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The English Method

A Free Extract

Waite's original playing-card divination method,
transcribed and annotated from
A Manual of Cartomancy (1909).

Annotated by Alex Vizcroft

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THE COMPLETE TAROT METHOD

Waite's English Method, Fully Explained



A FREE EXTRACT FROM
THE COMPLETE TAROT METHOD
ALEX VIZCROFT

CHAPTER TWO

THE ENGLISH METHOD

BEFORE THE COUNT

The first act of the method is not laying the cards. It is choosing a card to represent the person asking the question. That choice is deliberate, personal, and intentional, and it is made before the deck is touched. Everything that follows — the shuffle, the deal, the survey, the count — happens in relation to that chosen card.

Once the choice is made, the card is returned to the deck. The reader then shuffles, deals, and looks at the table.

Fifty-two cards lie face up in rows of nine. Five rows are complete. The sixth holds seven cards. The whole arrangement is visible at once, and it is already speaking. Certain cards cluster near each other. Certain suits dominate. Certain denominations repeat. The grid is not a list of cards to be read in sequence. The reader's first task is to survey the whole layout before the count begins.

This is not a preliminary step to be hurried through. It is Stage One of the method. Arthur Edward Waite was explicit on the point: before beginning to count, the reader must "study well the disposition of the cards, according to their individual and relative signification." The count comes second. The survey comes first.

What follows is a guide to the survey, and then to the count that focuses it.

SECTION ONE: THE VOCABULARY

The English Method is a playing-card method. It uses the standard 52-card deck, not the Tarot. Waite's instructions for the Tarot are entirely separate and will be covered in the next chapter. For this method, the reader needs only a standard pack of cards.

The vocabulary of the method has three parts: the suit hierarchy, the court cards, and the individual card significations.

The Suit Hierarchy

The four suits carry a general tone that applies before any individual card meaning is considered. Waite ranks them in order of their "good augury":

1. **Clubs:** Mostly indicate happiness. No matter how numerous or how accompanied, they are rarely or never of bad augury.
2. **Hearts:** Joy, liberality, or good temper.
3. **Diamonds:** Delay, quarrels, and annoyance.
4. **Spades:** Grief, sickness, and loss of money.

This hierarchy is a background tone, not a verdict. A single Spade in a field of Clubs and Hearts is a minor note. Four Spades in a row of nine is a different matter. The reader notes the distribution before reading any individual card.

The Court Cards as People

The court cards (Kings, Queens, and Knaves) represent people. Their colouring corresponds to the colouring of the person they represent. The court cards of

Hearts and Diamonds represent persons of fair complexion. The court cards of Clubs and Spades represent persons of darker complexion. This is the convention of the tradition Waite is working in, and it is the key to identifying who is who in the spread.

Kings and Queens are the principal persons of the reading. Knaves are something else entirely, and they deserve their own attention.

The Knave as Thought

The Knaves occupy a unique position in the method. They do not represent people in the way Kings and Queens do. They represent the *thoughts* of the people represented by the court cards of a corresponding colour. The *Knave of Hearts* carries the thoughts of a fair person. The *Knave of Spades* carries the thoughts of a dark person.

This distinction matters enormously. When a Knave appears near the Significator, or when the count from the Significator lands on a Knave, the reading is not simply about an event or a person. It is about what someone is thinking. The outer world and the inner world are both present in the spread, and the Knaves connect the outer events of the reading to the inner thoughts of the people in it.

The Individual Card Significations

The following meanings are Waite's own, transcribed directly from *A Manual of Cartomancy* (1909). They are the fixed meanings of the 32 cards used in the English method. The remaining 20 cards (the twos, threes, fours, fives, and sixes) are not assigned individual meanings in Waite's text, but they participate in the count and the structural rules.

Clubs

CARD	SIGNIFICATION
Ace	Wealth, a prosperous life, tranquillity of mind
King	A dark man, upright, faithful, and affectionate in disposition
Queen	A dark woman, gentle and pleasing
Knave	A sincere but hasty friend; also a dark man's thoughts
Ten	Unexpected riches, and loss of a dear friend
Nine	Disobedience to friends' wishes
Eight	A covetous man; also warns against speculations
Seven	Promises brilliant fortune and much happiness

Hearts

CARD	SIGNIFICATION
Ace	The house. If attended by Spades, it foretells quarrelling; if by Hearts, affection and friendship; if by Diamonds, money and distant friends; if by Clubs, feasting and merrymaking
King	A fair man, of good-natured disposition, but hasty and rash
Queen	A fair woman, faithful, prudent, and affectionate
Knave	The thoughts of a fair person; also a good friend
Ten	Prophetic of happiness and many children; corrective of bad tidings of cards next to it, and confirms their good tidings
Nine	Wealth and high esteem; also the wish card
Eight	Occasional drinking and feasting
Seven	A false and deceitful friend

Diamonds

CARD	SIGNIFICATION
Ace	A letter — but from whom and what about must be judged by the neighbouring cards
King	A fair man, hot tempered, obstinate, and revengeful
Queen	A fair woman, fond of company and a coquette
Knave	The thoughts of a fair person; also a near relation who considers only his own interests
Ten	Money
Nine	Shows that a person is fond of roving
Eight	A marriage late in life
Seven	Satire, evil speaking

Spades

CARD	SIGNIFICATION
Ace	Great sorrow, malice
King	A dark, ambitious man
Queen	A malicious, dark woman, generally a widow
Knave	The thoughts of a dark person; also an indolent person
Ten	Grief, imprisonment
Nine	A card of very bad import, foretelling sickness and misfortune
Eight	Warns a person to be cautious in his undertakings
Seven	Loss of a most valuable friend, whose death will be attended with much misery

SECTION TWO: THE SURVEY

The reader has laid the grid. Before counting a single card, they must survey the landscape. This is where the reading actually begins.

The survey has three tools: the denomination rules, the structural rules, and the suit distribution.

The Denomination Rules

When cards of the same denomination appear together in the layout, whether adjacent or in the same row, they carry a combined meaning that supersedes their individual significations. Waite provides the following:

Aces: Four together: danger, failure in business, and sometimes imprisonment. If reversed, the danger is lessened. Three: good tidings. If reversed, folly. Two: a plot. If reversed, it will not succeed.

Kings: Four: a consultation on important business, the result of which will be highly satisfactory. If reversed, success will be doubtful. Three: a consultation, the result of which will be satisfactory. If reversed, the result will be doubtful. Two: a partnership in business. If reversed, a dissolution of the same.

Queens: Four: a company of ladies. If reversed, a company of ladies chattering and inventing lies. Three: friendly calls. If reversed, chattering and scandal. Two: a meeting between two friends. If reversed, poverty and other troubles.

Knives: Four: a roaring party. If reversed, a drinking bout. Three: false friends. If reversed, a quarrel. Two: evil intentions. If reversed, danger.

Tens: Four: condemnation. If reversed, good events. Three: a new condition. If reversed, disappointment. Two: change. If reversed, expectation.

Nines: Four: a good friend. If reversed, usury. Three: success. If reversed, imprudence. Two: receipt of money. If reversed, a small sum.

Eights: Four: some reverses. If reversed, error. Three: marriage. If reversed, a spectacle. Two: new knowledge. If reversed, trouble.

Sevens: Four: intrigues among servants or low people, threats, snares, and disputes. If reversed, their malice will be impotent to harm. Three: sickness, premature old age. If reversed, slight and brief indisposition. Two: levity. If reversed, regret.

The reader scans the grid for these combinations. A pair of Aces in the same row, a cluster of three Nines, four Kings scattered across the layout: each of these is a fact about the reading before the count begins. Note them. They are the background.

The Structural Rules

Three rules govern how cards modify each other by position. These are not individual card meanings. They are relational rules that apply whenever a specific configuration appears anywhere in the grid.

The Imprisonment Rule. Any court card (King, Queen, or Knave) that falls between two other cards of the same denomination signals that the person represented by that court card runs the risk of imprisonment. The individual

meanings of the flanking cards are suspended. The configuration overrides them.

This is Waite's own example: the *King of Hearts*, the *Nine of Hearts*, and the *Nine of Clubs* signify, individually, a liberal man, joy, and success in love. But place the King between the two Nines, and the reading changes entirely. A man then rich and happy would be ere long consigned to a prison. Position overrides individual meaning.

The *Ten of Hearts* as Corrective. The *Ten of Hearts* is the only card in the pack that carries an explicit modifying function. It is prophetic of happiness and many children, but more importantly: it is corrective of the bad tidings of cards next to it, and confirms their good tidings. A bad card adjacent to the *Ten of Hearts* is softened. A good card adjacent to it is strengthened.

The *Ace of Diamonds* as Relational Card. The *Ace of Diamonds* signifies a letter, but from whom and what about must be judged by the neighbouring cards. During the survey, the reader notes which cards surround the *Ace of Diamonds*, because those cards will define what the letter means when it appears in the reading.

Suit Distribution

Having noted the denomination clusters and the structural configurations, the reader takes a final step: they look at the overall distribution of suits across the grid. Is the layout heavy with one suit? Are Spades concentrated in one area and Clubs in another? Does the Significator's row have a different character from the rest of the grid?

There is no formula for this. It is an impression, and it is meant to be. The reader is building a picture of the whole spread before the count begins. The suit distribution is the weather of the reading: the general conditions under which everything else will occur.

SECTION THREE: THE SIGNIFICATOR AND THE COUNT

Step 1: The Significator

Before you shuffle the deck, you must choose a card to represent the person asking the question. This card is called the Significator.

If the person asking the question is a man, choose a King. If the person is a woman, choose a Queen. The suit should be chosen to match the general complexion or temperament of the person: Hearts for fair and warm, Diamonds for fair and restless, Clubs for dark and practical, Spades for dark and ambitious.

Waite adds two specific rules for this selection:

"If a married woman consult the cards, she must make her husband the King of the same suit of which she is Queen; but if a single woman, she may make any favourite male friend King of whatever suit she pleases."

In plain terms: the suits are used to map relationships. If you are reading for a married couple, they share a suit. If you are reading for a single person, the other suits represent the people in their life.

Once you have chosen the Significator, return it to the deck. The Significator's position in the grid after the deal is entirely random. The reader decides who they are; the cards decide where that person stands. That randomness is part of the method's logic.

Step 2: The Layout

Shuffle the full pack of 52 cards, cut three times, and deal face up in rows of nine. Five rows will be complete, each holding nine cards. The sixth row will hold the remaining seven. The grid is read left to right, top to bottom, with the first card dealt occupying the top-left position.

The Count

Once the Significator is located, the reader counts nine cards in every direction from it, reckoning the Significator itself as card one. Every ninth card is a prophetic card.

The count proceeds in eight directions: north, south, east, west, and the four diagonals. The mechanics of the count are governed by four precise boundary rules:

Rule 1: Horizontal wrap. The count treats each complete row as a closed loop. A count moving east that reaches column 9 continues from column 1 of the same row. A count moving west that reaches column 1 continues from column 9 of the same row.

Rule 2: Vertical wrap. The five complete rows form a closed vertical loop. A count moving north from row 1 continues from row 5. A count moving south from row 5 continues from row 1.

Rule 3: The partial row does not wrap. Row 6 is outside the vertical loop. A count from a Significator in row 6 that would move south, or east beyond column 7, or west beyond column 1, has no card to land on. That direction produces no prophetic card.

Rule 4: Counts from complete rows never land in the empty part of row

6. The wrap logic ensures this automatically.

What the count produces depends on where the Significator falls in the grid.

Interior positions (rows 1–5, columns 2–8): The count produces two distinct prophetic cards, one to the immediate left and one to the immediate right. The standard reading is a three-card configuration: the Significator flanked by its two prophetic cards.

Edge positions (rows 1–5, column 1 or 9): The count produces two distinct prophetic cards. One is the immediate horizontal neighbour. The other is the card at the far end of the same row. The reading is an asymmetric three-card configuration.

Partial row positions (row 6): The count produces exactly three distinct prophetic cards, all found in the top row of the grid. The reading is a three-card scatter drawn from the opposite end of the layout.

The Knaves and the Secondary Count

After the count from the Significator is complete, the reader performs a secondary count from each relevant Knave. The count from a Knave follows exactly the same rules as the count from the Significator: nine cards every way, the Knave as card one.

The prophetic cards around the Knave are not events. They are the contents of a mind. The secondary count from a Knave reveals what the person is thinking about.

SECTION FOUR: READING THE PROPHETIC CARDS

The Three-Card Reading

The standard reading is a three-card configuration: the Significator between its two prophetic cards. The reader has three pieces of information: the individual meaning of each card, the structural rules, and the suit context.

Waite's own example is the model. The *King of Hearts* between the *Nine of Hearts* and the *Nine of Clubs*: a man between joy and success in love, which reads as imprisonment. The individual meanings of the flanking cards are not ignored. They are the content of the configuration. The King is imprisoned not in spite of the Nines but because of them.

The reader assembles the three cards into a sentence. The individual meanings are the words. The configuration is the grammar. The sentence is the reading.

The Asymmetric Reading

If the Significator is on an edge, the three-card reading is asymmetric. One prophetic card is adjacent; the other is at the far end of the row. A common approach is to read the adjacent card as an immediate circumstance and the far card as a background condition or delayed influence.

The Partial-Row Reading

If the Significator is in the partial row, the reading is a three-card scatter drawn from the top of the grid. The Significator is in an incomplete position, looking upward at forces that are distant from it.

Assembling the Narrative

The full reading has three layers. The survey has established the background. The Significator count has produced the outer reading. The Knave counts have produced the inner readings.

Waite describes the individual card meanings as "only as the alphabet is to the printed book." A little attention and practice will enable the reader to form these mystic letters into words, and words into phrases — to assemble the cards together and read the events, past and to come, which their symbols pretend to reveal.

SECTION FIVE: PRACTICE AND THE READER'S OWN METHOD

No one reads correctly from the beginning. Waite says so directly, and it is worth taking seriously. The card meanings are fixed, but the skill of assembling them into a coherent reading is not. It is developed through practice, through repeated exposure to the configurations the grid produces, through the gradual accumulation of a reader's own sense of how the cards speak to each other.

Some readers will find the survey the most useful part of the method. Others will find the Knave counts the most revealing layer, because what people are thinking is often more illuminating than the outer events. Others still will find that the three-card reading, simple as it is, produces more than enough material for a full interpretation.

There is no correct approach. The method is a framework, not a script. Waite himself acknowledges that the significations are only a starting point, and that the reader's intuitive faculty plays an important part. The reader who develops a genuine fluency with the method will find that the cards begin to speak in combinations that go beyond the listed meanings, that the grid begins to have a character that is felt before it is analysed.

This fluency cannot be taught. It can only be developed. The framework given here is a foundation. What is built on it is the reader's own.

APPENDIX: A SAMPLE SPREAD

To demonstrate the English Method in practice, we will walk through a complete reading using a 52-card deck. The querent is a fair-haired man asking a general question about his current circumstances. Following Waite's rule, he is represented by the *King of Hearts*.

The Grid

Significator (K♥)

Prophetic cards (9♥, 9♣)

Knave of Hearts (J♥)

Knave prophetic cards (10♥, 6♣)

COL 1	COL 2	COL 3	COL 4	COL 5	COL 6	COL 7	COL 8	COL 9
7♠	2♣	9♥	K♥	9♣	4♦	A♦	Q♠	3♥
5♠	10♥	J♥	6♣	8♦	2♠	10♦	4♣	7♦
3♠	Q♥	5♣	A♠	K♣	9♦	2♥	8♠	6♦
4♠	7♣	10♣	3♦	J♠	5♦	A♣	9♠	2♦
6♠	8♣	Q♦	4♥	10♠	7♥	K♦	3♣	A♥
5♥	J♣	8♥	6♥	J♦	K♠	Q♣		

Stage One: The Survey

Suit Distribution: Spades dominate the left edge, while Diamonds cluster heavily on the right. The weather of this reading is tense.

Denomination Clusters: Four Knaves (a roaring party). Three Kings (a satisfactory consultation). Three Nines (success).

Structural Rules: The Significator, the *King of Hearts*, sits exactly between the *Nine of Hearts* and the *Nine of Clubs* — Waite's exact example of the Imprisonment Rule. The *Ten of Hearts* sits in row two, column two, adjacent to the *Knave of Hearts*. The *Ace of Diamonds* sits between a *Four of Diamonds* and the *Queen of Spades*: a letter bringing trouble from a malicious woman.

Stage Two: The Significator Count

The *King of Hearts* sits in Row 1, Column 4 — an interior position. The count resolves to the two flanking cards.

Left Prophetic Card: *Nine of Hearts*. **Right Prophetic Card:** *Nine of Clubs*.

Because of the Imprisonment Rule, we do not read these cards individually. The querent is currently trapped by his circumstances. The success promised by the Three Nines cluster is real, but he cannot access it yet because the Nines themselves form the walls of his cell.

Stage Three: The Knave Count

The querent is a fair man, so his thoughts are represented by the *Knave of Hearts*, located in Row 2, Column 3.

Left Prophetic Card: *Ten of Hearts*. **Right Prophetic Card:** *Six of Clubs*.

The querent's thoughts are fixed on his family and his future happiness. The *Ten of Hearts* as a corrective softens the anxiety of his current imprisonment. His mind is in a better place than his physical circumstances.

The Narrative Assembly

The querent is currently in a state of restriction, unable to move forward. This restriction is happening in a tense environment, with trouble brewing from a malicious woman. However, the reading is fundamentally positive. The querent's mind is focused on his family and his ultimate happiness, which provides a powerful internal corrective to his outer stress. The background conditions promise that a consultation will take place that will lead to success.

The narrative is clear: endure the current restriction, ignore the trouble from the dark woman, and proceed with the planned consultation. The outcome will be successful, and the happiness he is focused on will be secured.

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Waite's Original System, Fully Recovered

You have just read the complete English Method — one chapter from a book that restores the full, intended system of Arthur Edward Waite for reading the cards.

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 - ◆ The **Grand Orient Method** — Waite's synthesis of French occult cartomancy
 - ◆ The **Etteilla Method**, restored from Waite's earliest writings
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See It In Action

The English Method comes alive when you watch it work.

At SpiritWave Labs, our Tarot readings use the Vizcroft Method — a modern extrapolation of Waite's original playing-card system applied to the full 78-card Tarot.

Every reading you receive is rooted in the same principles you have just studied: survey before count, structure before meaning, the whole before the part.

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