think would be appropriate to his skill and confidence level. I have a couple of sample decks below.

#### Two colors

I recommend using decks of exactly two colors to introduce a fledgling planeswalker to the game. It emphasizes the idea that the colors can work together in different ways, which in turn emphasizes that **Magic** is about making your own choices and exercising your own creativity (and yes, he can still learn this even while playing decks you built). If the decks have more than two colors, it becomes less likely that your newbie will be able to cast his cards. We want it to be easy on him, but still a *little* challenging—hence two colors. Emphasize how some players prefer one or two colors over others, and that he can choose favorites as well.

#### Simple Core Set Commons

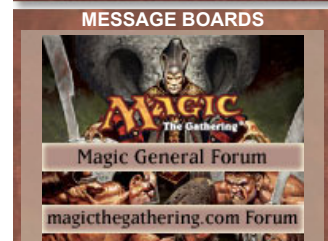
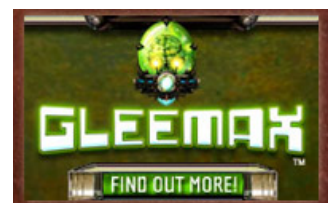
*Tenth Edition* commons are excellent teaching tools. Many creatures are vanilla or have only one keyword (Mark Rosewater likes to call these "French vanilla"), meaning there's little in the way of learning about power, toughness, and regular ol' creature combat. *Tenth Edition* common spells generally do one thing, and do it for a reasonable amount of mana, which is also good; spells that have a lot of fiddly modes, cost-reduction mechanics, or other souped-up options will just confuse your apprentice. And core set commons are full of classic **Magic** creatures and spells that embody the flavor of each color.

#### Few Activated Abilities

Static keyword abilities (flying, first strike, haste) and comes into play abilities (*Venerable Monk*, *Gravedigger*) are great lessons for your trainee, but go easy on creatures, enchantments, and artifacts with activated abilities. Your newbie is just getting the hang of tapping lands for spells and tapping creatures to attack. He doesn't need the worry of keeping track of when to use *Samite Healer*'s ability, or wondering what all *Puppeteer* can do for him. Monsters that attack and block, and artifacts that make mana, are great. Still, there's nothing more deliciously **Magic** than tapping one's *Prodigal Pyromancer* to aim some fire at an opponent. If there's no "bad" way to use a creature's activated ability, then go for it (and don't chide him when he misses an opportunity to use it).

#### Two Sample Decks

Below are two decks you might put together. They're constructed entirely of *Tenth Edition* cards, mostly commons with a few uncommons. They're designed to illustrate classic game play (creature combat, along with some cool spells that generally blow up of the other guy's permanents) and basic rules. Feel free to substitute cards as you see fit, build



your own teaching tools, or use theme decks instead. Let your apprentice skim a few cards from each, and let him pick which one he wants to play.

## Life and Undeath

Casual Teaching Deck 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>12 Plains</p> <p>12 Swamp</p> <hr/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>1 Angel of Mercy</p> <p>2 Dusk Imp</p> <p>2 Gravedigger</p> <p>1 Hidden Horror</p> <p>2 Highway Robber</p> <p>2 Looming Shade</p> <p>2 Mass of Ghouls</p> <p>3 Scathe Zombies</p> <p>2 Suntail Hawk</p> <p>2 Venerable Monk</p> <p>1 Wild Griffin</p> <p>2 Youthful Knight</p> <hr/> <p>22 creatures</p>	<p>1 Angel's Feather</p> <p>1 Deathmark</p> <p>1 Demon's Horn</p> <p>1 Essence Drain</p> <p>2 Holy Strength</p> <p>1 Pacifism</p> <p>2 Recover</p> <p>2 Reviving Dose</p> <p>1 Soul Feast</p> <p>2 Unholy Strength</p> <hr/> <p>14 other spells</p>
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## Fiery Monsters

Casual Teaching Deck 

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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>12 Forest</p> <p>12 Mountain</p> <hr/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>2 Craw Wurm</p> <p>1 Earth Elemental</p> <p>1 Femeref Archers</p> <p>2 Giant Spider</p> <p>2 Goblin Piker</p> <p>3 Grizzly Bears</p> <p>2 Hill Giant</p> <p>1 Karplusan Strider</p> <p>2 Llanowar Elves</p> <p>1 Prodigal Pyromancer</p> <p>2 Raging Goblin</p> <p>1 Spined Wurm</p> <p>1 Wall of Fire</p> <p>1 Wall of Wood</p> <hr/> <p>22 creatures</p>	<p>1 Blaze</p> <p>1 Demolish</p> <p>2 Firebreathing</p> <p>1 Giant Growth</p> <p>1 Incinerate</p> <p>2 Lava Axe</p> <p>1 Natural Spring</p> <p>1 Naturalize</p> <p>1 Recollect</p> <p>2 Shock</p> <p>1 Spitting Earth</p> <hr/> <p>14 other spells</p>
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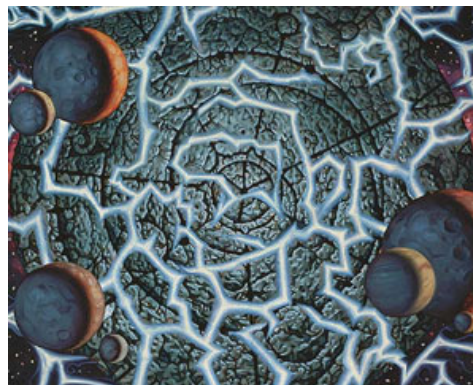
## Teaching in Spirals

Learning is a dynamic combination of repetition and variation. Each game you should repeat the basics—seven cards in your opening hand, untap upkeep draw, one land per turn. But as the games go on, add layers of new knowledge on top of the more basic lore your apprentice has already grasped. And use flavor as a tool to help reinforce the rules.

Start playing with both players' hands face up. Focus on identifying lands vs. nonlands, rather than on the types of spells available. Conjure the scene of two dueling wizards amassing resources across the battlefield, and how each has an arsenal of lands and spells he'll use to take down the other. Talk about the power of lands to provide mana, and the relationship of mana costs to the amount of mana his lands can generate. Talk about the gradual build-up of more and more powerful spells as the game goes on, culminating in a winner.

Add new layers of complexity as your trainee becomes ready for them. Talk about creatures vs. noncreature spells, how creatures stick around to fight for you while instants and sorceries are one-and-done.

Talk about the graveyard—the "discard pile" where spent magics go and the dead lurk. Note that both of the sample decks above feature some **Raise Dead** effects. What better introduction to the graveyard than **Gravedigger**, a zombie with a shovel? He literally digs up a creature from the graveyard. Flavor can solidify those lessons in your apprentice's mind much quicker than rules memorization.



You'll find the lessons will create a kind of spiral shape of ever-widening repetition. As you teach, you should be hitting the same concepts over and over, like you're going in a circle—untap upkeep draw, play a land, cast spells, untap

upkeep draw, play a land, cast spells. But as you retrace the steps, widen the circle. Do a little more each turn. Enchant a creature before sending it into combat. Cast a removal spell. Gain some life off an [Angel's Feather](#). Ping a [Dusk Imp](#). You'll be doing the same actions, reinforcing the previous lessons as you go, but varying them and adding information each time through the loop.

## Spark Kindling

Your fledgling planeswalker is getting the hang of it. He's playing a whole game by himself. He's remembering card names and enjoying the flavor of smashing creatures into one another. He's using strategy, killing your best guys while protecting his own. The next ingredient your new planeswalker needs is what I call a "spark kindling" kit.

If you've ever made a campfire, you know that you won't get a good, steady flame out of the firewood with just your matches. Even fancy accelerants like kerosene (boo) will only blow up briefly, and will often burn out before it heats and catches the big stuff. What you need is wood of just the right size to catch the flame and yet not burn up instantly, to hold the flame long enough to light the long-burning fuel—you need kindling.

A planeswalker spark is the same way. Your fledgling planeswalker might have had a great time in his first few games, but his spark won't be fully ablaze yet. He isn't yet burning with the steady flame of cardboard infatuation that you do. His spark still needs a little kindling for the game to really take hold.

A "spark kindling" kit is a set of cards designed to bring a new planeswalker from casually interested outsider to full-on ardent fanatic. It captures a new planeswalker's imagination, shows him the range of what's possible in **Magic**, and hints at the kinds of powerful magics that are out there waiting for him if he becomes part of the spell-slinging biz. And you can build one in a few easy steps.

### 1. Start with some bulk

If you've been playing **Magic** for long, you probably have a stockpile of commons and uncommons, and even weird rares, that you have no use for. Take a shoebox and fill it with these excess cards. Don't worry about tournament viability or cardboard condition—your apprentice won't care. He just needs some bulk that he can pore over, and eventually, that he can use to build his own decks. Don't even worry about complexity at this stage—your apprentice will naturally gloss over the stuff he doesn't understand, and will return to it (like a spiral) when he's ready. Be sure to include enough basic lands.

### 2. Add some "build-arounds"

Now spice up that kit with what we in R&D call "build-arounds"—cards that inspire decks to be built around them. You may have to look past the common slot for these, but it's important to get those deck-building thoughts engaged for the spark to truly awaken. It's like a jedi and his first lightsaber—until he's built his own first deck, he's not yet truly a planeswalker.


The best kinds of "build-around" cards advertise themselves, and explain right in their rules text how they should be used. [Goblin King](#) and [Imperious Perfect](#) say right on their cards what creature types they go well with. [Nightmare](#) and [Corrupt](#) say "I get better with lots of swamps." Just about every Sliver sends a pretty clear message about what else it wants to combine it with.

Other great "build-arounds" give rewards for what players wanted to do anyway. [Searing Meditation](#) and [Quirion Dryad](#) reward the impulses to gain life and play exotic spells. [Megrim](#) and [Dingus Egg](#) reward the rather darker impulses to mess with enemy minds and blow up enemy lands (which are, in turn, great impulses for you to encourage).

Gold cards make awesome "build-arounds" simply because they inspire a color combination that the fledgling planeswalker may not have thought of. [Vorosh, the Hunter](#), [Blizzard Specter](#), and [Jungle Barrier](#) might not have obvious combo applications to your newbie friend, but darn if they won't inspire him to build a new three-color deck around them.

Not every "build-around" has to be a deck centerpiece in and of itself. They're there to provide an idea, to encourage the act of deckbuilding and provide the excitement of a homemade combo. The "spark kindling" kit can be overwhelming without a few cards in it that say exactly how to play them.

### 3. Add something special

As a show of good faith, include something that your fledgling planeswalker will go gaga over. Add a dragon or an angel card. Put in a creature with a double-digit number somewhere on it, or a beat-up old Sol Ring, or a foil [Incinerate](#). Put in a cool legendary creature with a big fat gold rare symbol right there on it, or a splashy  spell. If you can afford it, include a couple of booster packs.

Once the teaching session is over, send off your apprentice with the spark kindling kit tucked under his cloak. It's a generous donation from your own collection to his, but consider it an investment. Once you have his spark blazing, you'll always have someone to trade with, someone to bounce deck ideas off of, and of course, someone to throw down with.

## Additional Resources

As an almost-final note, I am far from the first person to write about teaching **Magic** to new players. Anthony Alongi, former [magicthegathering.com](#) columnist, was a particularly excellent evangelist for the game. Check out these articles about teaching new players, hailing from as far back as 2002:



[Your Next Apprentice](#)  
[Higher Education](#)  
[Magic: The Next Generation](#)

Check out (and have any and all fledgling planeswalkers check out) these Wizards-created YouTube videos that teach the basics of the game.

[Part 1](#)  
[Part 2](#)  
[Part 3](#)  
[Part 4](#)  
[Part 5](#)  
[Part 6](#)

The [Magic Rules Page](#) has a link to an *excellent* [basic rulebook PDF](#). It's updated as of *Lorwyn* (including an update on the planeswalker rules) and has thirty pages of rules, play examples, a glossary, and cool art throughout. Got a printer? Print out a copy!

## Letter of the Week

I wanted to respond to this short, sweet, and pleasantly this-week-appropriate question.

To a planeswalker, what is the difference between your hand and your library?

It's a question about the flavor of decks and hands, two of the most basic concepts of the game! Great timing, gentle reader.

You're a planeswalker, a multiverse-travelling wizard who knows a bunch of spells. Your **library** represents the sum total of all the spells you know, and all the lands you've come in contact with. Think of it as your deep storage, or long-term memory, or your subconscious—they're the spells that you've learned but aren't currently focusing on. They're your magical arsenal, the storehouse of arcane weaponry you might unleash during any given duel.

Your **hand**, on the other, um, hand, is your conscious mind. It's the magical ideas that you have tossing around in your head presently, the plans you have developing for the next several moments of your duel. It's the sum of magical weapons you have ready and waiting, sheathed in their scabbard of your conscious attention, at your beck and call for whenever they're needed.



Cards that attack libraries tend to be flavored as eroding one's memories or damaging one's sanity: *Altar of Dementia*, *Glimpse the Unthinkable*, *Cranial Extraction*. Cards that attack the hand tend to be flavored as more direct mental attacks: *Brain Pry*, *Mind Rot*, *Stupor*. Cards that let you draw more cards tend to be flavored as boosts of cognitive or divining power: *Inspiration*, *Pursuit of Knowledge*, *Skeletal Scrying*.

Now, since we make hundreds of new cards each year, this flavor can't be too rigid. We can't lock down a rule that "discard spell = mental attack" or else the art, concepts, and names of those kinds of spells will get very boring. So on some cards, you will see the flavor of hands and libraries stretched in interesting directions. If your library is your long-term memory, then why is searching your library for a card flavored as a *Demonic Tutor*? Is it just a Demonic Reminder of what you already knew? And what if you switch decks? Does that mean you got mind-wiped and replaced all your old memories with new ones?

There's a point when the game world and the fantasy world decouple and go their separate ways. And that's okay—Richard Garfield said it himself in *The Duelist* #12: "But for me, a game world should be more suggestion than outright simulation. In the end, when I play **Magic** I still see myself hurling spells at my opponent, although I have no idea how to 'visualize' the spell *Twiddle*. Within the universe of **Magic**, *Twiddle* seems very sensible, a reasonable inhabitant of a world whose broad outlines I understand but whose details are left to the imagination." And frankly, I prefer it that way—we can create worlds till we're blue in the face, but it's just window dressing until you pick up the cards and use them to create worlds of your own.



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