

General Notes on Reading Tarot

by Peter Denvind Wright

The tarot deck is made up of two major parts: The Major Arcana and The Minor Arcana. The Major Arcana is made up of 22 cards that can be slightly re-arranged to fit together in a story often called *The Fool's Journey*. This is the story we all follow in life as we start with ignorance but are protected until we experience love, pain, and joy. We then learn morality and often spirituality. The second part, The Minor Arcana, is made up of four suits: Wands, Swords, Cups, and Pentacles. These four suits represent the four elements: Fire, Air, Water, and Earth. Fire is passion and creativity, Air is intelligence, Water is emotions, and Earth is structure and material goods.

Modern playing cards came from the Minor Arcana. Swords became Spades, Cups became Hearts, Wands became Clubs, and Pentacles became Diamonds. The court cards in tarot are Page, Knight, Queen, and King. Somewhere in the transition the Page became the Jack and the Knight disappeared, leaving us with only 13 cards in the normal playing card suites.

The Major Arcana and the suits in the Minor Arcana tell stories. The cards, when linked together, tell about the cycles in our lives. It is often easier to learn and remember the imagery and symbolism in the cards if one connects them to the stories they tell.

Tarot cards are read in spreads: The reader shuffles the cards, has the seeker shuffle, then cut the cards. The reader will then place the cards down in patterns called spreads. The locations of the cards are meaningful, just as the meaning of each card.

It is possible to read tarot cards by using notes for spreads and for the meanings of the cards, but one can only become a truly strong reader by leaving behind notes and knowing and understanding the symbolism in each card and how each card relates to others in the deck.

Tarot cards are **never** shuffled with a poker shuffle. That disturbs the energy and causes trouble with readings. Tarot cards are shuffled by holding them in the right hand and taking from the bottom of the deck with the left and shuffling or inserting the cards back into the pile toward the top. This is done for both left and right handed people.

Cards will change their meaning. Cards that meant one specific thing to me only a month ago may often mean two or more totally different things to me now. Both of the current meanings may or may not have any connection to what the card used to mean for me. If all meanings of all cards and spreads remains static, it is likely the reader is not growing and learning.

There is nothing hard about reading tarot cards. Anyone can learn the background. There is nothing special required to be a student of tarot. Tarot, also, is a gift. It can be used to help heal, to provide guidance, to reassure people in pain, or to provide hope at a time when there is none. Reading tarot for people is a gift. Gifts are to be shared.

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The following are suggestions and notes for beginners about tarot and learning tarot. They are suggestions, since situations and people make it difficult to make solid and fast rules about conditions that may change.

1) Develop and stand by your own ethical and moral code about the use of tarot and how you will deal with different attitudes.

2) Read The Ten Commandments of Tarot and use them to create your own guidelines. These are written from experience. They are designed to help readers avoid what could be serious problems and maintain a respectable reputation. Unlike the original Ten Commandments, though, they are not written in stone and each reader may feel the need to make personal modifications. They are a starting point.

3) A person can start reading tarot cards with notes on a spread and notes on a deck. A person does not truly know tarot until he or she knows the spreads and cards so well the knowledge is internalized. Memorization helps, but it is only when a reader steps beyond memorization and fully internalizes details of cards and spreads that mature readings can develop.

4) Cards, spreads, and meanings change, not only from person to person, but over time. Cards do not mean the same thing to me now that they meant to me a year ago. Be aware that meanings and specifics are not static and be open to the hints cards may be giving you about changing conditions.

5) Pick a deck that is comfortable for you. It is best that beginners start with a deck that is close to the standard imagery of the time (in late 20th century America, that is generally a variation of The Rider Tarot). After the messages of the cards have been learned, it is much easier to grow into other non-traditional decks. Don't be surprised if you have to try several different decks before you find one that works well with you.

6) When picking a deck for a beginner, it is strongly suggested to pick a deck that uses imagery close to the traditional imagery on decks such as Rider-Waite. This is the imagery that is easiest to learn, since it is what is most often described and referred to in books. It is also easy to transfer experience with this imagery to other decks.

7) There are many decks that are not true tarot decks, such as medicine cards, or The Lover's Tarot, or the Inner Child cards. The last two decks mentioned use the structure of tarot and are basically tarot decks, but the card names and designs are intentions are so different from standard, they can be confusing for beginners. There are also many other types of decks designed for divination and meditation. Be sure you, as a buyer, know what kind of deck you are buying and for what purpose you are buying a deck. (For example, I use the Inner Child Cards for meditation, but not for divination.)