

The Wandering Hermit

Learning the Tarot

by Peter Denvind Wright
© 1999 by Peter Denvind Wright
P.O. Box 3571, Richmond, VA 23235
(804)-560-2820 / denvind@poetic.com

Getting Started

[Click Here for the Online Table of Contents](#)

Read Me First!

Here it is! A full tutorial on how to read tarot on the web, free for anyone who wants it. I was only going to make it a brief intro at first, but then I decided knowledge is power and I believe in empowering people, not holding back from them. Doing a guide like this online is unique, and because of that, there are a few points I will clarify before we proceed:

Illustrations

Due to copyright laws, I cannot illustrate this guide with pictures of tarot cards. With this in mind, I decided not to illustrate this guide at all (except for spread diagrams), since any non-tarot illustrations might mislead, rather than instruct.

Practice

When I teach classes, I teach them over several weeks and build practice time into the class. *Practice is the most important element in learning tarot.* Just reading this guide will not teach you tarot. Practicing until you understand the cards instead of looking up or recalling memorized meanings is what will truly teach you tarot.

Availability for Help

If this were a book, I'd go into much more detail. If this were a class, I'd be available to answer questions. Although you can reach me by e-mail (denvind@poetic.com), and I try to respond quickly to e-mail, there are times, such as when I'm involved in a large writing project, that I can forget even simple and important things (like eating, walking the dog, videotaping Star Trek for later, or answering e-mail). You can also send me a note through ICQ. I'm Once A Druid (10974827). I'm not always on, or on under other names, but it is possible to make arrangements for chat times.

Downloads

Since it is not always possible to go online when you need to check something, I have condensed this into a few files. You have my permission to save these files on your computer or print them out. I've even made several versions of .zip files. Just download one. One format I'm using works with Adobe's Acrobat Reader, which is free. Go to www.adobe.com and look for it in their Products section. This reader is available on many platforms and I've selected this format to make the downloaded files usable on Windows, Mac, and other platforms.

Terms for Free Use

This entire tutorial is © 1999 Peter Denvind Wright (see top of file for contact information). It is intended as a free tutorial for learning tarot either online or through downloading to a personal computer. Copying and distribution is allowed as long as this tutorial is not sold or used as part of any publication, production, class, or talk for which fees are charged or unless the author's written permission and terms of use have been obtained and agreed upon before hand. In English, feel free to use this, to download it, to print it out, to send copies to friends (electronically or on paper) and to share this with anyone wishing to learn tarot, but under no conditions is it to be used to make any money without terms being arranged with me in advance.

Sorry for the nasty legal talk, but it's necessary to make sure people don't take my work and make it into their profit. This tutorial is intended to spread knowledge, but not to help others increase their wealth at my expense. There is no monetary cost for this tutorial, either online, or the download version. I do ask, though, that you send me e-mail (denvind@poetic.com) or a post card (Peter Denvind Wright, P.O. Box 3571, Richmond, VA 23235) to let me know this has helped you learn tarot. I am, among other things, a writer, and I would like to know when my work helps people.

With all that said, let's get on to learning just a smattering of the background of tarot and, especially, on to learning how to read tarot!

What Is Tarot?

Tarot is a system of divination and spiritual exploration using a special type of deck composed of 78 cards. There are many different types of tarot decks, the most common being the Rider Deck or Waite Deck, or one of many versions of these (including the Rider-Waite Deck).

Super-Brief History

It isn't necessary to know about the history of tarot to be able to read tarot or to use tarot as a tool for spiritual growth. I have read books that state tarot came from an Italian game called tarrochi. I have read other books that make no mention of this

game. There is evidence to believe that the deck was used as a way of preserving and passing on stories that the Church did not want people to know. In short, in A.D. 400 the Roman Emperor Theodosius declared on Christian Church to be official. Before then many different versions of Christianity had appeared. Suddenly all but one were heretical. One offshoot, sometimes called the hidden church, may have designed the cards to tell the history and beliefs of their church. Making it into a game was a way to disguise them and hide them from the official Church. Margaret Starbird, in her book The Woman with the Alabaster Jar, gives an explanation similar to this. If this is true, it explains, at least to me, part of why the Church was so opposed to tarot.

Getting Started and Getting a Deck

Tarot is one of the most popular and well known methods of divination, mainly because it is easy to learn and requires little to start. All you need to start is a tarot deck, a book or teacher and time to practice (the last one is *extremely* important!). Since there are so many types of decks available, it is important to pick one you are comfortable with. I suggest going to a local new-age or metaphysics store (local, since they are usually smaller and the staff is more able and willing to help you) and look through their decks. Check their sample decks (they should have samples available). Check out the styles of artwork on the decks and pick one that you feel connects with you. For more information on selecting a deck, see my file on Selecting a Tarot Deck.

There is one warning about decks: There are two parts to the deck, the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. The Minor Arcana is 56 cards. Some decks do not illustrate the Minor Arcana with symbolic pictures, but instead just show a picture of objects, such as 3 swords for the 3 of Swords, instead of an actual picture that is more symbolic. Once you have a deck, all you need is a guide, which can be a teacher or something written. This online guide will help you gain a basic understanding of how to read tarot.

Remember that You are Right!

I used to teach high school math (including Algebra and Geometry). Students were always scared to try to answer a question because they were afraid they would be wrong. If you want to really read tarot and use it, then unlearn what school taught you. In tarot there are more right answers than wrong answers. Trust your intuition. That voice in you that all your teachers said was wrong is actually right! How will you know what deck to pick? By picking the one that seems right (by the way, most readers have at least a few decks and have gone through stages of preferring one deck over another). How will you know how to interpret a card? By going with what feels right to you! When I teach tarot classes, I have what I call "General Answer #1" that I use over and over. To many questions my answer is, "You have to go with what seems right and what works for you." It's that simple. It really is.

For most cards in the deck there are multiple meanings. I, and other readers I work with, have seen the meanings of cards change from spread to spread, even if it's during

the same reading for the same client! So, to answer your question, So how do I know which meaning of the card to use? I refer you to General Answer #1. It is important to learn to trust yourself. When you see a card with many different meanings (again, that's most cards in the deck), it may be that it always means one thing for you. On the other hand, look at the other cards in the spread. What are all the cards, together, trying to tell you? There are no hard and fast answers. Just learn that you are right! Remember General Answer #1. This is not high school where independent thinking is discouraged. This is life. Trust your intuition!

After Getting a Deck

So you've got a deck. So what do you do now? The overall goal is to gain an understanding of what the cards mean, then use them in spreads. In a spread cards are placed in special positions, with each position having a meaning of its own. For example, if one position indicates the final outcome of something, the card that is placed there will tell you what kind of conclusion to expect. You can study the cards in two ways: 1) go through the deck on your own and study the cards and decide what they mean, or 2) let someone else tell you the general meanings. If you go with #2, always remember that the meanings of cards can change. **Never accept someone else's meanings as complete!** In other words, if I tell you the meanings of the cards, and it seems to you that some of my meanings are wrong, refer to General Answer #1 and go with what is right to you. I wrote my entire book on tarot cards in sonnets. Why? Because if it's written in normal prose, people read it and believe it. If it's in verse, they interpret and think about it. They find their own meanings in verse.

So go through the deck. You can explore on your own, with a teacher, or with a written guide. I've included a guide to the deck here that you can use. Just remember **never** to accept someone else's interpretation over your own.

Handling Your Deck

People have many different attitudes for handling their cards. Most tarot readers keep their cards in a special box, or wrapped in silk, or stored with a crystal on top of the deck. Remember General Answer #1. Do what is right for you. People also have their own ideas about opening a deck. Some will only buy and open decks between the new and full Moon (this is the time when the Moon is growing in size and the time to focus on what you want to grow in your life from full Moon to new Moon the moon is waning, so that is the time to focus on what to release from your life). If you ask me about when you should buy a deck or what you should do when opening it for the first time, I'll refer you to General Answer #1.

Most people feel the way the cards are shuffled is extremely important. I believe tarot cards should never be poker-shuffled. I hold the cards in my right hand and use the left to pull cards from the bottom and shuffle them into the deck. I use this method for two reasons. The first is that it keeps my cards upright. (Inverted cards have different

meanings and I generally don't do inverted readings.) The second is that, from a metaphysics view, we receive from the Universe through our left side, so that is the side I want handling the cards. I have to point out, though, this is my opinion. Although most readers tend to agree, I know of two readers who work where I do that poker-shuffle their decks.

Intro to the Tarot Deck

A tarot deck is 78 cards from two sections. The first is the Major Arcana, made of 22 cards. While most people agree the Major Arcana cards carry more weight, emphasis, and power than the Minors, leaving out or ignoring the Minors is like spelling with only vowels. The Major Arcana (or Majors or Trumps or Major Trumps) is made up of a specific series of cards that tells a story called The Fool's Journey. The Minor Arcana (or Minors or Minor Trumps). is made up of four suits of 14 cards each, for a total of 56 cards. The four suits are Wands, Swords, Cups, and Pentacles, each made up of cards numbered Ace through Ten and four court cards, Page, Knight, Queen, and King. (Just for trivia the modern playing deck came from the tarot deck. The Knight was dropped, the Page became the Jack and the suits changed.)

One note on card meanings: Upside down cards in a spread are called inverted. Inverted cards have different meanings (and if you use a circular deck, there can be meanings attached to the amount of skew or slant). I've never needed to do inverted readings, so I shuffle in a way that keeps my cards upright. I have not included information on inverted meanings here. If you want to use inverted cards, my best suggestion is to use the information in the booklet that came with your cards for help on inverted meanings.

If you are online, [click here](#) to start learning about The Major Arcana.

If you want to go to the Table of Contents, [click here](#).

If you want to go to the download section, [click here](#).