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Tarot's limited vocabulary

Before you dive into the meanings of the cards, here is something that is seriously worth thinking about. Imagine you had to tell your life story, but you were only allowed to use seventy-eight different words for your vocabulary. Try it, it truly is difficult. This is an issue that many tarot readers do not really think about, as it is something that just does not occur to us. We are used to using a wide vocabulary to describe and relate complex issues.

When you work with a tarot deck, there are two things to always keep at the back of your mind. The first is your seeing range, and the second is your deck's vocabulary. The seeing range is the part of the story that you can see. Looking through a hole in a door only allows you to see what is directly in front of you. To see more details of the room beyond, you have to create more holes. The tarot deck's vocabulary is its seventy-eight cards: these are all the 'words' you can use to gain information.

Because of the tarot's limited vocabulary, each card can have various similar meanings. For any reading, you must decide which meaning you will attribute to each card based on the question you asked and the card's position in the layout. For example, if you wanted to tell your partner that you are going to have a baby, but you cannot use the word 'pregnant' or 'baby'—or you just want to shock them into sitting down, then you could present them with a pair of knitted baby booties.

That same knitted pair of booties could also be a way of conveying the need to tread 'gently and lightly.' The same booties could be used to convey the letter B, or the concept 'feet' or 'woven.' It all depends on the context of the situation and question.

When you are doing a reading and looking at the card meanings, remember there is wiggle room to interpret. Think about how the

meaning can be interpreted according to the question and what the cards are trying to convey. Remember the deck's limited vocabulary, and think about creative, sideways approaches to interpretation. Also remember that sometimes a meaning can be literal: if you are asking about a danger, and the Chariot turns up in a position that shows what danger you may be in, this could literally mean "danger with your car."

Another thing to seriously keep in mind is that using tarot for divination is very different from using it in counselling or psychological experimentation. Because the psychologized use of tarot is easier than divination, this has become the most popular way to read the tarot: many books on the market are basically psychology with little or no content about divination. If you really want to learn tarot, then it pays to be clear about what you are using it for and how you want to approach it. If you are clear in your intent, then developing your skills will be much easier.

In divination tarot, the trump or major cards are really powers, fate dynamics, and qualities that *flow through* people, situations, and events. The minor cards represent how those powers, dynamics, and qualities *manifest* in people and events. With this in mind, if you need a lot of information on some subject, it can be worth using layouts that separate the Major and Minor Arcana, then pair them up. More information on that can be found in the layouts chapter.

The more you work with a deck, the more the cards will show you their own meanings in a way that is unique to you. Everyone develops their own vocabulary with divination, and eventually a particular card will have some specific meaning to you that would not work for another reader.