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## How to do a tarot card reading for beginners

For many of us, a "Tarot card reading" means a woman in flowing robes, leaning over a small table in a candlelit room, foretelling impending doom. But that's not really what Tarot cards are about. In fact, they're not even really meant to tell your fortune or future. As the occult organization The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn says, "The most powerful sources of information come from within; the Tarot aids in coming in contact with one's Higher Self." But what does that mean? In this article, we'll look at the various ideas about where Tarot cards come from, what they mean and how a deck of cards can possibly tell you anything about yourself. You'll learn why it matters where the cards fall and why you don't have to be a psychic to do a Tarot reading. Speaking of readings, the first thing to know is that there actually are two different types of Tarot readings: question readings and open readings. In question readings, you are addressing a specific question. Tarot is not intended to answer specific yes or no questions. Most say it also shouldn't be used to make decisions, but instead should be used as a guide to help you make the decision yourself. For this reason, the way a question is stated is very important. Tarot reader and teacher Joan Bunning gives this advice: Keep your options open: If you have the answer before the reading, then you're not allowing the cards to guide your overall decision. Bunning offers this example: Asking how you could encourage your mother-in-law to move out, as opposed to asking how you can get along better with her, is narrowing the scope of the true question by answering it before you even get started. Find the best level of detail: Your question should be focused but not overly detailed. Rather than looking at one aspect of a problem, find a way to look more broadly at it. For example, rather than asking how you can make your home life less chaotic, ask how you can better balance the family's schedules. That's a focused question. But do not go so far as to ask how you can coordinate baseball, soccer and Cub Scout schedules and still have family time — that's too detailed. Only include the minimum level of detail needed in order to express what you want to learn from the cards. Focus on yourself: If the reading is for you, make sure your question centers on you rather than on someone else who you think may be the root of your problem. For example, asking why your teenager is experimenting with drugs is focusing on them, not you. Asking what role you play in your teen's decision to experiment with drugs brings the question back to you. Stay neutral: Your question shouldn't convey a preconceived notion that your view is necessarily the right one. For example, asking why you're doing more work around the house than your spouse isn't neutral; asking how you can get more cooperation from your spouse when it comes to housework is neutral. Be positive: This one's straightforward. Instead of asking why a specific event hasn't happened, ask what you can do to help make that event happen. Open readings address the larger aspects of your life rather than a specific problem area or question. They're usually done when you're entering a new phase of life, such as getting married, graduating from college or starting a family. You can somewhat direct the reading if you have a general area you want to cover, such as your career or health, but that's as specific as the direction gets. Tarot is one of the most popular divination practices, and though occultists have been drawing the allegorical cards for centuries, illustrated decks are now popping up all over. The intrinsic aestheticism of this ancient art has revitalized interest in tarot, making it a social media favorite — there's now even such a thing as emoji tarot. Despite its ubiquity, though, tarot can still seem elusive and confusing. What exactly is tarot? What do the cards mean and how are they used? Don't fret: The tarot fundamentals are easy to understand. Here's what every beginner should know about the history of tarot, as well as tips and tricks for kick-starting your unique practice. Where does tarot come from? Surprisingly, tarot is a relatively modern craft. Though tarot decks date back to the 1400s, pictorial cards were originally used for games rather than prediction. Cartomancy, or fortune-telling through the use of playing cards, actually wasn't developed until 1785, when French occultist Jean-Baptiste Allette — known by his pseudonym, Etteilla, the inversion of his surname — created comprehensive links between illustrated cards, astrology, and ancient Egyptian lore. Over the next century, mystics and philosophers continued to expand the role of tarot. In the late 1890s, several London-based occultists formed the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, one of the groups responsible for the modern magical revival. Two of the group's founders, husband and wife MacGregor and Moina Maters, wrote a manual that detailed tarot's symbolic power, entitled Book T. In 1909, Arthur Edward Waite and Pamela Colman Smith designed and published a tarot deck loosely based on the teachings of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. This timeless deck is commonly known as the Rider-Waite deck and is still the most popular tarot variant for both beginner and professional card readers. In 1943, occultist Aleister Crowley (the self-declared nemesis of Arthur Edward Waite) and Lady Frieda Harris published their own interpretation of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn's tarot. Their Thoth deck, named after the Egyptian god of alphabets, incorporates specific astrological symbolism into each card, linking the divination practice to the cosmos. How do I choose a deck? There is no shortage of stunning, dynamic tarot decks. Since the mid-twentieth century, hundreds — if not thousands — of beautiful decks have been published. The Tarot de Marseille deck is an elegant reproduction of a classic French deck; the Motherpeace deck perfectly captures the ethereal spirit of the 1970s; the Black Power deck spotlights famous black luminaries. Cardsy explains that there are five cards (if not more) in every deck that are often met with uncertainty. "These are the five cards you might be scared of but shouldn't be," she starts. Death: "This one gets a bad rap and is actually one of my favorite cards in the deck," she says. "The death card, ruled by Scorpio, is all about change and transformation. Just as a scorpion sheds its shell to up-level into a bigger, better-fitting one, being in Death card energy indicates you are evolving into a more authentic, aligned version of yourself." The Fool: This card doesn't actually make you a fool, contradictory to popular opinion. Instead, Cardsy B says that this card is actually about taking risks and moving into a brand new chapter sans baggage. "The traditional Fool card shows an enthusiastic traveler preparing to leap off a cliff with a dog by his side, representing loyalty and protection (ie: Leap and the net will appear; When you take risks that feel intuitively aligned for you, the universe will have your back)," Cardsy explains. "To me, this is one of the most optimistic cards in the deck indicating a fresh start and movement in a positive direction." The Devil: Let's be real, drawing the devil can be challenging, but it's not as bad as you might think. "The classic artwork shows a demonic figure with a man and woman shackled to the demon," Cardsy verbally illustrates. "While this card does indicate temptations of self-sabotage, when we look closely, the shackles around the two individuals tied to the Devil are extremely loose." She says that this translates to the ideas that you can untie yourself and walk away from self-sabotaging patterns anytime you choose. The Emperor: "This traditional version of this card shows a stoic pope-like figure on a thrown indicating leadership and setting up a new foundation," Cardsy explains. "The traditional patriarchal imagery of this card can be polarizing as it can be seen as patriarchal energy asserting domineering rules and regulations." That's not how she sees it though. Instead, she believes that this card is all about how you choose to set up the foundation for your life in order to set yourself up for the most authentic alignment and success moving forward according to your playbook — no one else's. The Hermit: Contrary to the traditional meaning of the word "hermit," pulling this card doesn't indicate that you're a social recluse. "The traditional card shows an old man on top of a mountain holding a lantern out in front of him," Cardsy explains. "This card reminds us to go within and filter out any outside noises — even if they are opinions from loved ones with well-meaning intentions — as we move toward self-actualization. The lantern reminds us that we don't need to know the entire future, but rather just trust our intuition to light the next few steps of our journey." After a year as unpredictable and collectively hated as 2020, we're all looking forward to ushering in 2021. But before we can do that, we could really use some guidance on exactly how we can go about making this upcoming year less of a dumpster fire. That's where tarot comes in. Tarot is a form of divination that uses a pack of playing cards to provide a sense of direction. Practitioners believe that readings can help us figure out how we can best cope with the world around us. And while personalised readings can offer individual insight into the things going on in your life, practitioners can also practice "collective pulls" that offer more general insight, similar to how astrologers can give insight into the a particular planetary transit might have on everyone, in addition to specific signs. So why not use the cards to see what 2021 might have in store for us? We sat down with Sarah Potter, a tarot reader, professional witch, and colour magic practitioner based in New York City, for a collective 2021 tarot reading to help guide you into the new year and beyond. Click through to see what lies ahead.

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