

*The Original*  
**Writer's**  
Tarot  
**Handbook**

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# Introduction

The Writer's Tarot is similar to traditional Tarot in a few ways. First of all there are also 78 cards: 22 higher Arcana (or court) cards and 56 minor Arcana cards. The simplified meaning of each card (at the top and bottom) loosely matches those of the traditional Tarot. Also, for those acquainted with traditional Tarot, some symbols, occupations and meanings are mirrored. But that's as far as it goes.

The Writer's Tarot cards are designed to inspire you. To:

- get your creative juices flowing
- lift a sagging section in your story
- overcome writer's block
- build characters
- suggest locations
- and, and, and...

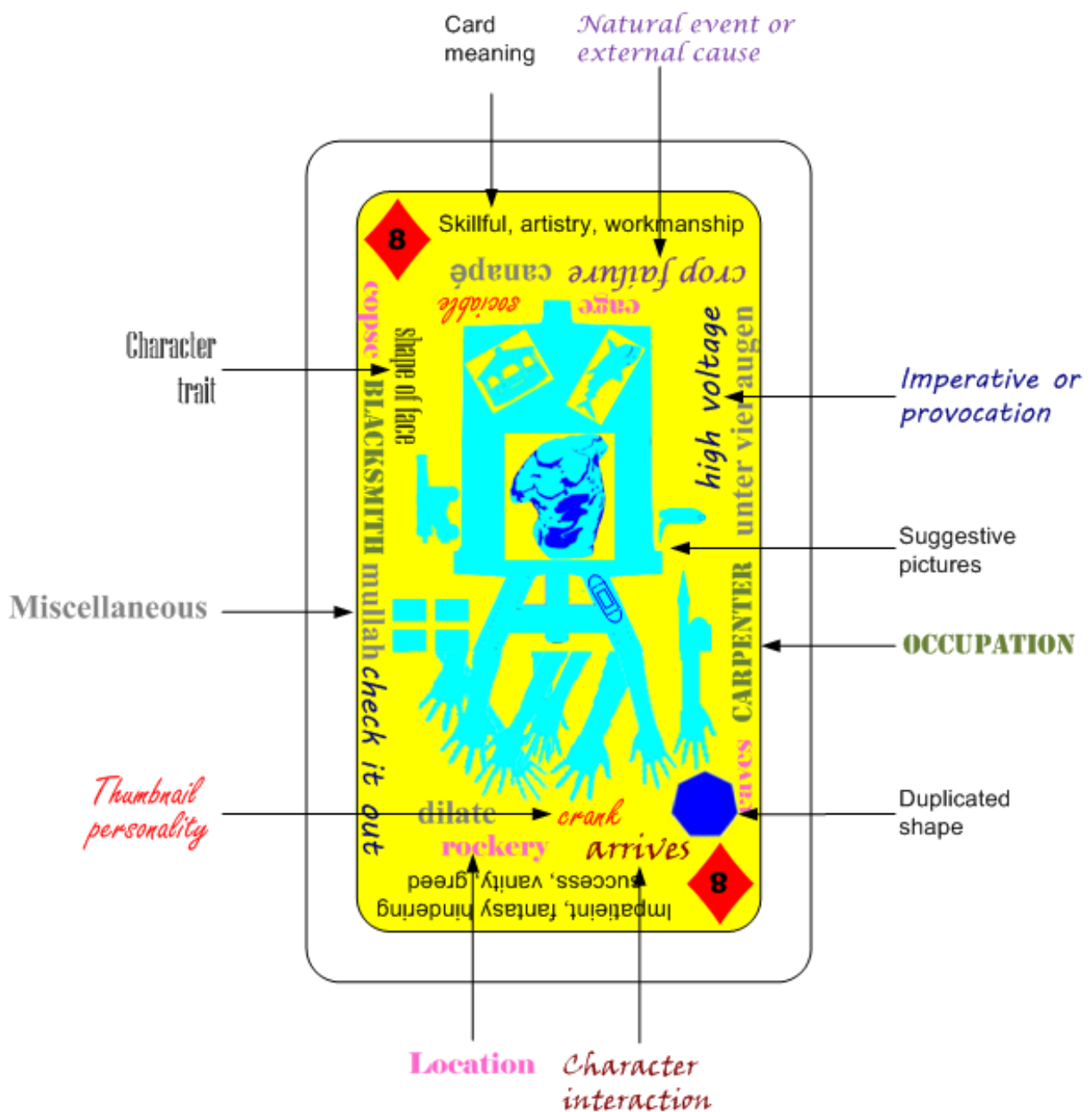
They say a picture says more than a thousand words. Whilst some of the pictures on the cards are straightforward and others somewhat enigmatic, many of them will mean different things to different people. Similarly, some of the words will be variously interpreted.

At first glance the cards appear chaotic. However, there is design in the chaos as can be seen under **Colour Codes**.

# Colour Codes

Each card offers numerous unrelated words (and arbitrary phrases) and a cluster of suggestive pictures. The words are colour-coded.

For clarity let's look at a card. (The pictures are subjective and therefore warrant no explanation.)



**crop failure** (Purple - a natural event or external cause)

**arrives** (Brown - character interaction)

**crank** (Red - thumbnail personality)

**shape of face** (Black - character trait)

**check it out; high voltage** (Blue - imperative/provocative words/phrases)

**blacksmith; carpenter** (Green – occupations)

**unter vier augen; mullah; canapé** (Grey – miscellaneous (incl. phonetic alphabet, foreign phrases)

**cage; copse, eaves, rockery** (Pink – locations)

Some words can be ambiguous making the categories interchangeable.

The meaning of a card (top and bottom) depends upon which way up it reveals itself to the person who lays it. The meaning at the top should be used. Having said that, there is no reason why the card could not be turned upside down!

# How to use the cards

## For writers

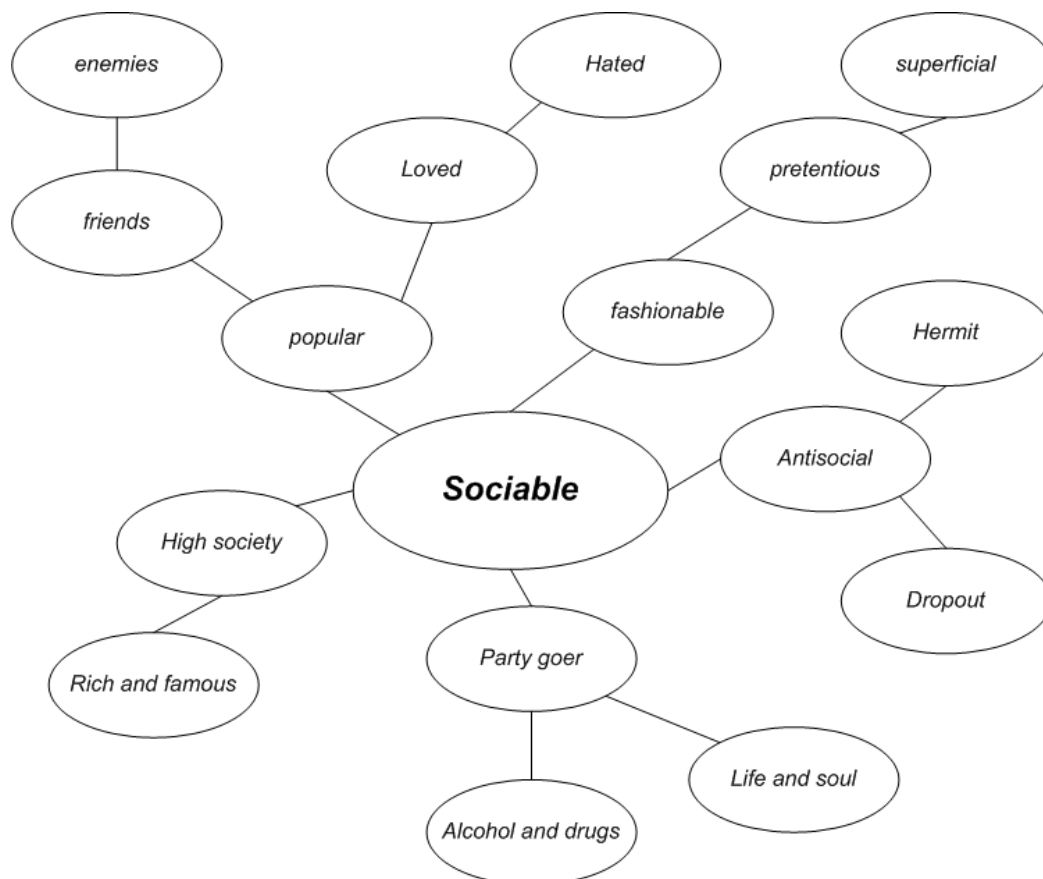
The following is a list of suggestions on how to use the Writer's Tarot. Bear in mind that the interpretation of the cards is a springboard and the images and words do not have to be used literally. Think laterally. For instance, occupations could suggest locations and vice versa.

Go through them searching for inspiration or an idea.

## **Perform a creative Search**

Carry out a creative search: free associate from a root word or picture.

Here's an example using the word "sociable" from the card on page 6.



Ask yourself a question and let a random card inspire the answer. Using the card on page 6, we could get the following answers to the questions:

Where should my next scene take place? (Pink: copse, cage, rockery, caves)



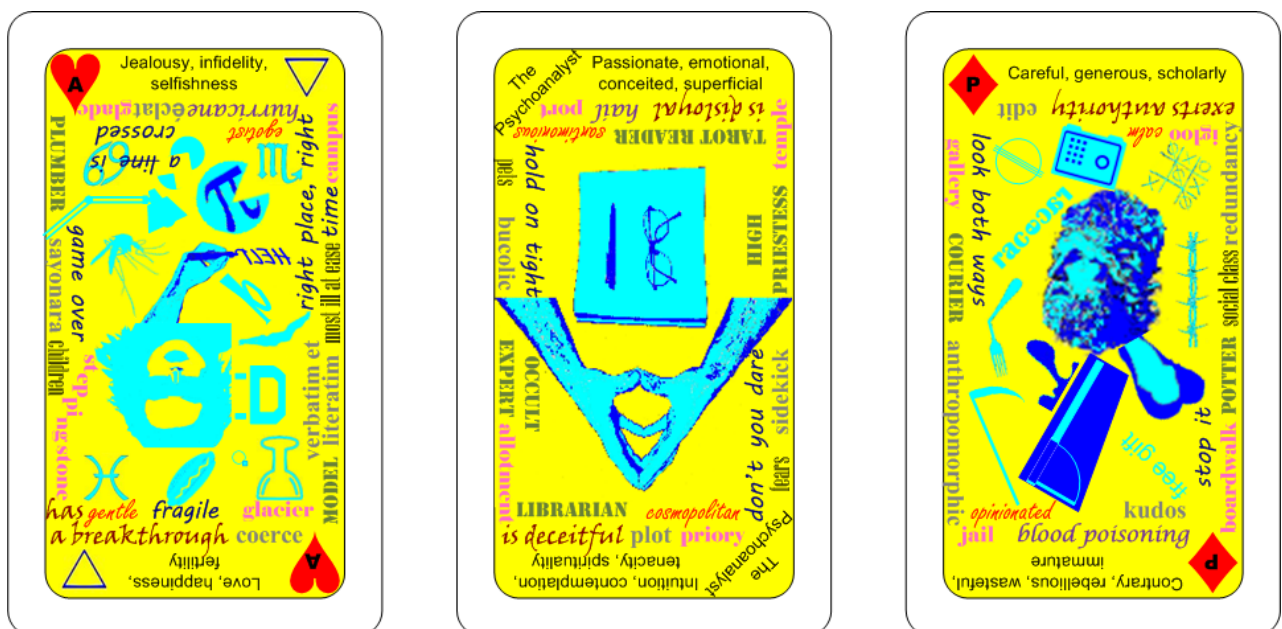
What do I know of this character? (Red, black, green, card meaning: sociable, crank; shape of face; carpenter, blacksmith; skilful, artistry, workmanship or impatient, fantasy hindering success, vanity, greed)

What happens next? (Purple, brown, blue: crop failure; arrives; high voltage, check it out)

Don't forget, the answer may be in a picture. Then the first question above could be answered with: in a gazebo or art gallery, near a cannon, at a mosque or an aquarium.

## Build a sentence

Lay out three cards and build a sentence (or nonsense) to get your creative juices flowing.



A plumber  
A model  
A mosquito  
Children  
A car  
A cry for help  
A hurricane  
A woman wearing sunglasses

is disloyal  
is deceitful  
is passionate  
contemplates  
holds on tight  
doesn't dare  
plots  
Fears  
in a priory  
in a temple

and/but

stops it  
results in blood poisoning  
is opinionated  
remains calm  
exerts authority  
wins the game  
shows kudos  
is made redundant  
is wasteful  
is safe  
reaps

## Think laterally

Think laterally. The word "tank" on the card on the next page could refer to a military tank, fish tank, fuel tank, water tank, scuba tank or decompression tank. More obscurely there's think tank, tank top or tank up. And in economic circles to tank means to fail. These suggestions are by no means exhaustive.



## Create a scene

Create a scene by asking the standard What, Where, When, Why, Who and How.

### What happens?

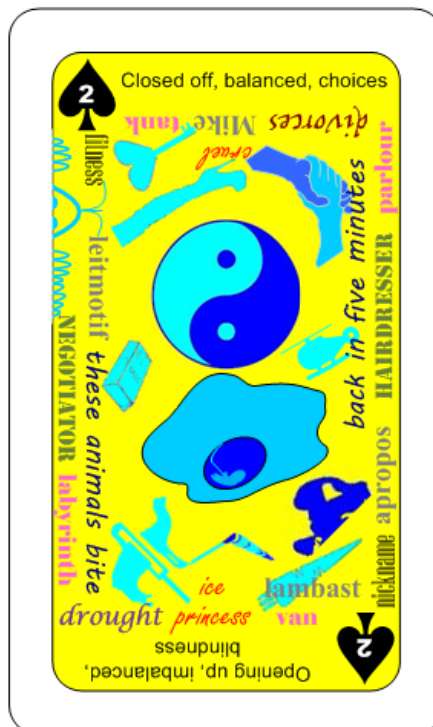
*something orael*  
an **agreement** is reached  
*someone divorces*  
a **helicopter** arrives  
graffiti is uncovered  
gold prices change  
*there's a drought*  
someone is **lambasted**

### Where does it happen?

in a **brothel**  
in a **café**  
*outside a labyrinth*  
*in a tank*  
*in the parlour*  
in an **Eastern** country  
on the **gold** coast  
*in a van*

### When does it happen?

during a **leitmotif**  
*during a drought*  
*in five minutes*  
when a **helicopter** arrives  
after an **agreement** is reached



### Why does it happen?

*because these animals bite*  
because they're **blind**  
because **gold** prices change  
because an **agreement** is reached  
there's a **bad** harvest

### Who does it happen to?

a **prostitute**  
*a divorcée*  
**Mike**  
**A HAIRDRESSER**  
a **camel**  
*an ice princess*  
**THE NEGOTIATOR**

### How does it happen?

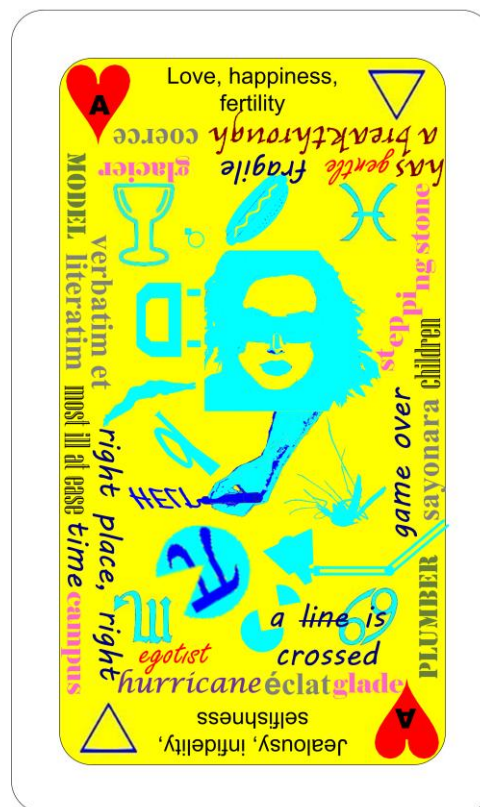
a **helicopter** crashes  
**key to love** is found  
*a tank gets stuck*  
someone makes a **choice**  
they **open up**

### Prompt an episode

With your plot in mind, ask a specific question. For example, what happens next to this character?

Using a bit of imagination the following card could generate the following answers:

"Finds love, happiness, fertility; is jealous, selfish; suffers mosquito bite (malaria); is trapped by a hurricane; has a breakthrough; blows trumpet; is blinded; is in the right place at the right time; crosses a line; is in a triangle; ends game; says goodbye; uses a stepping stone; is uncomfortable; becomes engaged; loses ring; has sex; drinks wine/poison; sheds light; plays computer game; eats pie; does mathematics; drives away; wears sunglasses; sees a clam; eats burger or hotdog; grows a moustache; dives; climbs a mountain; encounters an alligator; builds a model; is egotistical, is gentle; is fragile; cries for help; meets a plumber, a Pisces, a Cancer, a Scorpio,..."



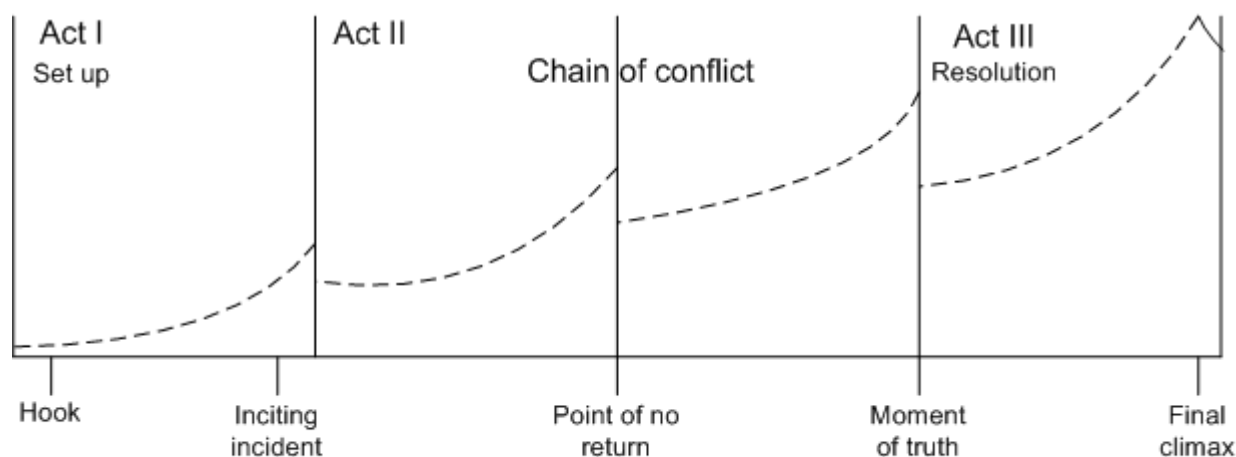
## Flesh out a character

Use a card or number of cards to ask yourself about a character. The card on the following page asks about a character's fitness or nickname (Character trait).

Whilst the 22 higher Arcana can be used to create major characters, themes and major events; all the cards can inspire character, prompt a setting, incident or plot twist. However, the cards are not suitable for the big questions: theme, plot, style and viewpoint. They are best used for the smaller specific issues.

### Classic three-act linear structure

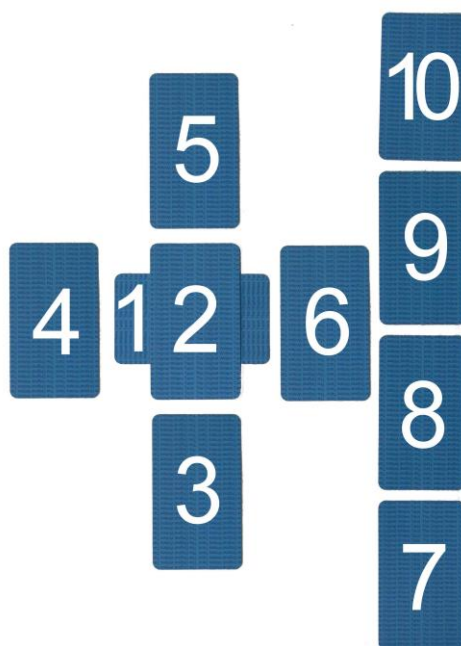
Having said this about the big questions, one can use the Celtic Cross spread to represent the classic three-act linear structure as shown here.



### Classic three-act linear structure

This way an entire story can be outlined. Here is the classic Celtic Cross spread that could be employed for the skeleton of a complete story. Many more can be found in the internet.

### Celtic Cross

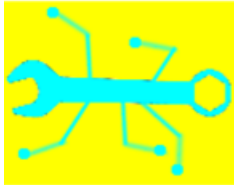


1. Protagonist (stable, but unsatisfactory world)
2. Goal (Need)
3. Help (Mentor, sidekick)
4. Internal obstacle (character flaw, Back story)
5. Trigger (Kick-start, beginning quest)
6. External obstacle (Antagonist)
7. Conflict (set-back)
8. Increased conflict (raised stakes)
9. Crisis (Climax)
10. Resolution/Dénouement (return to new stable world)

The following pages provide an example.







1. Our protagonist is a car mechanic.

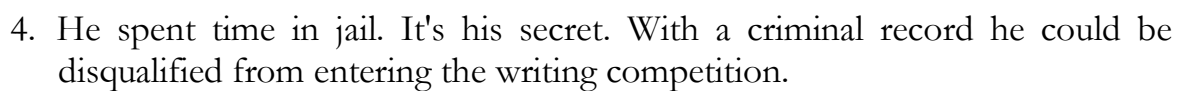


WRITER  
WRITER  
WRITER

2. He wants to be a writer and has his eyes on the major competition.



- jail jail jail





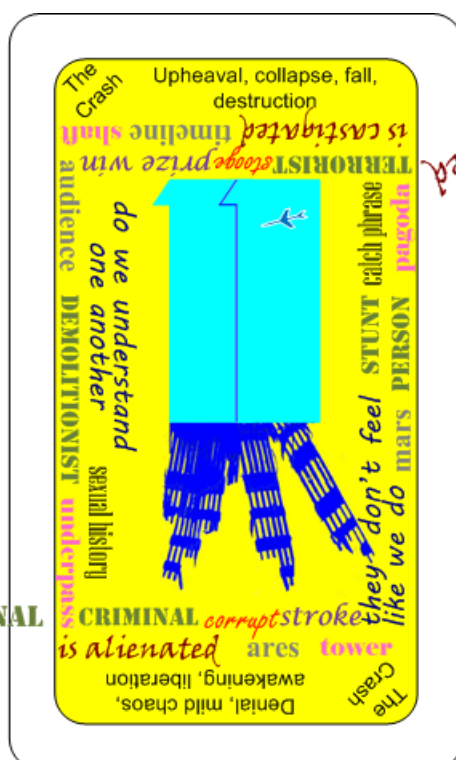


within three days  
within three days  
within three days



7. The librarian lies to him about the submission closing date and reveals it when it is three days away. The protagonist enters nonetheless.

CRIMINAL  
CRIMINAL  
CRIMINAL  
CRIMINAL



is castigated  
is castigated  
is castigated  
is castigated

8. The librarian, with easy access to public records, exposes the protagonist's criminal record. Our protagonist is disqualified from the competition and castigated by the town.



crank  
crank  
crank  
crank

9. Our protagonist – supported by the divorcée – appeals to the townsfolk and gets the submission rules changed. He writes like a crazed person (crank) creating a wonderful piece of art.



CARETAKER  
CARETAKER  
CARETAKER



10. He writes an urban story about a prison boxer. The voice and style take the judges by surprise and he wins the competition. The librarian is discredited

for leaking the criminal record. Our hero takes on a job as a caretaker, so that he can write.

Putting it all together, we have:

1. Our protagonist is a car mechanic.
2. He wants to be a writer and has his eyes on the major competition.
3. A divorcée, who works in a café, believes in him. (Romantic interest?)
4. He spent time in jail. It's his secret. With a criminal record he could be disqualified from entering the writing competition.
5. The trigger is a hurricane which destroys the garage where he works. He's out of a job.
6. The antagonist is the librarian, an educated man, and sees himself as a main contender for the writing competition. (Chasing after the divorcée?)
7. The librarian lies to him about the submission closing date and reveals it when it is three days away. The protagonist enters nonetheless.
8. The librarian, with easy access to public records, exposes the protagonist's criminal record. Our protagonist is disqualified from the competition and castigated by the town.
9. Our protagonist – supported by the divorcée – appeals to the townsfolk and gets the submission rules changed. He writes like a crazed person (crank) creating a wonderful piece of art.
10. He writes an urban story about a prison boxer. The voice and style take the judges by surprise and he wins the competition. The librarian is discredited for leaking the criminal record. Our protagonist takes on a job as a caretaker, so that he can write.

Admittedly, it's not a brilliant story, but it has potential. The bare bones are there to be fleshed out. Why was our protagonist in prison? The librarian could be brought out more. What if he runs the competition? Or is one of the judges? And what's the divorcée's story? The love interest could also be built up.

Naturally cards can be swapped or used to influence another part of the storyline.

However, the cards are probably better for fleshing out a scene or cameo character in an established story.

Here are some layout/spread examples.

**The power of three** (three-card spreads):

**Character:**

1. Past (back story, flaw)
2. Present (motivation)
3. Future (goal, aspirations);

1. Mind (head)
2. Body (heart)
3. Spirit;

1. First character
2. Second character
3. Relationship;

1. Character
2. Hopes
3. Fears;

1. You
2. Your friend
3. Your enemy.

### ***Action***

1. Left
2. Right
3. Straight on;

1. Advance
2. Retreat
3. Halt;

1. Goal
2. Obstacle
3. Resolution.

### **Four-card spreads**

Add a fourth card for the following.

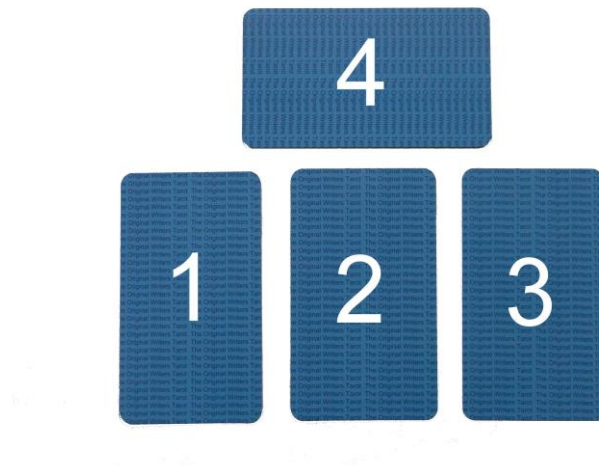
### ***Make a scene***

1. Inciting incident
2. Conflict
3. Crisis/Climax
4. Resolution

Note that especially the fourth card (resolution) need not be part of the chronological scene and could appear at another time.

### ***Flesh out a minor character***

Use a three-card character layout above, but add a fourth (first) card to suggest an aspect of the character, be it occupation (green), thumbnail (red) or card meaning.



For instance, in the past, present, future spread the fourth card could represent a present obstacle. In which case, the fourth card could be placed over the second card.

In fact, the number of possible spreads is limited only by the number of questions that can be posed.

Search the internet "Tarot for writers" for further layout-inspirations.

## **For fun**

Apart from using these cards as ordinary playing cards (remove the higher Arcana cards and the four Pages). Leave the latter in for fun – in this deck a Page ranks between a ten and a Jack (a Tarot Knight)).

Like traditional Tarot you can use the card meaning to answer personal questions.

Can you find the pictures that appear more than once?

Can you find the cards that complete the phonetic alphabet?

## **Games**

Here are some further suggestions for two or more players.

### ***I saw***

Choose a number of cards and try to remember all the pictures or words or both you have seen. Points are given for the number of correct answers within a certain time limit.

### ***Memory***

Match the pairs of lower Arcana cards with the same dark blue pictures/shapes. Some cards do not have the dark blue shapes.

### ***I-Spy***

Lay out a number of cards and play I-spy against the clock.

### ***What is my job?***

Without letting others see your card, choose an occupation (green words) and describe what you do without saying the word. Alternatively, you don't see the card and others describe your job without using the word. Both games can be time-limited. Alternatively the locations (pink) can be used to play the same game as: *where am I?*

### ***How many words***

Take turns choosing occupations on a card. Under the clock everyone should write as many words of three letters or more they can make out of the chosen word. Points can be given for the most words.

### ***In a word***

Describe yourself using the thumbnail (red) word without saying the word (or one that rhymes with it). Again, this game can be played against the clock.

### **Charades**

Lay out a selection of cards. Play charades with occupations (green), provocative phrases (blue), locations (pink). It's even harder with the miscellaneous (grey) words or pictures. Use the picture to think of a film, play or a book. The winner must not only identify the film, play or book, but also the prompting picture.

When appropriate the selected card can be hidden or for all to see with other cards.

In many of the above games dice can be employed to govern what must be used on the card.

With one die (with rolls of 4, 5 or 6 the choice can be made on the roll or set before the game commences)

1. Purple – a natural event or external cause
2. Brown – character interaction
3. Green – occupation
4. Red – thumbnail personality or Pink - location
5. Black – character trait or Grey – miscellaneous
6. Blue – imperative/provocative words/phrases or Picture

With two dice

1. –
2. Purple – a natural event or external cause
3. Green – occupation
4. Brown – character interaction
5. Red – thumbnail personality
6. Black – character trait
7. Blue – imperative/provocative words/phrases
8. Grey – miscellaneous
9. Picture
10. Pink – location
11. Anything (your choice)
12. Gain a point

### **Communicate**

This game is for teams of two or more. Select a colour/theme for a round or more (or use dice as described above). Cards are taken from a face-down pile. Each player must communicate to his team the word or phrase (imperative) of that colour/theme within a set time. The player may discard the chosen card and select another. Discarded cards go back into the pile. The player cannot use the words on the card or rhyming ones. Winning cards are held by the team. The game ends when a team has collected a set amount of cards. This amount should be set before the game commences.



# Parallels with Tarot and Astrology

Traditional Tarot cards can be used as a writer's resource. So the Original Writers' Tarot is not a new idea. What is new is the accessibility and immediacy that can jumpstart creativity. There is no need to look up each card and wade through the myriad of interpretations, and then grapple the effects of other cards in a spread. This is the job of good Tarot readers. Succinctly put, these cards strip away the mysterious, and perhaps opaque, meanings behind the Tarot and present the writer with an easier approach.

The simplified meanings at the top and bottom of each card have been chosen from writer's point of view.

The higher arcane cards carry the name of their Tarot equivalent. The Novice has the word foolish (The fool) and The Crash has The Tower as a location.

The card meanings of the Writer's Tarot can be used as a beginner's device for the traditional Tarot. The wording on each card is a single interpretation of the traditional Tarot, which are open to individual interpretation through their pictures.

In the internet there are many sites offering a myriad of aspects to the cards. Here is one, presented as a table.

Playing card suit	Tarot card	Element	Astrological sign	Temperament
Clubs	Wands	Fire	Aries, Leo, Sagittarius	Strong emotion, enthusiastic, passionate, temperamental, achiever, interesting
Diamonds	Pentacles	Earth	Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn	Dependable, grounded, reliable, materialistic, loyal, practical
Hearts	Cups	Water	Pisces, Cancer, Scorpio	Refreshing, charming, mysterious, private, sensitive, emotional
Spades	Swords	Air	Aquarius, Gemini, Libra	Powerful, creativity, fun, ideas, adventurous, exciting

The traditional Tarot symbols can be found on the aces of each suit.

Number	Traditional Tarot Name	Writer's Tarot Name
None (0 or 22)	The Fool	The Novice
1	The Magician	The Puppeteer
2	The High Priestess	The Psychoanalyst
3	The Empress	The Matriarch
4	The Emperor	The Patriarch
5	The Hierophant	The Bureaucrat
6	The Lovers	The Relationship
7	The Chariot	The Venture
8	Strength	Fortitude
9	The Hermit	The Dropout
10	Wheel of Fortune	Fate
11	Justice	The Equaliser
12	The Hanged Man	Independence
13	Death	The End
14	Temperance	Moderation
15	The Devil	Passion
16	The Tower	The Crash
17	The Star	The Celebrity
18	The Moon	Subconscious
19	The Sun	Conscious
20	Judgement	The Phoenix
21	The World	Freedom

## **A final word**

There are no rules on how to use these cards.

See [www.thewriterstarot.com](http://www.thewriterstarot.com) or [www.writerstarot.com](http://www.writerstarot.com) for more details and ideas.

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