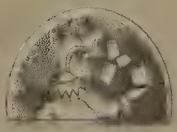

Special Topics in Tarot

TAROT TIPS

Eight of Pentacles

RUTH ANN AMBERSTONE
& WALD AMBERSTONE

FOREWORD BY MARY K. GREER

TAROT TIPS

78 Practical Techniques to
Enhance Your Tarot Reading Skills

About the Authors

Ruth Ann and Wald Amberstone are cofounders of The Tarot School in New York City, offering Tarot instruction in several formats and media.

Together the Amberstones teach, write, and publish about Tarot on all levels from divination to psychology to esotericism and magical practice. They are perpetual pioneers of new Tarot techniques, and remain lifelong Tarot students. Between them, Ruth Ann and Wald have amassed more than seventy years of experience as Tarot practitioners. Ruth Ann began her career as a reader in 1974, and Wald began his Tarot studies in 1959.

More than a thousand students have taken live classes at The Tarot School since it opened its doors in 1995. Hundreds more from around the country have participated in Tarot Teleclasses and Telecourses (a pioneering program of classes given entirely on the telephone), and students from all over the world have purchased tapes from The Tarot School Audio Course Series and study The Tarot School Correspondence Course. *Tarot Tips*, the Tarot School's e-mail newsletter, has thousands of subscribers worldwide.

The New York Tarot Festival, presented in June 2002 by Ruth Ann, Wald, and the students of The Tarot School, was the first national and international Tarot symposium to be held on the East Coast. The Readers Studio in April 2003 was the first Tarot conference targeted specifically to advanced students and professional readers.

Special Topics in Tarot

TAROT TIPS

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with

FOREWORD BY MARY K. GREER

Llewellyn Publications
Woodbury, Minnesota

ing a card in your mind rather than physically drawing it from the deck. Then interpret it, looking at the card if you need to. You might not think that a mental draw is as accurate or random as doing it with the actual cards, but trust me, it works just fine.

The Reversed Major Secret Path

The next time a Major Arcana card comes up reversed, take a look at its numerological partner. You may find the information you need is found there:

21–The World / 3–The Empress

20–Judgement / 2–The High Priestess

19–The Sun / 10–The Wheel of Fortune

18–The Moon / 9–The Hermit

17–The Star / 8–Strength

16–The Tower / 7–The Chariot

15–The Devil / 6–The Lovers

14–Temperance / 5–The Hierophant

13–Death / 4–The Emperor

12–The Hanged Man / 3–The Empress

11–Justice / 2–The High Priestess

10–The Wheel of Fortune / 1–The Magician

This technique is very playful, and the play is to find connections. There is no right or wrong way to go about it, and no rules as to when to use it. I wish you many joyful discoveries as you explore the secret paths of Tarot!

THREE

READING TECHNIQUES

In the flow of a Tarot reading, the individual cards are filled with meaning. They are the boats that carry us comfortably and safely downstream. Spreads connect the cards into the meaningful currents of a reading's themes and issues. It is the unending task of a student of Tarot to accumulate an ever more complete knowledge of these things in order to constantly improve as a reader. Happily, this knowledge is available in orderly systems that can be systematically learned.

But to negotiate the unexpected hazards of a reading—the shallows, rapids, rocks, and falls—a reader needs a set of skills rather than a body of knowledge, one that is by its nature a bit unruly, disorganized, even chaotic. This skill set is called by the deceptively simple name "Reading Technique."

What do you do when you look at a perfectly familiar card in a reading, only to go suddenly and completely blank about what it means?

How do you stay objective, and therefore useful, when doing a reading for someone you know very well (including yourself)?

What do you say to a querent when your gut instinct disagrees with the clear meaning of the card you are reading?

These and a thousand other intractable questions have been answered, and answered differently, again and again by readers over the years. They are the answers born of experience, validated by experience and not by theory. They can be told by someone who knows to someone who asks, but every reader has to personally test and personally validate the answers all over again. Reading technique is always learned in the doing.

There's a lot to learn. Just as there is pretty much a bottomless well of meanings and interpretations, and hundreds if not thousands of spreads, there is a very large and growing body of recorded technique. We know this can be a pretty daunting realization. So much to learn, so little time. But here, as in all big projects, things tend to go step by step. Everyone, from beginner to expert, adds to their knowledge little bit by little bit, but progress is still remarkably quick as long as you keep learning.

In this chapter, you will find our answers to a number of real, very practical questions asked by our students. By their nature, our answers cannot be definitive, but you will find them helpful. We have also included other things we think you would like to know and will be able to put to good use.

Tip #31: Expectations

QUESTION:

Why is it with most Tarot readings the message you get is so watered down, and it's so long that by the time you've finished reading it, maybe you have gotten only one or two things from it? It seems so many readers tell you the same thing several different ways, so you think you're getting an in-depth reading, and really you're not.

Also, why do the readings focus so much on things you already know, instead of more on what you don't know? Like your future?

It ends up being more of a counseling session. I think most people really want the emphasis to be on the future than on guidance. Just my opinion. Would love to hear yours. — Lorraine

ANSWER:

You raise an interesting issue that would probably elicit different responses from different people. I can only speak from my own point of view. Your question really covers two separate concerns.

The first, regarding watered-down messages, is strictly a matter of skill. A skilled professional reader should listen carefully to your questions, clarify your questions to find out what you *really* want to know, and make sure those questions are answered to the best of their ability. (It's amazing how many people forget to do this!) This process should include an ongoing dialog to make sure you are getting what you need from the session and to address any additional questions that may come up during the course of the reading.

As to your frustration at not being told the future, we are of the strong opinion that if straight prediction is what you're looking for, you should find and consult a psychic reader. It has been our experience that the Tarot is at its most useful and reliable when used as a tool for guidance, but that's because it's what we do best. The cards themselves do not have powers—these come from the reader. It may or may not come as a surprise, but Tarot readers are not all alike. Every reader has a different talent and a different predilection, and does the kind of reading at which they're best.

If you have certain requirements and expectations of a reader, you may wish to speak to them *beforehand* and discuss their approach. This will help you make an informed decision and go a long way toward reducing the level of frustration for both of you.

Tip #32: Asking a Question

QUESTION:

I've just recently picked up on the Tarot (even though I've had my cards for two years—go figure) but I'm not certain how you would start a reading. Does the querent tell you the question they are asking, or should they expect to keep that to themselves? Should they tell you more about the situation, or do I leave that all up to the reading? I've been trying some practice readings on my family with both, and I find that the reading is more accurate when they do tell me. Either way I was just looking for your opinion or some advice would be appreciated. — River

ANSWER:

I agree that a reading will be much more productive if the querent asks a question. The more background information they can give you as well, the deeper you can go and the more targeted and useful the reading session will be. Granted, there are many readers who actually prefer to work without a question, but that's a matter of personal style.

Some background information should be discussed as part of the process of clarifying the question. Other things may occur to the querent only after the reading has gotten under way. Also, some people will be more forthcoming than others. Be sensitive to what is comfortable for your querent.

In my opinion, the question is one of the most important parts of the reading and the reading can only be as clear as the question asked. If the question asked is ambiguous, the results will often be less than satisfactory. Helping the querent to define and refine their question will save time and ultimately be much more useful.

Learning how to pose productive and targeted questions takes time and practice. Here are some suggestions:

- Think of the initial question as an onion—what questions lie beneath the original question?
- Is there a more specific way the question can be worded?
- Has the querent asked what she or he *really* wants to know, or is there a hidden or buried issue?

Another technique to is to take a lead from the popular American television show *Jeopardy.* This is a game show where the contestant is given the answer and then must guess the correct question. Instead of having the querent ask the question, try backing into your reading by first asking the querent, "What answer would you like the cards to give you?" and then define questions that will yield this answer. For instance, "I want the cards to tell me that the book I am writing will be a success." Some questions based on this answer might be:

- What can I do to make sure I finish writing it?
- Will I make my deadline?
- Is there a market for my book?
- Is my agent the right person to promote it?
- What is my definition of success?

Design your spread to answer the questions that arise.

Of course, this technique is no guarantee that the cards will always tell you what you want to hear. If the writer of this book has no talent, contacts, or drive, the answer could very well be disappointing—but by asking the right questions, at least they'll know why. The information uncovered in the reading should be useful enough to help the querent come to terms with or overcome the difficulties.

Tip #33: Clarifying the Question

QUESTION:

I did a Celtic Cross for a dear friend on a very critical matter regarding his career. He is in the midst of a discrimination case, going on for two years.

> On positions 7, 8, 9 and 10: Judgement, Justice, 7 of Wands and 9 of Cups

This was very promising. A week later, I found out that he lost his case. I was baffled because this has never happened before; what actually occurred was the exact opposite of what the reading seemed to predict, although, I found out that if he can get two people to support his claim for racial discrimination, he still has a chance. This twist was not a previous consideration.

I really feel I let someone down, with the help of Tarot. The question was simple: "Will my efforts to fight for what I believe is right be decided in my favor?"

He is out his lawyer's fees and part-time employment. This person gives up a lot to fight for a cause (he's an activist). He had hoped that his case would be a precedent, a deterrent to ongoing discrimination and harassment in the workplace. — Bonnie

ANSWER:

You did not let him down—and neither did the Tarot.

Tarot took the long view. It is very responsive to questions *as asked.* Apparently, his "efforts to fight for what he believes is right" are not over. Therefore, the outcome has not become final yet. You said he still has a chance if he can find a couple of people to back him up. He now needs to decide if he has the strength and resources to see his fight through to the end.

Also, since he is an activist, that fight is probably lifelong and encompasses much more than this particular case. In the long run, those efforts will be rewarded but that may not help him now.

And, because he is an activist, chances are pretty good that he had already made up his mind to pursue this matter and was looking to the Tarot for confirmation. Don't feel that you talked him into anything he didn't want to do. This is his agenda, not yours.

Just a technical note: if you want to know the outcome of a specific event (i.e., trial or case), the question should focus on that specific event.

If your friend wants to consider an appeal, and agrees to let you read for him again, refine the question as much as you can. Ask multiple targeted questions about the case, the witnesses, the judge, his chances of winning this case, and anything else he might need to know to help him.

Oh, and don't use the Celtic Cross if you can possibly help it. That spread is fine for general readings, but what you want to do here is create a spread that will answer the specific questions you need answered. Take the time to work out a list of what he really needs to know so that the answers are useful.

Tip #34: Ten Practical Questions to Ask the Tarot

I can't stress enough how one of the most important components of a successful reading is the question and how it's asked. The more targeted a question is, the more likely it is the answer will be useful.

I really dislike the term "proactive," but it aptly describes the type of question that will yield the best results. Here are ten examples that you can use singly or in combination:

1. What do I need to know about . . . ?
2. What is the next step I need to take to achieve . . . ?
3. What can I do to help . . . ?
4. What is standing in the way of my . . . ?
5. How can I best overcome the obstacle of . . . ?
6. How can I be a better . . . ?
7. Which is the best choice between . . . ?
8. What can I do to support myself while . . . ?
9. When is the best time to . . . ?
10. Who am I?

Question #9 requires some knowledge of timing techniques in order to best answer it. (See **Tip #42: Timing in a Reading**.)

Question #10 is not so easy to answer but I wanted to include it because as far as we're concerned, it's the most important question you can ask the cards. Finding the answer is a lifelong process of discovery, and the more you study Tarot, the better you'll be able to answer it.

Happy readings!

Tip #35: Quiet Querents

QUESTION:

How do you handle a person who doesn't interact with you or want to tell you their question because their feeling is the cards should tell you what's going on? — Susan

1. What do I need to know about . . . ?
2. What is the next step I need to take to achieve . . . ?
3. What can I do to help . . . ?
4. What is standing in the way of my . . . ?
5. How can I best overcome the obstacle of . . . ?
6. How can I be a better . . . ?
7. Which is the best choice between . . . ?
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Happy readings!

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How do you handle a person who doesn't interact with you or want to tell you their question because their feeling is the cards should tell you what's going on? — Susan

ANSWER:

Many people who consult readers do so from the conviction that the cards have a power of their own, and a good reader is in tune with that power. For querents like these, the ordinary talents of perceptiveness, card knowledge, empathy, and compassion are irrelevant. All that counts is the psychic miracle, and if a reader cannot produce, or at least appear to produce this miracle, the querent will feel cheated. It is best for both querent and reader in such a case to be up front about what the reader is and is not prepared to do.

Of course, there are many readers who actually *prefer* that the querent not ask any questions or say anything until after the reading. Such readers have learned the trick of rapidly discovering a querent's issues and interpreting the cards around those issues. This is a special technique and can be learned, like everything else. The psychic approach will appeal to some readers more than others.

To get the most out of a reading session, I personally believe questions should be clarified as much as possible and a meaningful dialogue carried on throughout the reading. I make it clear to the querent before I begin that this is how I read. I tell them that the more specific they can be, the deeper we can go and the more helpful the reading will be to them. If the occasion warrants it, I also explain that I am not here to "put on a show."

The analogy of doctor and patient comes to mind here. Imagine a patient who refuses to tell the doctor what's wrong on the grounds that the doctor, if he's any good, should be able to figure it out. That always seemed to me like a great waste of valuable time.

Even so, there may be times when the querent genuinely does not have a specific question. At times like this, you can suggest drawing a card to answer the question, "What does _____ need to know right now?" Oftentimes, this can act as a conversation

starter. If not, you can then go on to draw several cards in a particular category such as health, work, love, etc.

Sometimes, people will refuse to ask a question out of fear. They really do have a very serious question but are afraid to voice it. They hope that the cards will give them the answer they need without having to say anything. Unfortunately, you have no way of knowing if this is what's going on. The only thing I can suggest here is to do your best to pay attention to your querent's energy and/or body language for signals of tension or anxiety and to read with compassion as much as possible.

Another instance when you might encounter the "quiet querent" is mid-reading. If the person you are reading for becomes tired, distracted or withdrawn, you can re-establish the interaction by giving them something to do.

A favorite technique of mine is to offer the querent a card and have them study it for a minute. Then ask them how it makes them feel when they look at it and/or what it brings to mind. This is also an excellent technique to use if you momentarily lose your focus or concentration—or if you suddenly find you have nothing to say about a particular card.

Tip #36: Paying Attention!

> *I think the one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention.*
>
> — Diane Sawyer

This is certainly a valuable lesson to keep in mind for life in general but is especially important to remember when you are doing a reading for another person. There are four things in particular to pay attention to:

1. The Querent
2. The Question
3. The Conversation
4. The Close

- **The Querent**
  Take some time to really observe the person you are reading for. Make sure they are comfortable and have everything they need before the reading begins, such as water or tea, a pen and paper for notes, etc. Attention to creature comforts, both the querent's and your own, will start a reading off on the right foot.

  During the reading, watch their body language. Sometimes physical reactions can give you feedback on your reading even if they don't say anything. Watch their energy level and endeavor to keep them relaxed and engaged in the process wherever possible. *Observe.*

- **The Question**
  This is the focal point of the reading. Take time to examine the question and clarify it so that it best reflects what the querent really wants to know. Many times a question will have underlying questions that can be more important than the one that was first asked.

  Once you have determined what the real question is, make sure you answer it. This may sound obvious but it's easier than you think to get sidetracked by other issues and forget to give a solid answer to the initial question. *Remember.*

- **The Conversation**
  Be very attentive to everything the querent says. As a teacher, I have the unique opportunity to oversee live readings performed by other people. I can't tell you how many times I've observed the querent casually throw out a crucial piece of information that was missed because

the reader was too preoccupied with what they were going to say next and wasn't paying attention. *Listen.*

- **The Close**
  Whenever possible, the querent should leave the reading feeling upbeat and optimistic—or at least with a plan of action to help them in the direction they need to go. If this isn't the case, take the time to draw one more card which will tell them what to do next. I like to close by saying "I hope this has been helpful." *Ask for feedback.*

Of course, paying attention to what is in the cards is equally important. Just because you've seen a card 100 times before, doesn't mean you won't see something new this time if you pay attention!

Tip #37: Ten Ways to Pick a Card

One of the first steps in beginning any reading is picking a card to start with. Whether you are doing a one-card reading or an elaborate spread, you need to start somewhere. Here are ten suggestions to get you started:

1. **Off the Top**
   The simplest way is to shuffle the deck and start dealing the cards off the top of the deck.

2. **Cut to the Chase**
   Another easy method is to cut the deck in half and draw cards from the top of the bottom half.

3. **Piling it On**
   Cut the deck into multiple piles, depending upon the spread you have chosen. For a three-card spread, for example, cut the deck into three piles and draw a card off the top of each pile for each of the positions.

4. **The Fan**
   Spread the entire deck out in front of you in an arc or fan shape. Hold your hand slightly above the cards and run it back and forth. When your hand gets warm or you feel a little tingle, stop and choose the card under it. Repeat this process as often as needed.

5. **Go Fish**
   Swirl the cards around on the table into a "pool." Choose the card or cards that catch your eye.

6. **Play the Numbers**
   Pick a number and count down from the top. For instance, if the number is 7, you'll start the reading with the 7th card. This is a good method to use when the person you are reading for is not physically present, as in a phone reading, since it puts some of their personal energy into the layout process.

   You can also incorporate a little numerology into your reading, based on the number that's chosen.

7. **Hot Date**
   A variation on the number theme is to use the number that corresponds with the date the reading is being done. Or, to personalize the energy even more, use the date of your querent's birthday. If their birthday is on March 4, for example, you would count down either four cards (for the fourth) or seven cards (three for the month and four for the day). If they're willing to give you the year of their birth as well, do a quick numerological reduction of their whole birth date. That's best if the information is available. If you're reading for yourself, of course, use your own birth date. This is another good method to use when the person you are reading for is not present.

8. **Double Date**
   If you're doing a relationship spread, you'll want the energies of both parties in the reading. First, count down from the top of the deck for Person A and choose their card or cards. Then count up from the bottom of the deck for Person B, using their birth date.

9. **The Name of the Game**
   Another way of personalizing the starting point is to use initials. If the name of the querent is Esmeralda, for instance, count down *A-B-C-D-E* to the fifth card and start there.

10. **On the Fly**
    Shuffle the cards until one flies out of the deck.

Tip #38: Deck Orientation

QUESTION:

If you flip cards or turn them over does it matter how the client hands you the deck? If they slide the deck to you, do you turn the deck around? If they turn the deck around and hand it to you, do you leave it as is? Is the answer just be consistent? — Susan

ANSWER:

If you choose to read reversals (upside-down or flipped cards), it is best to maintain the orientation of the querent's shuffle. So if they're sitting across from you and they slide the deck toward you or hand it to you, you should turn the deck around before drawing the cards. If the querent turns the deck around first, leave it that way.

Also, when you turn the cards over, be careful to turn them sideways as opposed to flipping them end-to-end. This will also preserve the correct orientation of the cards.

If you do not work with reversals, it doesn't matter how you receive them as you'll orient the cards as you lay them out.

Tip #39: Going With Your Gut

QUESTION:

If you look at a Tarot Card and you get a feeling from the picture that is opposite from what the book or basic meaning of the card is, should you go with your gut feeling or the book meaning of the card? — Jill

ANSWER:

There are two schools of thought on this, Jill, but as far as we're concerned, your intuition, or gut feeling, is what's ultimately most important.

When reading with Tarot cards, the cards themselves serve two functions. The first is to provide a focus for any natural psychic or intuitive ability you have. The second is to give you a vocabulary of interpretations and symbols to help you express your impressions.

This vocabulary comes from several sources. There are many Tarotists and book authors who have taken the time to write out and publish their own interpretations. Read as many of these as you like, but understand that no one author has the definitive word on the meaning of a card. Find which meanings work best for you.

There are symbol dictionaries that are an excellent resource for adding to your understanding of particular pictorial elements. There will be times when a detail in the card will hold the message. That message will most likely have nothing to do with any standard interpretation of the card.

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There are symbol dictionaries that are an excellent resource for adding to your understanding of particular pictorial elements. There will be times when a detail in the card will hold the message. That message will most likely have nothing to do with any standard interpretation of the card.

There are also highly developed symbolic systems such as Qabalah and the magickal systems of orders such as the Golden Dawn. Learning as much as you can of the esoteric symbology of the cards adds even more to the resources you have at your disposal.

The main thing is to be flexible, learn as much as you can, and trust yourself. And don't forget to communicate with the querent! If you aren't sure if your interpretation is the most appropriate one, ask. Dialogue and feedback are just as important as anything else.

Tip #40: Drawing a Blank

It happens to the best of us; you're in the middle of doing a reading for someone, everything's going along very nicely and suddenly it happens—you turn over a card and can't think of a single thing to say. All the interpretations you've ever learned about that card have simply disappeared into thin air!

It can be a gut-wrenching experience when this happens, but it doesn't have to be. There's a simple technique you can always rely on to get you back on track. Pick up the card and put it in front of the querent. Then ask them to look carefully at the card and tell you how it makes them feel. Don't ask them what they think it might *mean*—focus on the emotions that the card elicits.

Use their response as a springboard to further discussion about that card in particular, or how those feelings relate to other cards in the spread. In the unlikely case that both of you draw a blank and have no response to the card, you can always say, "We'll come back to this one later." Sometimes, cards that are read later in the spread will offer the insight you need to interpret it.

Tip #41: Reading Numbers

QUESTION:

I am fairly new to Tarot and I have been receiving your *Tarot Tips* for about a month, and I think they are great. Thanks so much for sending them. It is so good to know that I am not the only one who has such questions. Keep up the good work.

I just listened to your radio interview and I thought it was great to finally put a voice with those tips. It was a great interview and very interesting. One question I do have is that Wald asked about numbers before reading a card. Could you tell me a bit more about reading numbers and where I could maybe learn more about it? Thank you! — Kimberly

ANSWER:

I use a very simple numerology. It concerns itself mostly with styles of energy that tradition associates with the various numbers from 1–10. Since there are many systems by which these numbers can be interpreted, and since they all have useful things to say, if you want to use numbers for interpretation, build a personal system that you can be comfortable with. Such a system is usually a mix-and-match sort of affair.

Everybody knows some of this stuff. A lot of it is intuitive. The rest can be found in a variety of books. The main source for the kind of interpretations that I do is the numerology based on the Qabalistic Tree of Life. You can find a useful short form of that in *The Tarot School Correspondence Course* and in Robert Wang's *Qabalistic Tarot.*

In addition to the numbers themselves, it is useful to realize that when a person chooses from a set of graduated possibilities, like a series of numbers, that choice is usually connected intuitively with the chooser's state of mind. This is what gives

accuracy and validity to any interpretation of a chosen number, regardless of the system used.

So, for example, if a person chooses the number 9 out of a group of 10, that person gives us a quick look at the state of their energy with regard to whatever question they ask. The simplest thing that the number 9 suggests is coming to the end of a process—approaching a stage of completion.

If the same person asks a second question and chooses, say, the number 1, you could at the very least safely assume that, in this case, the person was at the beginning of things rather than at the end.

Tip #42: Timing in a Reading

There are many approaches to reading Tarot but as soon as the question of timing comes up, you are using the cards as a predictive tool. Predictive readings can be tricky, and many Tarot readers are reluctant to do them, but I'm going to go out on a limb here and tell you that I believe they have their place. I have come across several methods of seeing time frames that I particularly like.

When it comes to timing, trusting your intuition can work but this is where card knowledge can be especially helpful. Approaches for predicting timing vary from simple to complex. Here are a few systems you can apply without too much trouble.

Take a look at the numbers on the cards. Are there multiples of any particular number? This can be a good clue. For example, if two or more "3" cards show up, you're looking at the possibility of three hours, three days, three weeks, or three months. (Making predictions in terms of years is really stretching it and I wouldn't trust them!) This is where your intuition and the context of the reading may suggest the best time frame to choose.

Another good indicator of time can be found by looking at the suits. Again, see if there is any one suit that is represented in the majority of cards. Then use the time of day or season attributed to that suit to help answer your question of timing.

Swords = Morning and Spring

Wands = Noon and Summer

Cups = Evening and Autumn

Pentacles = Midnight and Winter

You may come across different attributions elsewhere but these are the ones that we use.

The suits can also give you a sense of how quickly or slowly things may move. The energy of the masculine suits of Wands and Swords is faster than that of the feminine suits of Cups and Pentacles, with Wands being the fastest and Pentacles the slowest. We have used the following associations with a great deal of success:

Wands = Days

Swords = Weeks

Cups = Months

Pentacles = A year or more

One more timing technique that I find useful is to lay cards out in a calendar spread, looking for the first card that is most representative of an answer to the question.

For example: a common question asked is "Do you see a relationship coming up for me in the future, and if so, when?"

After having the querent shuffle the deck, draw one card per month until you reach a card that might indicate a relationship. It could be the Lovers, the 2 of Cups, the 9 of Cups (often seen as the "wish card"), any of the Knights, the Ace of Cups, etc. Use your intuition and you'll know it when you see it.

So if you were doing this reading now, the first card would represent the current month. If the 2 of Cups was the fifth card laid out, the chances would be best for a relationship in five months from now. You can also look at the cards leading up to that time to see what kinds of things should be worked on in the meantime.

I do not recommend going any further than one year into the future. It sometimes happens that none of the twelve cards laid out are appropriate. That could mean that either the event in question will not happen during the course of this year or that this is not the right time to ask. When this happens, take a look at the cards to shed light on what else is going on instead.

If you are familiar with the astrological associations of the cards, you can use those to give you a sense of timing as well. For example, the 6 of Pentacles is attributed to the moon in Taurus. It's the second of three cards (in the Minor Arcana) associated with Taurus. This correlates with the second ten-day period of that sign, the beginning of May. For a complete list of astrological attributions for both Majors and Minors, see **Tip #43: Astrology in a Tarot Reading.**

Tip #43: Astrology in a Tarot Reading

QUESTION:

I've been learning how to read the cards for about six months now, I got interested after a reading in a store. I have one question about the way my cards were read. Before the reading started, my reader asked me what star sign I was. I know that this helps with the reading, but the spread seemed to start off from a specific card according to my answer. Do you know what this spread is? It looked like a variation of the Celtic Cross, but I can't be sure. I have looked in plenty of books, but haven't found any clues. — Jay

ANSWER:

This particular method does not sound familiar to me, but many readers create their own spreads and it could be that this was the case with your reading. However, since you believe that the spread was a variation on the Celtic Cross, there's another possibility.

Since the Celtic Cross does not have astrological attributions assigned to the positions in the spread, my guess is that the reader used his or her knowledge of the astrological associations of the cards themselves to find a starting point. For your reference, here is a list of sun signs and the cards related to them according to a standard and widely used system of attributions that we follow at The Tarot School. (You may find other systems of attribution elsewhere.)

Aries = The Emperor

Taurus = The Hierophant

Gemini = The Lovers

Cancer = The Chariot

Leo = Strength

Virgo = The Hermit

Libra = Justice

Scorpio = Death

Sagittarius = Temperance

Capricorn = The Devil

Aquarius = The Star

Pisces = The Moon

If the reading began with a Minor Arcana card, most likely the Element associated with the season of your birth was the determining factor:

Suit of Swords = Air Signs: Gemini, Libra, Aquarius

Suit of Wands = Fire Signs: Aries, Leo, Sagittarius

Suit of Cups = Water Signs: Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

Suit of Pentacles = Earth Signs: Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn

More complex astrological associations can be made as well, but chances are they were not considered in this context. One other possibility is that the reader did a numerological reduction of your birth date and began with that position. This technique of the querent's birth energy in a reading can be applied to any spread.

If you have a good working knowledge of astrology, you may find these more specific associations for the Minor Arcana interesting. As always, there are other systems of attribution, but this is the one we prefer:

Suit of Swords (Element of Air): Ace = the season of Spring

Cardinal Air	*Fixed Air*	*Mutable Air*
2 = Moon in Libra	5 = Venus in Aquarius	8 = Jupiter in Gemini
3 = Saturn in Libra	6 = Mercury in Aquarius	9 = Mars in Gemini
4 = Jupiter in Libra	7 = Moon in Aquarius	10 = Sun in Gemini

Suit of Wands (Element of Fire): Ace = the season of Summer

Cardinal Fire	*Fixed Fire*	*Mutable Fire*
2 = Mars in Aries	5 = Saturn in Leo	8 = Mercury in Sagittarius
3 = Sun in Aries	6 = Jupiter in Leo	9 = Moon in Sagittarius
4 = Venus in Aries	7 = Mars in Leo	10 = Saturn in Sagittarius

Suit of Cups (Element of Water): Ace = the season of Autumn

Cardinal Water	*Fixed Water*	*Mutable Water*
2 = Venus in Cancer	5 = Mars in Scorpio	8 = Saturn in Pisces
3 = Mercury in Cancer	6 = Sun in Scorpio	9 = Jupiter in Pisces
4 = Moon in Cancer	7 = Venus in Scorpio	10 = Mars in Pisces

Suit of Pentacles (Element of Earth): Ace = the season of Winter

Cardinal Earth	*Fixed Earth*	*Mutable Earth*
2 = Jupiter in Capricorn	5 = Mercury in Taurus	8 = Sun in Virgo
3 = Mars in Capricorn	6 = Moon in Taurus	9 = Venus in Virgo
4 = Sun in Capricorn	7 = Saturn in Taurus	10 = Mercury in Virgo

If you assign the four Aces to the seasons, thirty-six cards remain in the numbered cards of the Minor Arcana, nine per suit. Each of these coincides with ten degrees of the circle of the year, and each of these ten degree sections is called a "decan." Since a sign contains 30 degrees, there are three decans to each sign. For example: the 2 of Wands is attributed to the first decan of the sign of Leo and runs from 0–10 degrees. The second decan (3 of Wands) runs from 11–20 degrees of Leo. And the third decan (4 of Wands) runs from 21–30 degrees of Leo. This pattern is repeated throughout all the signs.

Tip #44: Using Esotericism in a Reading

Ever wonder what to do with all those tables of correspondences you come across in books? Here's a simple reading exercise we teach in class that can help you use some of that information in a practical way.

1. Divide your deck into two stacks—one comprised of the Major Arcana cards, and the other of the remaining cards.
2. Formulate your question.
3. Shuffle each stack while concentrating on your question and place the cards face-down in front of you.
4. Draw two cards from the Minor Arcana pile, using any method you like. These two cards will give you a basic answer to your question. It is not necessary for them to have any particular position assignments but feel free to assign some if that makes you more comfortable.
5. Draw one card from the Major Arcana pile. Do *not* interpret this card in the usual manner. Instead, choose an esoteric correspondence associated with the card to give you additional information. The only purpose of this card is to point the way toward this hidden bit of information.

We did several readings using this technique that were remarkably insightful. There are many sources of correspondences, but the ones that we worked with in class were the Golden Dawn astrological attributions and esoteric functions:

Card	Astro. Attribution	Esoteric Function
The Fool	Air	(No function)
The Magician	Mercury	Life & Death
The High Priestess	Moon	Peace & War
The Empress	Venus	Wisdom & Folly
The Emperor	Aries	Sight
The Hierophant	Taurus	Hearing
The Lovers	Gemini	Smell
The Chariot	Cancer	Speech
Strength	Leo	Taste
The Hermit	Virgo	Sexuality (Touch)
Wheel of Fortune	Jupiter	Riches & Poverty
Justice	Libra	Work
The Hanged Man	Water	(No function)
Death	Scorpio	Movement
Temperance	Sagittarius	Anger
The Devil	Capricorn	Laughter
The Tower	Mars	Indignation & Grace
The Star	Aquarius	Imagination
The Moon	Pisces	Sleep
The Sun	Sun	Fertility & Barrenness
Judgement	Fire	(No function)
The World	Saturn	Power & Servitude

In doing this reading, it's wise to use reversals. For example, in the case of those cards that have double functions, an upright card would indicate the first of the functions mentioned and a reversal would indicate the second function.

Even the cards that have only one function have two clearly different versions of that function. For example, the Emperor has the function of sight. Reversed, it could mean blindness or the inability to "see." Justice has the function of work. Reversed, it could mean not working or something that has malfunctioned.

You can use the astrological attributions to give you insight into the types of energy that are influencing the situation, to represent people with that particular sun sign, or to help with questions of timing.

If you choose to work with more extensive tables of correspondence, remember to keep it simple—pick one (or two at the most) to help you zero in on the hidden answer to your question.

Tip #45: Complex Reading Technique

Sometimes you can combine a whole series of one-, two-, and three-card readings into a comprehensive series that answers every question a querent may have on a complex topic. In this way, it's possible for them to ask one question after another concerning a particular subject and get a straightforward, powerful answer to each facet of their main concern.

Everyone knows, for example, most readings are about romance and relationships. Romantic issues often have many twists and turns, and a single answer to a general question is not altogether satisfying. The querent may have many things they'd like to know about their present situation.

The way this technique works is to help the querent formulate a specific question and answer it with a one-, two-, or three-card spread. Then use the answer as a springboard for further questions, each answered with its own one-, two-, or three-card spread.

To begin the technique, shuffle and cut in the usual way. Do one short spread and leave it face-up on the table. Without reshuffling, answer the next question with another short spread, drawing the cards off the top of the deck. Set this second spread face-up, directly beneath the first one. Then do a third, a fourth, etc. Do as many such short spreads as are necessary to cover every aspect of the querent's issue.

In this way, you organically create a large, subtle, complex spread that is made of easily managed parts. The entire history of the question, and all its answers, are laid out on the table for you and the querent to see clearly.

Tip #46: Bottoms Up!

Let's get to the bottom of this!

Want to find out the underlying influence in a situation? Or maybe a subconscious motive or desire? Look at the card on the bottom of the deck. It never fails to give some additional insight.

Tip #47: Reversed Readings

QUESTION:

I have been having a dickens of a time. I did a reading for my husband and all the cards came out upright and beautiful. However, when I try to do a reading for myself lately, every single card has come up reversed. I simply shake my head, clear the deck, and walk away. Do you have any ideas what may be doing this? It has been happening now for about two weeks. Before that I would get an occasional reversed card. — Marsha

ANSWER:

If a spread contains only reversed cards, Wald and I tend to ignore the reversals and read the spread as if they were all upright. In a case like this, we take the reversals to be the cards' way of drawing extra attention to themselves. (This is one of many ways we look at reversals, and you can certainly use this interpretation for single reversed cards as well.)

In your case, Marsha, it would seem that rather than shaking your head and walking away, you might want to turn the cards upright and take the time to give them some serious thought. My sense is that the deck is trying very hard to get your attention—even going so far as to stand on its head! Once you have gotten the message, my bet is this unusual occurrence will stop and your readings will return to more familiar patterns.

Tip #48: Many Majors in a Spread

QUESTION:

Lately, every time I do a weekly reading for myself, I get five or six Majors. The recurring ones are: the High Priestess, the Fool, the Hanged Man, the Chariot, and the Hermit.

This confuses me. I turn to the Tarot for its wisdom, and hopefully find my way. Years back, The Tower kept showing up, and yes, I experienced the crisis of The Tower. I know that is behind me now. I live a more reflective life compared to few years back.

Also, how often can one read for oneself? — Bonnie

ANSWER:

Oftentimes, the questions we ask are only the surface aspect of deeper questions of which we're not conscious. Even purely practical questions sometimes serve as disguises for deeper issues. Then, practical matters become like the elements of dreams—turning us back on ourselves for reflection and contemplation.

When a disproportionate number of Majors turn up in a spread, the first thing to consider is the need to look deeper than the initial question. When this happens repeatedly, it's almost a guarantee that the cards are asking you for greater subtlety and self-inquiry.

In order to reach deeper levels of meaning, it's really good to know as many levels of interpretations of each card as possible, including:

- Practical
- Psychological
- Esoteric
- Spiritual

For example, let's look at one of your recurring cards, the Hermit.

On a practical level, the Hermit speaks of the need for solitude, of being clear and pure in intention and action, of striving for the highest and of being a model and guide to others.

Psychologically, the Hermit addresses the issues of detachment, personal attainment, self-improvement, and total commitment to a high goal (never looking backward or downward).

Some of the esoteric considerations of this card include the astrological attribution of Virgo (and all that implies), combined with the sexual fire contained in the connection with the Hebrew letter Yod. This can produce either a powerful restrained or repressed sexual impulse, or a sublimated sexual energy that often expresses itself as spiritual ambition.

On a spiritual level, the Hermit distills light from his own purity. And where that light shines, it dispels the darkness of the personal shadow. When the Hermit is active on this level, you can expect a powerful realization and a new level of understanding to reveal itself.

There is considerably more to each level than there is room to mention here, but you get the idea. The Majors can work on any one of these levels or on several at the same time. You'll instinctively know which ones apply to your present situation. The more you know about each card, the deeper you can go.

In answer to your question about how often you can read for yourself, our experience shows that you can read as often as you like. Instead of thinking of each reading as separate, you can regard successive readings as a continuous process—each reading deepening the ones before it. Sometimes though, the deck will actually get annoyed with you for pestering it and it will let you know when enough is enough.

Tip #49: Contradictory Cards

QUESTION:

My question has to do with interpreting seemingly very opposing cards in a spread. I recently did a reading for myself about a painful relationship that I've decided to back off from. I did a reading to get some insight on the situation and these are the confusing cards that came up:

In the "covers you" position was the 3 of Cups, right next to it in the "crosses you" position was the 3 of Swords, while the card representing "other" was the Sun.

Another reading showed the 10 of Cups in the "significator" position, 2 of Cups in the "near future" position, but the "outcome" card was the Lovers card reversed.

Can you speak, in a general sense, about how one should begin to interpret seemingly highly contradictory cards in a reading? What role does their position in the spread play? — Susan

ANSWER:

I'm not sure of the best way to answer your question, Susan, because as far as we're concerned, cards never really contradict themselves. The trick is to understand the full range of meanings for each card in order to see where it fits in the scheme of things. Another important thing to keep in mind is that although two

for the New York Tarot Festival.

All this time, our relationship had been growing stronger. Two years later, as the century turned, we became engaged.

So now we would be planning two events—the festival and our wedding! At some point, it occurred to us to combine them. This way, our colleagues who were flying in for the Tarot Festival could also attend the wedding. At first we thought we'd have a quiet ceremony in one of the hotel conference rooms, or maybe even sneak off to the park. But as time went on, our plans became more and more elaborate. Ultimately, we took up three sections of the Grand Ballroom and invited all the festival participants (more than 200 people), plus family and friends, to witness our vows.

Robert Moyer designed and created our elaborate wedding garb, as well as a magical setting for the ceremony—complete with hanging banners of the Four Aces, a beautiful altar, a grove of trees, and a black-and-white checkered floor! Lon Milo DuQuette and Mary K. Greer were our real-life Hierophant and High Priestess, and a group of family and friends rounded out the wedding party. The ceremony, which we wrote ourselves (in our spare time!), was filled with Tarot symbolism and other personal spiritual references. Mince Pye put the icing on the cake with beautiful Renaissance music, and a good time was had by all.

The New York Tarot Festival itself, which was held during the weekend of June 21–23, 2002, was a whirlwind of classes taught by a dozen of the best Tarot instructors around. We specifically requested that everyone present a hands-on workshop instead of a lecture, and the participants were delighted with the experience. There were rituals, parties, an evening in Manhattan, and a Merchants Faire for shopping.

Thinking back on it now, we can't imagine how we managed all the details. We couldn't have pulled it off at all without the help of Lelia and Irene, and a dedicated crew of friends, family, and volunteers from the Tarot School student body. The financial risk

was tremendous, and the anxiety level bordered on soul-shattering. But we were blessed, and with the help of a last-minute article in *The Village Voice* which resulted in a flurry of walk-in registrations, we just about broke even.

We attempted an event of that size because we were innocent. We succeeded through hard work and grace. The best advice we can offer if you want to produce a public event of any size is to Take... Your... Time.... Our plans must have gone through at least a half-dozen incarnations before they were realized, and we re-negotiated the contract with the hotel four times. But when it was finally showtime, we knew what we wanted, and we knew what we were doing.

Bonus Tips

- Don't be afraid to try something big
- Another reason to have a large network: Learn from others' experiences

The Readers Studio

Shortly afterward, the let-down hit. We were so used to working at a furious rate, our regular projects seemed almost boring by comparison. The community wanted us to do another event, and even though we had been swearing up, down and sideways that we would never do anything like that again, we were hooked!

We weren't, however, hubristic enough to tempt the gods by planning another event of that magnitude. We decided to do something more intimate, yet we wanted it to be special—something that had never been done before.

After giving it a good deal of thought, we realized that what was missing from the Tarot event calendar was a conference expressly designed for professional readers and teachers. The

Readers Studio was created not only to serve the needs of more experienced Tarotists, but to give instructors a rare opportunity to teach at their highest level.

The first Readers Studio, coproduced by Llewellyn Worldwide, was held in April, 2003. Attendance was capped at seventy-eight seats and three top-notch teachers, Rachel Pollack, Mary Greer and Nina Lee Braden, presented four-hour practical workshops geared to raising everyone's reading skills to the next level. The format was simpler than the festival's but the feedback we received was very positive, and we plan to make it an annual event.

Bonus Tip

- Shoot for the stars! In less than ten years, the Tarot School went from having a few students to teaching hundreds of people from all over the world. They host large-scale, successful events featuring some of the most exciting names in Tarot. Where will you be in ten years? Imagine the possibilities, learn as much as possible, roll up your sleeves, and see what happens.

Predicting the Future ...

The evolution of The Tarot School has been organic, and we really can't predict its future. We'll keep teaching, of course, and we'd like to write more books. We'll continue the programs we have in place, but new directions always come as a surprise. We look forward to discovering what those new directions will be, and to sharing the adventure of Tarot with you!

— Ruth Ann and Wald Amberstone

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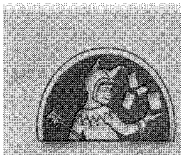

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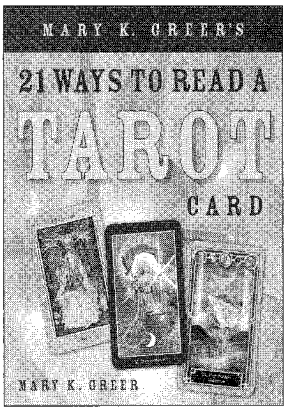

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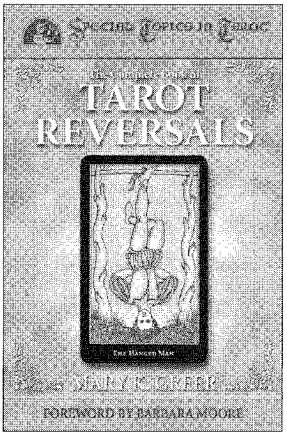

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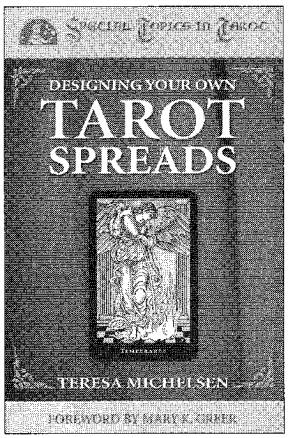

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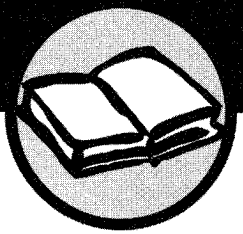

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