

Intro To Cartomancy: A No-Nonsense Tarot Alternative That Uses Playing Cards

You've heard of [tarot cards](#), maybe you've even used [an oracle deck](#), but did you know you can do a reading (for yourself or a friend!) with a regular old deck of playing cards? This practice is called *cartomancy*, and anyone can give it a try.

Here, we dive into everything you need to know about cartomancy, from its origins to what the cards mean, how to do a reading, and more.

What is cartomancy?

According to intuitive astrologer [Jacy Nova](#), cartomancy began centuries ago and was a favourite pastime of royals in European courts. "Cartomancy can be traced back to Europe as far as 1360, but it really rose to prominence between the 18th and 20th centuries" she adds.

Similar to [the cards in a tarot deck](#), every card in a standard playing deck is ascribed a certain meaning. In cartomancy, you present your question to the cards, make a pull, and then allow your subconscious to guide the way. As you pull the card(s), you can [tap into your intuition](#) to discern what it's trying to tell you.

How is cartomancy different from tarot reading?

While they can be read similarly, [tarot decks](#) and regular card decks are pretty different. The tarot deck has 78 cards (as opposed to a standard deck's 52) and contains different suits from your hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades. In addition to that, Nova adds, tarot cards "have more of a magical quality to them and really help you when you're doing psychic or intuitive readings."

She notes that playing cards are much more black and white. This can make them a good option for anyone just dipping their toes into divinatory readings and looking for more direct guidance. While tarot cards do have specific meanings, most tarot readers will lean on intuition more as they pick up the subtle energies of whomever they're reading for.

"The different tarot cards, I think, are much more in-depth," she adds. "They tell a deeper story, especially if you're [doing a deeper reading](#)."

Reading the cards:

So, how do you read a playing card deck, you ask? According to Nova, it's all about the suits. Unlike tarot, there's no major arcana here, so the big themes show up through your hearts, spades, clubs, and diamonds.

The four suits:

- **Spades** represent challenging tasks or events coming in the future.
- **Hearts** are about feelings, family, home, love, and relationships.

- **Clubs** represent positive things that are coming in the near future.
- **Diamonds** are all about money and finances.

How to do a reading:

First things first: you'll want to work with a [freshly cleansed deck](#). From there, [give your deck a shuffle](#), lay the cards out in front of you, and ask a question, Nova says. Depending on how in-depth you want to go, you can [pull a single card](#), or you can opt for a three-card reading, with a card to represent the past, present, and future. "There's also nine-card spreads, or the Celtic cross, which is also available in tarot, or even 21-cards," she says.

Once you've got your spread on the table, here's a peek into what each card means.

Cartomancy card meanings:

Hearts

- Ace of Hearts: New relationships, friendship
- 2 of Hearts: Good fortune in love and relationships
- 3 of Hearts: Be cautious in your relationships
- 4 of Hearts: Change or travel is on the horizon
- 5 of Hearts: Someone in your life is jealous
- 6 of Hearts: Surprise new love interest
- 7 of Hearts: Broken promises
- 8 of Hearts: Visitors and invitations
- 9 of Hearts: The "wish" card—which may come true
- 10 of Hearts: Good fortune is coming
- Jack of Hearts: Can represent a good friend or a young, blond person
- Queen of Hearts: A kind blond woman
- King of Hearts: A helpful blond man, good advice

Spades

- Ace of Spades: Endings, misfortune
- 2 of Spades: Tough decisions, deceit, change
- 3 of Spades: Trouble in relationships, infidelity
- 4 of Spades: Illness, broken promises
- 5 of Spades: Obstacles and difficulty, eventual success
- 6 of Spades: Improvement, small wins, upswing
- 7 of Spades: Bad advice, grief, loss
- 8 of Spades: Deceit, danger, caution is advised
- 9 of Spades: Bad luck, depression, anxiety
- 10 of Spades: Bad news, worry, imprisonment
- Jack of Spades: An unpleasant or immature young person with black hair
- Queen of Spades: A dark-haired woman or widow
- King of Spades: A dark-haired selfish but ambitious older man

Clubs

- Ace of Clubs: financial fortune, wealth, good news
- 2 of Clubs: Challenges, gossip
- 3 of Clubs: A wealthy partner and successful marriage
- 4 of Clubs: Deceit or betrayal, potentially by a friend
- 5 of Clubs: New friends and support
- 6 of Clubs: Success and prosperity, financial help
- 7 of Clubs: Success in business with potential trouble from a romantic partner
- 8 of Clubs: Difficulty in business and in love
- 9 of Clubs: New admirer or opportunities, warning against stubbornness
- 10 of Clubs: Unexpected money, travel
- Jack of Clubs: A reliable and trusted dark-haired friend
- Queen of Clubs: A dark-haired, helpful, and confident woman
- King of Clubs: A dark-haired, strong older man

Diamonds

- Ace of Diamonds: A gift of jewellery, a letter or message, improvement
- 2 of Diamonds: Disapproval of a relationship or affair
- 3 of Diamonds: Legal trouble, domestic arguments
- 4 of Diamonds: Unexpected money, inheritance
- 5 of Diamonds: Improvements and success in business, happy home life
- 6 of Diamonds: Relationship troubles, problems in a second marriage
- 7 of Diamonds: Challenges at work
- 8 of Diamonds: Surprise romance or travel later in life
- 9 of Diamonds: New business opportunities, unexpected money
- 10 of Diamonds: Financial prosperity, good fortune
- Jack of Diamonds: An unreliable or dishonest young person with light hair
- Queen of Diamonds: An outgoing, flirtatious woman with light hair
- King of Diamonds: An accomplished older man of influence with light hair

Tips when practicing:

Set the scene:

With any ritual, it's important to set up a calm and supportive space that allows clarity and intuition to flow. "You want to make sure there's not any clutter," Nova says. "That's really helpful because objects absorb energy, so it's important to be conscious about that." She also says it can be nice to grab any of your favourite spiritual objects like [crystals](#) to have on hand when you take your pull.

Say a prayer or blessing beforehand:

"Say a prayer or blessing before you do the reading," Nova says, "because many times, depending on how close you are to the person you're doing the reading for, you want to make sure you're not projecting any of your emotions onto the reading."

Work with the lunar cycle:

Both the [new moon](#) and [full moon](#) have different energies that can make for a heightened cartomancy reading, Nova says. "If someone's wanting to do a reading and they're thinking about starting a new business venture, moving, a new relationship, doing readings around the new moon is a great time for manifestation and setting your intentions," she explains, adding that the full moon is about "completion, resolving old issues, and pushing things away and moving forward."

The bottom line.

Cartomancy is a great option for anyone looking to try a new form of divination. "If someone wants a no-nonsense, black-and-white approach to doing a reading, [cartomancy] is very direct," Nova says. So, think of the questions you'd like answered and try your hand -- literally.