

How to Use Playing Cards As Tarot Cards

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You have questions—and a simple deck of playing cards might have all the answers. Using playing cards to tell your fortune might seem like a slumber party trick, but it's actually called cartomancy and dates back to the 1700s.^[1] It only takes a few minutes to do a simple card reading, and it's really fun to interpret the cards. We'll walk you through the essential steps for using playing cards as tarot cards. There are several ways to interpret the cards, but we've kept it simple so you can get right to the good stuff.

This article is based off an interview with our spiritual advisor and reiki master, Emily Christensen, founder of Rainbow Raaja. [Check out the full interview here.](#)

Method 1

Method 1 of 11: Clear your mind before you start your reading.



1 Jumbled thoughts make it hard to interpret your cards. ^[2] Before you begin, take a moment to breathe deeply and release any thoughts circling your head. When you feel ready, dive into your reading.

- For instance, you might close your eyes and take a deep breath. As you let out your breath, imagine your thoughts going with it.

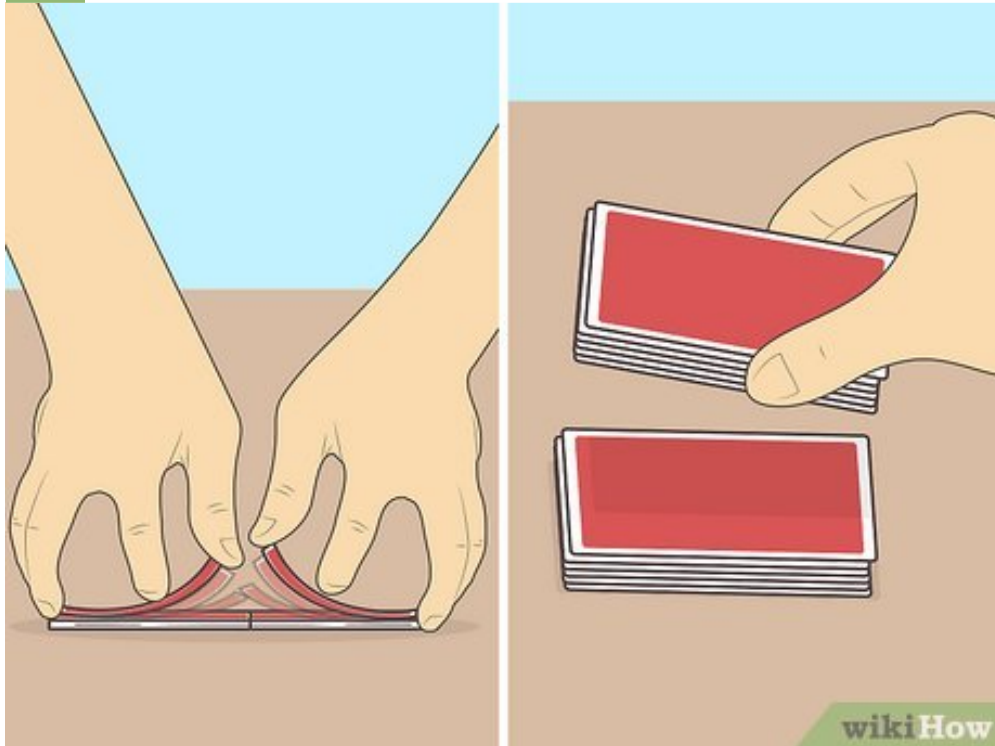
Method 2 of 11: Ask the cards a question to guide your reading.



1 Always form a question before you get started. Be specific about your topic so you can get clear direction from the cards. You might ask about your relationship, work issues, life choices, or your spiritual path.^[3]

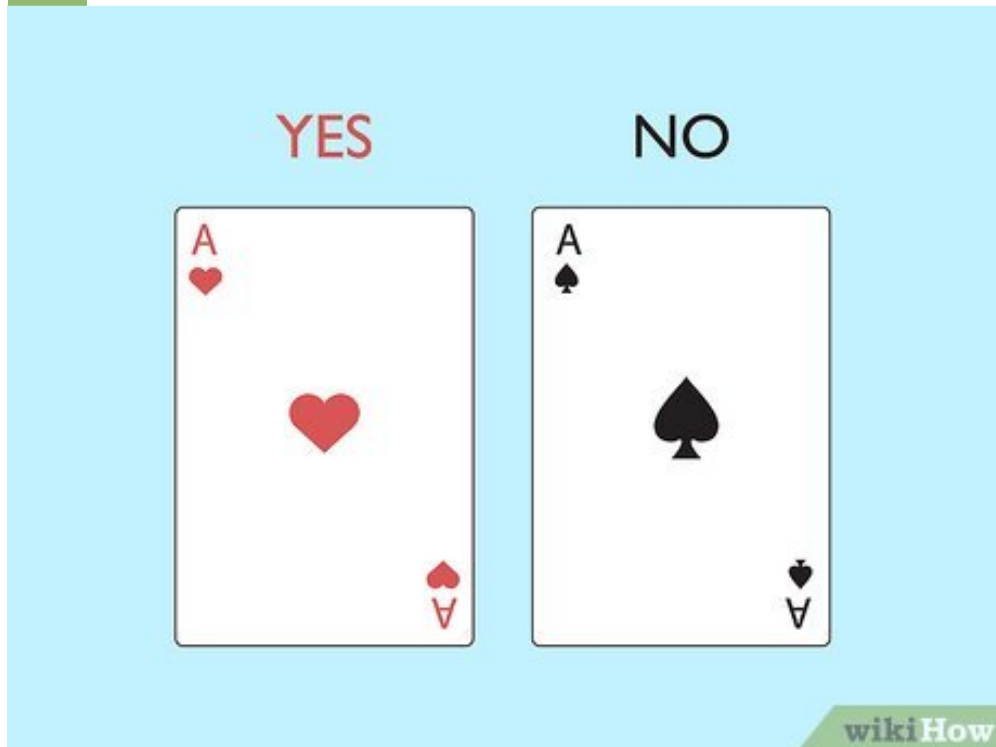
- If you're wondering about a particular person or event, ask something like, "Where is my relationship with Alex going?" "Will I be happy if I move away for college?" or "What will happen if I take this promotion at work?"
- You can also be more general. You could ask, "What's in store for my love life?" "How will the new year unfold?" or "Will I be successful in my career?"
- It's okay to ask more than 1 question, but do a separate card layout for each one.

Method 3 of 11: Shuffle your cards and cut the deck.



1 Ask for guidance as you prepare the deck. Shuffle the cards a few times to make sure they're really mixed up. Set the deck on a flat surface, then cut it once. Restack the deck so it's ready for the reading.^[4]

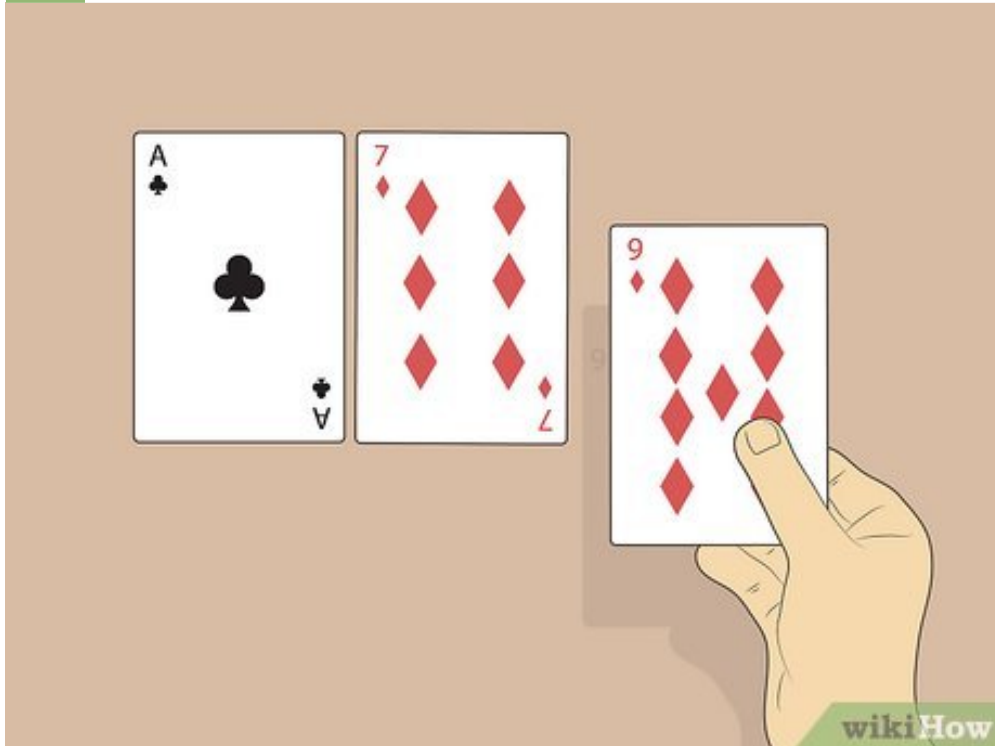
- Think about your question as you shuffle.
- If you're planning on using your cards for yes/no questions, you might not want to think about a specific question while you shuffle. Instead, you might think, "Give me the answers I seek."
- "Cut the deck" means to separate the shuffled deck into 2 smaller decks.

Method 4 of 11:
Draw 1 card for yes/no answers.

1 **Red cards mean “yes,” and black cards mean “no.”** Simply ask your question, then pick the top card. Your questions can be general or very specific. Either way, the cards will give you a clear “yes” or “no” answer. You can keep asking questions for as long as you like.^[5] Here are some good questions to ask:

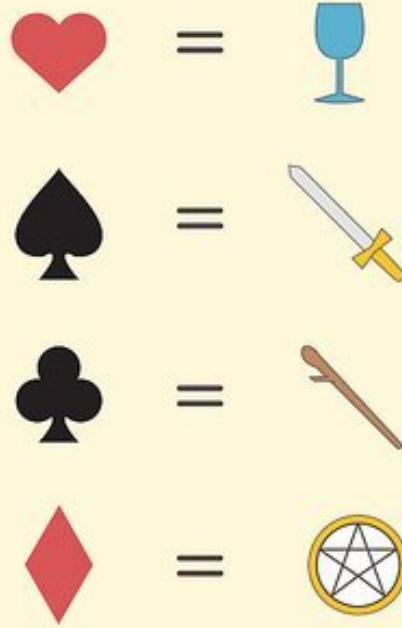
- “Will I find love soon?”
- “Is Taylor the right person for me?”
- “Is this career path right for me?”
- “Should I switch majors?”
- “Can I trust Mario?”
- “Am I on the right track at school?”
- “Should I enroll in a photography class?”
- “Should I move to Portland?”
- “Will this project be a success?”

Method 5 of 11: Lay out a spread for open-ended questions.



1 A spread is a series of cards that you read together. To get started, try a 1- or 3-card spread with your playing cards. Draw the cards from the top of the deck 1 by 1 and lay them in a row.^[6] You don't need to use a special layout to read your cards. Just follow your intuition.^[7]

- For a 1-card spread, you just draw the top card and interpret its meaning.
- In a 3-card spread, the first card represents the past, the second card represents the present, and the 3rd card represents the future.
- As you get more into tarot, you might learn how to [do traditional tarot spreads](#). However, this isn't necessary for reading playing cards.

Method 6 of 11:
Interpret the card's suit first.

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1 Each card suit has a special meaning that relates to the tarot deck. The suit's meaning will guide your interpretation of the card. Here's how each suit connects to the tarot:^[8]

- **Hearts:** Like the cups suit in the tarot, hearts represent your feelings, relationships, and home.
- **Spades:** Like the swords in the tarot, spades connect to obstacles, loss, planning, and intellect.
- **Clubs:** Like wands in the tarot, clubs represent future actions, travel, and creative thinking.
- **Diamonds:** Like pentacles in the tarot, diamonds connect to work and money.

Method 7 of 11:**Use the card number to deepen your interpretation.**

ACE → BEGINNING, ATTRIBUTES OF THE CARD SUIT
2 → RELATIONSHIP, BALANCE
3 → CONNECTIONS, GROWTH
4 → FOUNDATION, STABILITY
5 → CHANGE, CHALLENGE, IMBALANCE
6 → HARMONY, SUCCESS
7 → WISDOM, SPIRITUALITY, CHOICES
8 → ORGANIZATION, MOVEMENT, STAGNATION
9 → REALIZATION, UNDERSTANDING
10 → COMPLETION, TRANSITION TO SOMETHING NEW

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1 **Number cards are called “pip” cards.** Like in the traditional tarot, each card number means something different. When you interpret the card number, relate the number's meaning back to the suit's meaning. Here are the general interpretations for each number:[9]

- **Ace:** Beginning, attributes of the card suit
- **2:** Relationship, balance
- **3:** Connections, growth
- **4:** Foundation, stability
- **5:** Change, challenge, imbalance
- **6:** Harmony, success
- **7:** Wisdom, spirituality, choices
- **8:** Organization, movement, stagnation
- **9:** Realization, understanding
- **10:** Completion, transition to something new

Method 8 of 11: Treat face cards like number cards.

JACK	♥	→	ROMANTIC PARTNER; CONFIDANT
JACK	♠	→	FOCUSED, CLEVER
JACK	♣	→	ADVENTURER, RISK-TAKER
JACK	♦	→	GROUNDED, SERIOUS
QUEEN	♥	→	KIND, NURTURING WOMAN
QUEEN	♠	→	HONEST WOMAN
QUEEN	♣	→	PASSIONATE, AMBITIOUS WOMAN
QUEEN	♦	→	PRACTICAL, HELPFUL WOMAN
KING	♥	→	WISE, CALM MAN
KING	♠	→	CALCULATING MAN
KING	♣	→	INSPIRATIONAL MAN
KING	♦	→	HARD-WORKING, RICH MAN

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1 **Face cards are called “court” cards.** In general, they reflect real people, though knaves (jacks) can also reflect a situation. These cards may mean someone is coming into your life. Here's how to interpret them:^[10]

- **Knave (jack) of hearts:** Romantic partner; confidant
- **Knave (jack) of spades:** Focused, clever
- **Knave (jack) of clubs:** Adventurer, risk-taker
- **Knave (jack) of diamonds:** Grounded, serious
- **Queen of hearts:** Kind, nurturing woman
- **Queen of spades:** Honest woman
- **Queen of clubs:** Passionate, ambitious woman
- **Queen of diamonds:** Practical, helpful woman
- **King of hearts:** Wise, calm man
- **King of spades:** Calculating man
- **King of clubs:** Inspirational man
- **King of diamonds:** Hard-working, rich man

Method 9 of 11: Interpret the joker as a surprise waiting for you.



1 The joker represents the person being read, similar to the “fool” in tarot. When it appears in a reading, it may mean a situation you’re facing is going to suddenly change. It’s not really positive or negative on its own. Connect it back to the other cards in your spread and use your intuition to figure out what it means to you.^[1]

- For example, let’s say you’re doing a reading to find out if you’re going to meet someone special soon. In that case, the joker could mean that you’re about to have a sudden change in your love life.

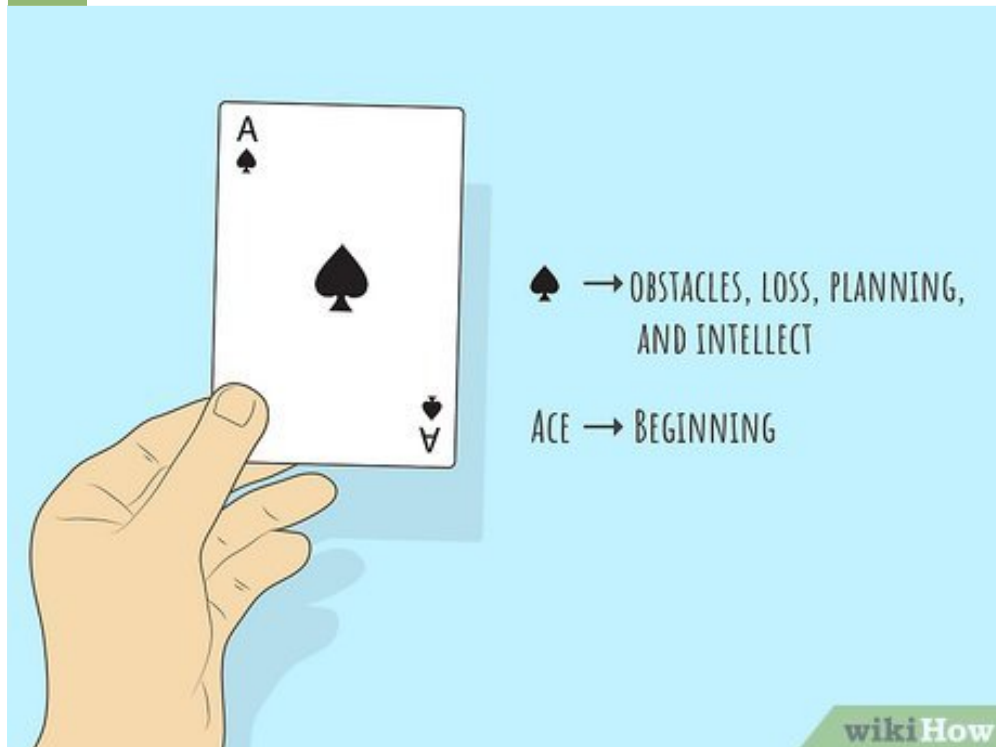
Method 10 of 11:

Set a meaning or intention for each card for a simpler reading.



- 1 Tarot reading isn't about rules—it's based on intuition.** Traditional card interpretations can provide a lot of guidance for your readings, but they're not necessary.
^[12] If interpreting your cards feels difficult or constricting, just go with your gut.
 - For example, let's say the number "8" has always felt lucky for you. When an "8" comes up in your reading, you might interpret it to mean something positive in your future.
 - Similarly, clubs look like clovers, which might remind you of your childhood playing outdoors. You might decide that clovers represent your inner child and spending time in nature.
 - The key is being consistent. If you assign special meanings to your cards, always interpret them that way.

Method 11 of 11: Put your interpretations together to get your reading.



1 Combine all of your card interpretations to get a full picture. First, pair each card's suit meaning and the number or face card interpretation. Then, look at all the cards together and see how they play off each other. Finally, use your intuition to decide what the cards mean to you.^[13] Here are some example readings for the question, "Should I switch jobs?":

- **Ace of Spades:** Spades can represent obstacles, loss, planning, and intellect, while the ace represents beginnings. This card might mean that changing jobs will require a lot of planning, but it could be a good idea because you see new beginnings in the cards. The loss could represent your old job.
- **3 of Clubs + 4 of Diamonds + 5 of Spades:** In this 3 card spread, the 3 of clubs represents the past and could mean that you had creativity and connection in your job before. The 4 of diamonds represents the present and could mean you have money and stability now. The 5 of spades represents the future and could mean you'd have change, obstacles, and loss. This might mean it's best to stay at your current job, depending on what your intuition tells you.



Tips

- Set the scene to make your reading more fun. Light a candle or incense, set out some crystals, and turn down the lights.
- In the regular tarot, cards that are upside down mean the reverse of the card's normal interpretation. Unlike tarot cards, playing cards typically don't have reverse meanings because the cards look the same in both directions. However, you can mark one side as the top so you can read reverse meanings if you like.^[14]
- Be creative and follow your intuition when reading your tarot. Be flexible!^[15]

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