

# MAGIC The Gathering Old School



## BECOMING A BETTER PLAYER

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## Learn to organize the board

Get into a routine of organizing your board state *the exact same way in each and every game* is both good for always keeping the best possible overview of the game but also to help you remember upkeep triggers, fast effects and not overlooking cards.

There is not “one truth” about this as different players have various systems. However, a commonly used system is:

Down the left (or right if left-handed) side of the playmat put the library at the top and graveyard below.

Graveyard should be arranged in such a way that you visually can see the names of all the cards in it without needing to grab it into your hands (Then you do not reveal your intention and if holding a regrowth, recall or time twister in your hand)

If a card is exiled by disintegrate, Swords to Plowshares or other cards his can either be places horizontally at the bottom of the graveyard or even better next to the graveyard outside the playmat (if space allows for it)

First row - at the bottom closest to you put the lands. Lands of the same name should be grouped together. Try to find a space on the mat in first row or third row and always use this to initially place a creature and/or land that is just put into play. This helps you know if you missed land drops and what creatures can't attack or activate due to summoning sickness.

Not remembering if a player has made their land drop is one of the most common mistakes or doubts among players during a match.

An exception from having lands in the bottom third row is lands that do not generate mana but instead generates effects that support combat. These should be placed in the top row together with the creatures in order not to forget to use these. Examples of this are Maze of Ith, Island of Wak-Wak and Oasis.

If a Blood moon is in play sort all your special lands in one group and the moxen and basic lands in another group in the first row. Then you minimize the mistake of tapping a special land for incorrect mana type other than red and you get a good overview of what other colors you have available

Second row above that other non-creature mana sources grouped together (like Moxen, Felwar Stone and Sol Ring) and next to these other non-creatures permanent like other artifacts and enchantments.

Third row furthest away place all the creatures. Mana creatures and utility creatures should be kept off to the side of that row.

Do not place or sit with your hands or arms above your lands or cards. The risk is that you overlook important options, and it is usually also very annoying for your opponent that will have difficulties in seeing what mana you have available.

Use a counters or dice to place on top of your library to help you remember if you have upkeep effect that triggers before draw phase. A green counter could be for remembering to use Sylvan Library, while a red counter could be to take damage from a Juzam Djinn or Underworld Dreams. This could be your use of Land Tax or Sylvan Library but also remembering to take damage from Serendib Efreet or Underworld Dreams.

## **Select a deck type that fits your preferred style and personality**

If you haven't already, try different decks out and see which one fits your style of play. Some players greatly prefer and perform better with aggressive decks others control or combo decks. Some players will find out that they are much better at creating pressure and forcing the opponent into a corner than there are at assessing threats and using removal/counters optimally. This relates very much to a player's, preferred style of play, preferred pace of the game and natural patience.

There are several examples of very experienced top players that have tried to shift to another well proven Tier 1 archetype deck and had difficulties in being able to produce any top results with that deck.

## **Learn From Mistakes**

Gameplay in Magic takes a little getting used to. The more you play, the better you will get at the game. It will become easier for you to recognize your mistakes and even learn from them. Don't let yourself become flustered with losing. It will happen.

Aside from your own mistakes, watch other players, and see what could have gone differently in their games had they taken different plays. It's often easier to see mistakes when you're not sitting in the hot seat, so watching others play is one great way to improve.

Don't allow yourself to take back moves. You WILL learn from your mistakes faster.

## **Know Your Role**

This refers to one of the most famous Magic: The Gathering articles of all time: "Who's The Beatdown" by Mike Flores. If you haven't given this article a read before, you can read it in the MENU tab "Deck Strategy". The short version is that in any given game of Magic, one deck is going to end up being the aggressor and another deck is going to end up being the defender.

For example, in an aggro versus control matchup, the aggressor is obviously the aggressive deck, and the defender is the control deck. The goal of the aggressor's deck is to win the game before the defender's deck can stabilize. In contrast, the goal of the defender's deck is to stymie the aggressor's attacks for long enough that its superior resources can win the game. The point is that you should always know what role you are playing in a matchup so that you can gear your play towards that role.

## **Goldfish**

Goldfishing is the term Magic: The Gathering players use for playing solo to test your deck. First, you shuffle your deck and draw your cards. Next, play your hand as if you are playing against an opponent, and they are doing nothing but passing their turn.

This is a great way to figure out combos in your deck that you didn't realize before. It's also a great way to work out any kinks before playing with a group of friends. Just don't be too surprised if people give you a confused look.

## **Watch top games that are streamed online**

Streaming has surged in popularity over the past few years. There are a ton of really great Magic streamers. It's important to watch them to find out how popular decks work and what combos are worth leaving out. It is a great starting point for someone looking to build competitively.

There are much to learn about general play as well as how to pilot a specific deck from watching experienced players who are better than you are.

Learning from mistakes is something that's often easier to do when you're watching others play and streams are perfect for doing just that.

### **Try Different Formats**

It might not seem like playing a format other than the one you want to excel at would make you better at it. After all, how is playing 7-point singleton or Vintage MTG going to make you better at 93/94 Old School? However, playing different formats ends up giving you a different perspective on the game, that you can then bring back to your chosen format and benefit from.

For instance, building decks in Limited play (like Singleton, Pauper, Mono Color, Spicy rules etc.) is a good way to become a better constructed deck builder. Limited gives you insight on cards that you would simply have ignored in standard Old School, since you're not forced to play mostly commons and uncommons. As a result, you can use this insight to broaden your horizons on what cards you consider playable in Standard. This may seem like a roundabout way to get better at Magic, but it really works.

### **Practice**

You aren't going to become a great Magic player overnight. This is a game with decades of history, and many competitive players have seen tens of formats and have years of experience. You, too, need some time on the practice field. Everyone does, and there's no better teacher than experience.

Don't be afraid to make mistakes or misplays along the way. It's how players develop, and you'll learn new things about your deck and the game itself as you go. Making mistakes is part of becoming better at anything you do, so it's important to learn from them and get better from it.

Play a lot with your chosen deck before skipping it or trying out a new one. And by a lot means at least 50 matches if you are relatively inexperienced. If you are well-experienced with the format and multiple decks maybe half is sufficient. Those matches should be against the most common and strongest deck types in the meta. That might seem like a lot, but unless you are a pro player that is likely how many matches it will take to get familiar enough with a deck to know its pace, how it is played optimally against the different deck types in the meta and be a competitive pilot of the deck.

### **Learn to evaluate the Metagame**

Preparing for the metagame is one thing, but actually getting to know it is another entirely. A good Magic player knows what other popular decks are in the format they are playing. A great Magic player has played those decks, knows how they work, and understands their weaknesses.

With this knowledge, you know what is coming next and can predict what your opponent may do next based on their current cards, the mana they have available, and the current board state. Experience makes this easier to do, and this might even help you see through bluffs or know when to mulligan a hand that is weak against a particular deck.

A lot of players are familiar with formatting their sideboard to beat the metagame, but what many people don't realize is that you can change your mainboard to accomplish the same thing. Granted, there are decks where changing the mainboard to accomplish this becomes more difficult, but most decks are capable of being changed in such a way.

For example, imagine you're playing in a super heavy control meta. While the best advice would probably be to just play a hyper-aggressive deck, you could also tech a midrange deck with more aggressive cards that lower your curve to accomplish a similar result.

The "metagame" or "meta" consists of the decks and cards that make up the majority of decks played within a given format. For example, Counter-Burn, The Deck, UW Skies etc. Some of the fun of Magic is evaluating a given metagame in order to try and come up with a deck full of cards that's good against the field.

While it's obviously much easier to find these kinds of metagame based decks when you're playing with a team, evaluating the metagame is still something you should look to do on your own. You might just be surprised at the success of the decklist you come up with.

### **Constantly access card changes in your deck**

The meta is constantly changing – so some of the cards in your deck should also change regularly. It is recommended tweaking your deck continually. There really is no answer to what the best deck or even best version of a deck is. Consider making sideboard cards into main deck cards. Test things out until you learn what works and what doesn't. The unfortunate side effect is that your deck won't necessarily improve if you make a change that is bad. But YOU will improve, and that what you are after.

### **Have A Plan B**

A plan B is essential for any strategy game, and that includes Magic. Your deck will have a primary strategy that defines it, such as "aggro" for White Weenie, "burn you to death with UR counter Burn, or just "play lots of Merfolk and attack."

However, your opponent might defeat your main plan, especially with sideboard cards, so you'll need another route to victory. Substitute creature combat damage with direct damage halfway through a game or abandon your combo and sideboard big creatures to attack with. Multicolor decks have the easiest time with this, especially those which are meant to be flexible – but other mono-color decks can utilize artifact creatures to do the same.

### **Three Resources, Not One**

*Mana* is not the only resource in this game; *Life points* and *Cards* are the other two, and all three must be managed well. How? Life points can be spent to pay for effects or spells, and black mana, in particular, is savvy with that.

Meanwhile, do whatever you can to advance your strategy by using as few cards as possible, and try to make your opponent spend more cards than they normally would in order to keep up with you. Blue does this best, but any color offers grindy cards or strategies to pull ahead, such as board wipes, two-for-one removal, cantrips, and creature threats that are impossible to completely negate with just one card. If your opponent runs out of cards, they will run out of steam, too.

### **Make Sacrifices**

Don't overestimate the value of your life points. Often, blocking does not turn out well, and rarely will your opponent attack unless they are sure that their creatures can kill yours. If you're going to die to attacks or suspect your opponent can kill you with damage outside of combat, you may want to consider blocking. Otherwise, use your life points as a buffer while you continue to develop your own game plan.

This is especially true if your creatures are useful utility creatures, such as Scavenger Folk, Sage of Lat-nam, Birds of Paradise etc. Don't throw them away long term to save two life points short term

### **Master Card Advantage**

This is a deep topic and probably one of the most important to understand. Any card has an inherent -1 card advantage since you lose the card to get the effect. Find cards that can destroy more than one permanent at a time, to make your opponent lose more cards than you did.

"Grindy" cards think long term, and they may cost your opponent many cards over time or let you draw many more. You may play a big 5/5 or 5/6 creature or a token-creating spell that your opponent will need more than one removal spell to deal with.

In The Duelist Magazine #14 in April 1996, Brian Weissman (the inventor of The Deck) wrote a famous article called "Taking Card Advantage" on this subject.

#### *The most basic cards in Magic, the single-card-effect cards*

These are the least obviously tied to card advantage. This class of cards inherently interacts on a one to-one basis with other cards in the game: you can use one spell to eliminate one of your opponent's cards. For example, when you Counterspell your opponent's Shivan Dragon, you are essentially trading one card (your Counterspell) for one of your opponent's (the Shivan Dragon). Spells like Counterspell, Swords to Plowshares, Terror, Lightning Bolt, and Desert Twister are all examples of cards in this class.

At face value, all of these single card-effect cards appear to be the antithesis of what one would assume to be card advantage, since by nature they can never affect more than a single target. Yet in the right situation, you can use them to gain card advantage. A Swords to Plowshares that removes a creature with an instant or enchantment invested in it gains card advantage. A Lightning Bolt that kills a Hypnotic Specter generated by a Dark Ritual garners the same. You can also use these cards to ensure the survival of a more powerful card-advantage card if, for example, you use a Swords to Plowshares to destroy your opponent's Scavenger Folk, which would have been a threat to your yet-to-be-cast Jayemdae Tome. Efficiency is what keeps these single-card effects in competitive decks.

#### *The second class, the multiscard-effect cards*

These have a one-time use that can let you draw or destroy more than a single card. These cards are undeniably powerful forces and have long been the backbone of competitive decks in Classic (Type I) and Standard (Type II) formats. Examples of these cards include Armageddon, Ancestral Recall, Hymn to Tourach, Primitive Justice, and Hurricane. Since they have larger, more powerful effects, multiscard-effect cards generally have higher casting costs than their single-card counterparts. Using a multiscard effect to eliminate fewer than two of your opponent's cards tends to be an inefficient use of a higher-casting-cost card. For example, Lightning Bolt is a single-card effect that inflicts 3 damage for one mana; Flare is a multiscard effect that deals 1 damage for three mana, so it would be a waste of resources to use Flare on only one target.

#### *The third class of card-advantage cards is permanent multiscard-effects cards*

These cards give card advantage continuously over time. Many cards in this permanent class are artifacts like Disrupting Scepter. Once it's in play, you can use Disrupting Scepter repeatedly to make your opponent discard a card. Other examples of these permanents include Browse, The Abyss, Orcish Artillery, and Drop of Honey. The large majority of creatures in Magic are also classified as permanent multiscard effects since

they have the ability to deal continuous damage. Your opponent may block your creature with one of his or hers, and each time your creature survives but your opponent's dies, you've gained card advantage. This class of cards operates somewhat inconspicuously, often granting no advantage when cast but facilitating dramatic, often game-winning dominance over time.

#### *The final class of cards in Magic, the rule-bending cards*

These are potentially the most powerful and certainly the least straightforward. Rule-bending cards are almost exclusively enchantments or artifacts; they do little by themselves, but under certain circumstances they can generate unrivaled card advantage by first bending the rules of the game so that you can turn that bending to your favor. Mana Flare is an example of a rule-bending card, since it causes all mana-producing land to produce an extra mana. By itself, that does not give you card advantage. But if you combine it with Book of Rass, you're able to pay 1 Mana and 2 life rather than 2 Mana and 2 life to draw a card.

#### *Card destruction*

Cards that destruct opponents cards can also grant card advantage if you eliminate more of your opponent's cards than you give up. For example, casting a Hymn to Tourach to rid your opponent of two cards in hand grants card advantage. Also, if you destroy your opponent's Bog Imp that's enchanted with Unholy Strength using a single Swords to Plowshares, you've similarly gained card advantage through card destruction

#### *Card nullification*

This is the most powerful and least straightforward of the card-advantage modes. When you nullify cards you are making it unusable, either because your opponent cannot cast it or because you've made it useless for him or her to cast it. Kismet's effect on a Ball Lightning is an example of card nullification. Also, you can create card nullification by playing with cards with protection from the color your opponent is playing that can't be targeted. The same way with Circles of Protection against a mainly one-colored deck.

Cards that work on card nullification are generally so powerful that they can seal up a game completely by themselves, representing the ultimate in card advantage. For example, if you cast Blood Moon against an opponent who is playing with all non-basic lands, you could conceivably seal up a game on the first turn, since your opponent's land sources would only produce red mana. Or you could take out a key mana source by casting Sink Hole or Strip Mine, thus nullifying your opponent's next six draw phases, all of which are spent drawing spells that can't be cast. Other examples are Stasis, Abyss and Moat which can make the opponents creatures useless to play. The one disadvantage to the strategy of card nullification is its dependency on specific cards, which are by nature weak and combo-oriented.

### **Always Remember Efficiency and Value**

In all games with finite resources, efficiency plays a big part on your success. In MTG, Mana is that resource. While there are combos that can generate infinite mana, you won't find that very often especially in MTG Arena as it offers more beginner-friendly gameplay.

What makes MTG's resource system unique is that it's very unpredictable. Your Mana base is dependent on drawing Lands from your Library. Because of this, the ability to make efficient plays can impact your chances of winning. A better MTG player can evaluate the value gained from your current turn, and the next one as well, to maximize efficiency.

For example, you have three Mana available, with no more Lands in hand. The other cards you have are one 1-Mana spell, two 2-Mana spells, and a 3-Mana spell. The question now is what should you play?

There are two ways for efficiency. One is to cast a 2-Mana Spell and a 1-Mana spell. If you don't draw a Land in your next turn, you can at least play that 3-Mana spell that wasn't cast.

The second option is to use all your Mana to cast the 3-Mana spell in your hand. If you draw another Land in your next turn, you can then cast both 2-Mana spells together. If you don't draw that Land, then you'll be back in the same scenario as the first option.

### **Mulligan bad hands / Know When to Mulligan**

There are some decisions to make even before you take your first turn. Sometimes, it's totally clear when you should mulligan, such as when you have no lands in your hand or your hand is almost entirely land cards. But what about borderline cases? Things get fuzzier here. If you're considering a mulligan, a good rule of thumb is to go ahead and take one.

Another rule is to see if your current hand lets you be proactive early on, or works well against your opponent. If not, take a mulligan. Also, if you cannot easily cast more than one spell in your opening hand with the lands you see, a mulligan may be in order. Finally, you may take a mulligan if your opening hand does not represent your overall strategy.

However, what you draw in those seven cards could drastically decide if you win or lose that match. Forget about what the opponent's hand might be yet and focus on your own. An opening hand with one Land is too risky to keep, even if your deck is built on 'weenie' (small) Creatures. On the other extreme, six lands out of seven cards would mean you have no spells to cast, and nothing to defend against the opponent.

If the Land balance is wrong, or the first seven cards do not hold keys cards to your deck's strategy, don't be afraid to take a mulligan. That's when you shuffle your hand back into your Library, redraw seven cards, and then put one card back to the Library's bottom. You have the option to redo the mulligan as many times as you want, though most players will stop at five cards (from seven to six to five) as anything less might be too hard to catch up.

Playing with the "London Mulligan Rule" a player will get "rewarded" with drawing seven new cards for taking a mulligan, This has led to players taking mulligan more aggressively than before the "London Mulligan Rule" was introduced.

A rule of thumb that is pretty simple could be: If you add a random 3-drop of cards and a Colorless Land to your hand, and check if the hand could do something without the help of extra cards. If it can, it is usually safe to keep. If it fails this test, consider to mulligan it. Of course, there are plenty of exceptions to this general rule. Consider the strength of your deck (A player would gamble more with weak decks), the matchup (A player would gamble more if he is an underdog in the matchup), your game plan (a player would gamble more if the deck is slow and doesn't have much card draw, since it needs more cards to function), and so on.

A common mistake is for a player to get lured into keeping a starting hand if you hold Library of Alexandria in our standing hand even if you cannot play one single card and/or have any other colored mana. This is driven by the plan to play Library of Alexandria in turn one and the hope to use it to draw additional land relatively fast.

If you do not draw any colored mana in the first 2-3 rounds or if your opponent holds or draw a strip mine the game can very likely be lost before it began.

### **Don't Rush To Play Out All Your Cards**

In the rush to win the game, you'll get this urge to play as many spells or cards as you can, assuming you have the Mana available. A better MTG player would not do this. Emptying your Hand isn't usually the best move for a couple of reasons:

Firstly, keeping Mana open and holding on to Instants allows you to bluff (see previous section) or interact on the opponent's turn. The main exception to this is when the opponent's Lands are all tapped and you want to ensure that your Instant spell gets to resolve with no chance of being countered.

Secondly, flooding your board leaves you open to a catastrophic "board wipe" that can cause you to lose the game. Imagine you have three Creatures in play. The opponent has none and you are applying pressure through attacks. You have two more Creatures in hand – should you play them?

In most situations, the smarter move is not to play them, simply because you are have the upper hand looking at the board state and therefore already in a winning position if the opponent does nothing to counter your Creatures' attacks. Yes, it would be bad to lose three Creatures to one Balance or Wrath of God, but worse if it was five Creatures. Even after losing your three Creatures, you can cast the last two and continue applying pressure.

A better MTG player knows to keep cards in hand in anticipation of what the opponent might play next.

### **Think About the Order of Your Land Drops**

This one is as easy as it is important to remember. Keep track of the color requirements of your cards and play your early lands accordingly.

Do not start in turn one playing a land that you cannot afford to loose to a strip mine in order for your starting hand to work. This is especially important if your opponent plays land destruction cards or could potentially aggressively use a turn one strip mine.

Also consider disguising your second color or third color as long as you can. For example, if you have only red cards that cost a single red mana to play in a red-green deck, don't show the opponent that you are playing red until you have to. Some might think you're color screwed and play their value cards without a kicker in order to apply pressure and punish your screw, and some might not guess your game plan and make strange plays. In some formats, players will also overextend into for example an earthquake or a Balance if you don't show them you're playing red or white.

### **Think About the Timing of Your Land Drops**

This falls into the same camp of not giving away free information before latest possible timing. The rule of thumb here is to keep your land drop back until your second main phase unless you want to represent a combat trick or instant removal.

### **Don't Offer Creatures Trades Without Reason**

Even if it feels ordinary, sometimes you don't want to trade creatures actively. If you play cards with aggressive abilities (such as raid), pump spells, overrun or anthem effects, Equipment, and so on, you might just want to assemble a large army instead of keeping the battlefield clean. Try to guess who benefits more from early trades and play accordingly.

Sometimes, you really do want to trade your early 2/2s if you can follow them up with a 3/4 and continue to attack. Sometimes, you play a 2/3 and should keep your 2/2 back to double block their 4/4 in the later stages of the game. Or you should keep a scavenger Folk back in order to have a future answer to an opponent's artifacts.

### **Casts Non-Critical Spells Only After Attacking**

Always remember that there are two Main Phases, one before and one after the Combat Phase. You have Creature cards in your hand, but should you cast them directly on your first Main Phase? If it has Haste and can attack immediately, then naturally you should play it before the Combat Phase. But in many other scenarios, a better MTG player will hold off casting non-critical spells only after the Combat Phase.

Casting non-critical spells in the second Main Phase will make you a better MTG player.

Looking at the opponent's board, if the opponent does not have a threatening blocker to your attackers and is unlikely to even block them – then don't play the creature until your second main phase. In Combat it is a good option to keep open, because if the opponent can also see the second creature (and even more important if the creature has an ability) it will affect his blocking decisions and potentially also his removal decision if he has an instant creature removal card in hand.

### **Wait to activate abilities or play instants until opponents end turn.**

When you play a card that has great potential, it's sometimes tempting to play it or activate its abilities right away. But remember: "Patience is a virtue." Or, in Magic terms, "Wait until the latest possible moment before playing anything." There are a lot of steps and phases that can fly right by players – upkeep, postcombat main phase, end step – but if you recognize that you will receive priority during those times, you can use this to your advantage. While you can activate most abilities at any time during a turn, often the best time to activate an ability is during the opponent's end step. This is the last step that you normally receive priority before your turn starts and you untap, so if you have any mana open at this time, it's good to have a way to spend it – otherwise it'll go to waste.

During the end step, unlike the main phase, your opponent can't react to your line of play by casting any sorceries, creatures, artifacts, or enchantments afterward. Only if the opponent has an instant in hand AND available left over mana from his just completed turn – he can respond to your play.

Examples of frequently used instant spells and card effects in the opponents end step are:

Ancestral Recall, Lightning Bolt and Psionic Blast (if playing burn deck), Library of Alexandria, Jayemdae Tome, Rocket Launcher, Relic Barrier or Ice Manipulator (specially on Winter Orb or Howling Mine), Boomerang on your stasis

Example of frequently used instant spells in the opponents upkeep: Mana Short and Reset.

Disguise and shuffle the cards in your Hand

A player once played against another player that always sorted his hand. The player saw that and confidently guessed the number of lands in his opponent's starting hand and also recognized when the opponent drew new lands.

It's not a mistake to sort your hand for lands and non-lands, but be sure to shuffle (or flick) your hand from often and optimal after every draw that you make. Even if you don't it doesn't hurt to randomize your hand from time to time. If you don't, a focused player can see where you put cards you draw and guess whether you drew a land. Specially you should avoid the habit of putting a land directly into play when you draw it. This will tell the opponent that you still sit with the exact same cards on your hand as last turn – and if you did not kill his Mishra's factory during the last two rounds of attack you will then not do it next turn either.

### **Learn to sidebar**

New players will soon learn that a deck is not 60 cards, but 75. A sidebar may have up to 15 cards, and they can be swapped with the main deck to adjust to your opponent's strategy.

Learn which decks and strategies are the most popular in your chosen format, and use that as a reference. But your opponent will side in cards too, and you may try to side in cards for that.

Learning to properly sidebar is easily one of the most difficult things about Magic: The Gathering in comparison to other similar card games. After all, most card games don't even have a sidebar. That being said, sideboarding is one of the things about Magic that not only makes it more unique but more strategic as well.

Your sidebar gives your deck access to cards that wouldn't normally be good but are incredibly good against the right deck. For example, board wipes aren't something that most decks want to run, but when you find yourself swarmed with creatures and dead by turn four, you're going to be very happy to have some in your sidebar. The same goes for graveyard exile effects, enchantment removal, and the list goes on and on.

Don't be afraid to use your sidebar for your opponent's sidebar, as well as their main deck.

### **Bait Out Cards**

Many decks have counterspells and/or removal spells. Reduce their impact by creating a smooth curve of how powerful your creatures are. Start with creatures that are weakest, but still pose a threat, and pressure your opponent into using counterspells and removal on them.

With any luck, your opponent's answers have run dry for the time being, and now it's safer to play your biggest threats yet. Your 2/1 Savannah Lion or 2/2 hypnotic Specter may bait out your opponent's sword to Plowshares or Counter spell, and on your following turn, that answer isn't around to deal with a sudden 5/5 Juzam Djinn or Su-Chi. This works especially well against control decks, which often are afraid of early game creature pressure of any kind. Play conservatively at first, then bring out your big guns a turn or two after that. Don't wait too long, though; control decks love the long game.

### **Tells and Bluffs – master the mind game**

In MTG, the ability to interact on your opponent's turn through Instants or Abilities makes the mind game ever more crucial.

A better MTG player will employ mind games, keeping up cards and Mana available for interaction bluffs

### *Keep Mana Open for Some Interaction Bluffs*

Keeping your opponent second-guessing your responses can cause him or her to make mistakes, suboptimal decisions or even hesitant to cast spells. Even if you don't have that Lightning Bolt, Disenchant or Counterspell in hand, keeping some Mana open and available during the opponent's turn can serve as a deterrent. At the very least it'll make your opponent sweat a little more. A classic example of this strategy is if you opponent has a Mishra's factory in play for several turns and you have no blockers in play – then keeping your mountain untapped or a plain and another mana source can make an opponent hesitate to activate the factory due to worrying about if you have a Lightning bolt or Disenchant in hand.

Of course, this idea only works if you have cards in hand. After all, the opponent knows when you are out of cards and thus have nothing to cast.

### *Bluff With Dead Cards*

Chances are you're going to draw a card that's not useful in most games of Magic you play. However, that card can become useful if you hold it up like you're waiting to play it — MTG will reward players who bluff and mislead their opponents. If you draw an unneeded land, feel free to hang onto it, and play as though it were a juicy removal spell or counterspell. Back this up with some untapped lands or other mana sources, and your opponent may get the totally wrong idea about what you're doing.

This works best if you're using reactive decks such as control. Then when an opponent plays a card just pause him for a moment and pretend you are evaluating if you should counter this play or let it resolve. As for aggressive decks, hang onto a dead card, and then make a bold attack while a couple of your lands are untapped. Your opponent may get the impression that you're preparing to support the attack by casting a combat trick (like Giant Growth or Lightning bolt).

### *Frequent tells*

There are several tells that an experienced player should be looking for throughout the match. Some of the frequent ones are:

- *Opponent counting all his lands*  
-> Likely holding a X-Spell like Fireball, Mind Twist or Braingeyser
- *Opponent asking or looking at how many cards you have in hand*  
-> Likely holding a Balance, Mind Twist or Wheel of Fortune.
- *Opponent asking or counting how many lands you have*  
-> Likely holding a Balance or Land tax
- *Opponent looking at his graveyard*  
-> Likely holding an Animate Dead, Recall or Regrowth
- *Opponent asking about your graveyard*  
-> Likely holding an Animate Dead, Eureka or Time Twister or want to see how many answer you

*already have used if you play a control deck (like number of Counterspells, disenchant, Swords to Plowshares etc.)*

- *Opponent asking or looking for how many life points you have left*  
-> *Likely holding a burn spell*
- *Opponent continuously keep two blue mana open*  
-> *Likely holding a Counterspell*
- *Opponent counting the number of unspent mana you have open*  
-> *Likely holding a Power Sink*
- *Opponent tapping mana and without taking his hands off untapping it back again to re-consider*  
-> *If the player for example plays white and taps 2 plains and three other mana but regrets – he is probably considering to play a Serra Angel he is holding.*

### *Frequent Bluffs*

The important point here is that, as well as this is tells listed above, where you can get indications about your opponent's hand, are *also the exact same ways you can choose to bluff our opponent*, or your opponent can bluff you into believing that you are considering playing cards from your hand that you actually not holding.

### **Think Ahead**

The best Magic players are able to see three, four, or even five turns ahead. Before they cast a card, they have already considered the ramifications of playing that card now for many turns in advance. This is a rather general tip, but it's an important one nonetheless.

The farther you can see ahead regarding the actions you're taking, the better chances you have of avoiding making a mistake. It's easy to think about what your next turn might look like, but things get more complicated and more beneficial the farther ahead you can see in advance.

An important aspect of this is also to keep count of what cards has been played already by asking to see the content of opponent's graveyard. For example, if you play against the deck and three counter spells are already in the opponent's graveyard – he likely only have one more available plus a mana drain.

Another aspect is to continuously think what outs your opponent might have or that you have in each situation.

### **Don't Concede Too Early**

If you're short on time and play a durdly matchup, it can be right to concede early in order to save time. But most of the time, you should play a game to its end.

People expect you to concede if you're dead-on board. If you don't, they get insecure. Did you just rip the removal that saves you? Just confidently passing your turn while dead on board can set their imagination running wild.

Sometimes, they want to play it safe and give you another draw step that can save you. I even saw someone concede a game in which he had his opponent dead on board, but didn't see it and thought he

was dead in the following turn. Play your last turn as if it isn't your last, and sometimes you will get rewarded for it.

Also, you give away free info on your deck if you concede before drawing your last card. If your deck lacks cards that can save you (like a Wrath or Fireball or whatever), don't let your opponent know you don't have that type of card. If you concede game 1 before drawing your last card, I will not play around mass removal in game 2. Also, your opponent might play additional cards that give you extra info for side-boarding.

The variance and unpredictability of the Land system in MTG also means luck plays a part in determining the winner. No player controls luck, which means you never really know how the tide can shift.

There have been games where you will be pounded from turn one, struggling to stay alive by sacrificing blockers and emptying your Hand. It's always very tempting to hit the "concede" button on Arena or scoop up your cards in paper Magic. But then each top draw from the Library is a critical card, and coincidentally the opponent starts drawing Lands for five consecutive turns. Just when you thought you'd lost, the game is won.

This is one of the biggest reasons MTG is loved or hated – that a beginner has the chance to beat a World Champion because of luck. Not that it will happen often, as a better MTG player will often make better moves, and case in point, fight on till the very end.