

# Using Tarot or playing cards for game story design

## Tarot Card Spreads

**Single-Card Design:** Consider a story element such as an antagonist, location, or conflict, and draw one card. Use the interpretation or meaning of the card, the suit, the number, or the image on the card to flesh out that element.

### Three-Card Design

#### **Antagonist – Setting – Conflict:**

Use single cards and their interpretations and imagery to define each.

#### **Past – Present – Future:**

Use single cards to consider the events or currents of each time in the story.

#### **Problem – Cause – Solution:**

Define a problem, the origin of the problem, and what to focus on to solve it.

#### **Nature of: Option 1 – Option 2 – Option 3:**

Use one card to decide the nature of each of three available options or paths.

#### **Relevance – Lesson – Application:**

Why is it here? What can you get out of it? What do you do or experience to get that?

#### For a **CHARACTER** or **FACTION**:

1. What is their role in the story? How do they affect the players, the world, or the plot? Or how do they arrive into the story?
2. What are they trying to get? What is their agenda? What do they need to resolve their nature? Or what can players learn or get by interacting/defeating/helping them?
3. What do they do to pursue their agenda? Or what must the players do or what will they experience in dealing with them?

#### For a **LOCATION**:

1. What is its role in the story? How is it a place of “ - ”? Is it the place itself or the people in it who represent that quality?
2. What can be learned about its history, its current state or function, the people of the place, or its likely future?
3. How do its qualities or people help or hinder, teach, challenge, or entertain the players?

For a **CONFLICT**:

1. What is going on, or what is someone trying to bring about, or to prevent?
2. What is the origin or motivation of the conflict, or what concept is at stake or desired?
3. What must the heroes do or focus on, or what will they endure in trying to resolve the conflict?

Note: remember that a weak conflict could be resolved by all parties having a heart-to-heart conversation. For a stronger conflict, find barriers and complications that would prevent a conversation from resolving the conflict simply.

For a **COMPLICATION** or **ESCALATION**:

1. What is the difficulty of the complication? How does it complicate the story or present an obstacle?
2. What can it reveal, advance, or reflect about the larger story?
3. What must the heroes do, overcome, contend with or engage with in order to proceed or succeed?

For an **AGENDA**:

1. What does it do for the character or what are they trying to get?
2. How are their plans or activities revealed to the heroes, or what must the heroes learn or uncover to understand the agenda behind the activities?
3. How is the agenda carried out, what is the character doing to get what they want, or possibly, what clues are they leaving behind?

For an **ADVENTURE HOOK**:

How does the situation present itself or involve the players?

How will pursuing the hook reveal a larger storyline?

How does the scenario hook the players with personal stakes, emotional appeals, enticing rewards, or railroading?

For a **KEY ITEM**, **CLUE**, or **REWARD**:

1. How is it encountered and why, or simply what is the look, feel, or type of item?
2. What is its origin or how is that revealed, or what clues can it reveal about the story?
3. What does it offer the players, a clue, the ability to “ - ”, protection from “ - ”, or how do the players use or decipher it?

## Ten-Card Celtic Cross for the Story:

I. First is the current situation. Where are the players or how is the scenario introduced? What events are going on right now?

II. The Crossing Card is the obstacle, block, or challenge. What needs to be overcome? How is it revealed? This may be the conflict or villain.

III. The third card is the root or uncurrent of the scenario. How did this become a problem? What is the hidden agenda or emotion?

IV. The fourth card is the past. What is the backstory of the problem? Or how do players' or other key characters' past stories or past actions affect the current story or scenario?

V. The fifth card is a conscious revelation or future possibilities. What should the players do about all this, or what should they focus on?

VI. Sixth is the future, which contributes to the outcome. How would the situation develop or progress if the heroes were not involved, or how would the "villain" or threat proceed?

VII. The seventh card is the emotional state. What is the tone; scary, funny, tense? How should the players feel, what are the personal stakes to them?

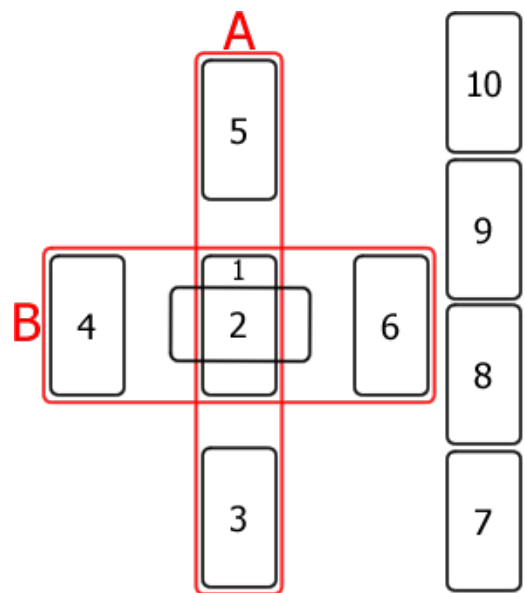
VIII. Eight is the outside or environmental influences. How do other people or the environment influence or complicate the scenario?

IX. Nine is the hopes, fears, or lessons. What kind of help or obstacles await the players? What will draw their focus, worry, or endanger them?

X. Last is the outcome. What kind of rewards will the heroes receive for success, what does success look like? Or what will the consequences or losses be for failure, or what is at stake overall?

A. is a path from bottom to top, from Three to One, to Five. It is the shift from subconscious to conscious. It is a "push-and-pull" between what the "villain" does versus what the players learn and do.

B. is a path from left to right, starting with card Four, through card Two to Six. It is the general "narrative" from beginning to end.



## Ten-Card Celtic Cross for a Setting or Culture:

I. First is the location, or home of the culture. What type of place is it? How is it a place of “ - ”? What happens there? Or what is the land like?

II. The Crossing Card disturbs the peace. If there is a conflict what is it? If not, what makes life more difficult or challenging here, for these people?

III. The third card is attitudes. What are the attitudes or beliefs of people, what do they value or fear? Or what do people believe about the place?

IV. The fourth card is the past. What’s the history of the setting or people, what are the layers of that history, and how are those layers revealed?

V. The fifth card is the focus. What is the focus of the players’ adventures or experiences with the place or culture? What can they do, or learn?

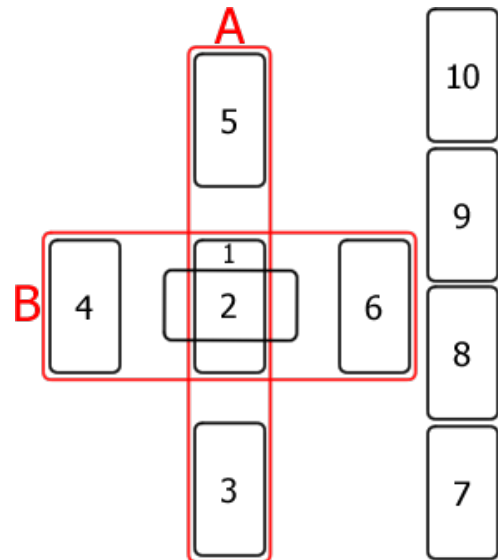
VI. Sixth is the future, which contributes to the outcome. Where are the currents of history flowing for this culture, or this place?

VII. The seventh card is the emotion. What is the feel of this setting, or what is the mood of the people who live there?

VIII. Eight is the outside or environmental influences. What is this culture’s or place’s relationship with other groups, factions, cultures, or connection to other locations? What is the people’s relationship to the land? Or how does this land affect the people?

IX. Nine is the ambitions. What good or bad changes do the people want to achieve, or what does an outsider want from them, or this place?

X. Last is the outcome. What will happen in the central disturbance or conflict, how will it play out? Will this be the result with intervention or without? Otherwise, in what way will the people or place flourish?



A. is a path from bottom to top, from Three to One, to Five. It is the shift from cultural to personal. What does it tell you about how the inhabitants engage with public life or politics, subcultures, or counterculture?

B. is a path from left to right, starting with card Four, through card Two to Six, from past to future. What does it say about the relationship of the place or culture to the passage of time, the calendar, holidays, or death?

**Alternate Multi-Card Design for a Setting:** Draw Single-Card or Three-Card spreads for each point on a map, or each key location in the setting.

# Meanings & Interpretations of the 78 Tarot Cards

## The Major Arcana

0. The Fool – beginnings, innocence, taking a risk without worry.
1. The Magician – power, confidence, having the tools you need to succeed, taking action.
2. The High Priestess – intuition, inner knowledge, mystery.
3. The Empress – Mother Nature, compassion, beauty, fertility.
4. The Emperor – structure, organization, rules, solidity, a ruler.
5. The Hierophant – tradition, belief, spirituality, a mentor.
6. The Lovers – love, union, a life-changing turning point.
7. The Chariot – determination, drive, autonomy, control, victory.
8. Strength – strength, courage, inner strength, self-care.
9. The Hermit – introspection, solitude, self-knowledge, wisdom.
10. The Wheel of Fortune – destiny, luck, changing fortunes, the inevitability of change.
11. Justice – truth, justice, a deserved fate, fairness, legal issues.
12. The Hanged Man – sacrifice, being stuck, suffering by not letting go or giving up something.
13. Death – transformation, transition, endings leading to beginnings.
14. Temperance – temperance, balance, patience, moderation.
15. The Devil – addiction, bondage, bad habits, materialism.
16. The Tower – disaster, upheaval, unexpected or unwanted change.
17. The Star – hope, renewal, serenity.
18. The Moon – fear, illusion, hidden danger.
19. The Sun – improvement, growth, joy, vitality.
20. Judgment – absolution, rebirth, a higher calling, forgiveness.
21. The World – completion of the journey, travel, accomplishment.

**The Minor Arcana –** The Numbers of any Minor Arcana suggest the following meanings:

Ace – Potential	Two – Duality	Three – Communication
Four – Stability	Five – Adversity	Six – Growth
Seven – Faith	Eight – Change	Nine – Fruition
Ten – Completion	Page – Message	Knight – Motion
Queen – Influence	King – Authority	

**Note:** Reversed (upside-down) cards, if used, usually cover the same topic as the suit and the number of the card suggest, but with a different implication, or possibly the opposite meaning.

If using standard playing cards, read Jacks as Knights, and Jokers as 0. The Fool.

	<b>♣ Wands</b> - Creativity, fire, artisans	<b>♥ Cups</b> - Emotion, water, clergy
<b>Ace</b>	Inspiration, creativity, creation.	Compassion, love, a new relationship.
<b>Two</b>	Planning, decisions, discovery, delays.	Partnership, attraction, commitment.
<b>Three</b>	Preparation, foresight, new enterprise, opportunity.	Friendship, community, celebration.
<b>Four</b>	Harmony, prosperity, a marriage.	Contemplation, meditation, inward focus.
<b>Five</b>	Disagreements, strife, competition.	Loss, disappointment, bereavement.
<b>Six</b>	Confidence, progress, achievement or acknowledgment.	Innocence, nostalgia, childhood or children.
<b>Seven</b>	Competition, perseverance, stand your ground.	Fantasy, imagination, illusion, too many choices.
<b>Eight</b>	Travel, movement, things changing.	Escapism, leaving home, parting, an emotional choice.
<b>Nine</b>	Resilience, persistence, determination.	Satisfaction, happiness, emotional comfort.
<b>Ten</b>	Burdens, responsibilities, stress.	Fulfillment, people aligning, harmony.
<b>Page Knight</b>	Enthusiasm, discovery, not tied down, messenger. Energy, lust, a voyage.	Creative, exploring feelings, serendipity. Romance, charm, invitations.
<b>Queen</b>	Exuberance, vibrancy, warmth, sex appeal.	Calm, intuitive, compassionate, a good friend.
<b>King</b>	Visionary, leader, entrepreneur, egotistical.	Friendly, emotional balance, emotional support.

	<b>♠ Swords</b> - Reason, air, nobility/military	<b>♦ Pentacles</b> - Material, earth, merchants
<b>Ace</b>	Clarity, power, a decision made, a truth revealed.	Manifestation, prosperity, a gift or new project.
<b>Two</b>	Choice, indecision, stalemate.	Balance, adaptability, making ends meet.
<b>Three</b>	Heartbreak, rejection, hurtful words, grief.	Teamwork, collaboration, pooling resources.
<b>Four</b>	Recuperation, withdrawing, resting the mind.	Stability, security, holding on to resources.
<b>Five</b>	Conflict, tension, bullying, defeat.	Poverty, material losses, financial worries.
<b>Six</b>	Transition, a path, a rite of passage.	Generosity, charity, giving or receiving support.
<b>Seven</b>	Betrayal, deception, stealth, reclaiming what was lost or stolen, thievery.	Investment, profit, missed out on opportunities.
<b>Eight</b>	Isolation, imprisonment, self-entrapment.	Education, employment, skill or craftsmanship.
<b>Nine</b>	Anxiety, depression, nightmares.	Self-sufficiency, appreciation, luxury.
<b>Ten</b>	Defeat, ending, death, crisis.	Wealth, establishment, family business.
<b>Page</b>	Curious, energetic or restless, quick-thinking.	Student, curiosity, focus, new enterprise.
<b>Knight</b>	Impulsive, opinionated, fight for the underdogs.	Efficient, routine, reliability, hard-worker.
<b>Queen</b>	Quick-thinker, perceptive, tells it like it is.	Down-to-earth practicality, a practical parent, generosity.
<b>King</b>	Intellectual, direct, authoritative, truthful.	Business magnate, disciplined, self-educated.