

## Divination 101: A Complete Beginner's Guide

Presented by Nori



The word “divination” comes from the Latin *divinare*, which means “to be inspired by the gods.” Simply put, Divination is the art of utilizing magic and/or ritual to gain insight into a question or situation. Divination has been practiced in some form or fashion in every culture and spiritual tradition, all over the world, since the beginning of time. There are literally thousands of different categories of Divination, and it would be impossible to discuss them in all the span of a single hour (if even that), so instead, we’ll touch on some of the most common methods in the Western world. It is by no means a one-size-fits all discipline: different methods will resonate with different people, so experiment and find one or two methods which work for you!\*

It’s important to remember that Divination is not “fortune telling,” at least not in the sense that it shows pre-ordained outcomes. As any psychologist or physical anthropologist can tell you, the human brain is hardwired to look for patterns to make sense of the world around us. Therefore, I think of Divination as a tool to help us understand the working of our own subconscious, and to learn how to trust our own intuition - both of which are **essential** for working effective magic. Remember, nothing is set in stone - we always have the power to change the outcome of our circumstances!

\**A disclaimer:* When exploring different methods of the divinatory arts (or, for that matter, any area of magic and/or spirituality), take care when approaching practices and customs that originate from cultures outside your own. Many magical practices are passed down in families from generation to generation, or have very specific cultural and historical contexts, and adoption by outsiders is not always viewed favorably by the folks with whom those practices originate. That being said, don’t be afraid to seek more information on different methods that interest you - if nothing else, it is always good to broaden our horizons with new knowledge!



## Tarot & Oracle Cards

Perhaps the most famous Divination method, the Tarot has been used in Europe since at least the 14th century, although its origins are admittedly very murky and hotly debated by both occultists and historians. The universal Rider-Waite deck, considered the standard that all other Tarot decks are based off of, was popularized by Dr. Arthur Edward Waite in 1910, who wrote: “The true Tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs.” The Tarot’s highly symbolic nature gives it a special appeal to

visually-oriented people, as well as those who enjoy metaphor and puzzles.

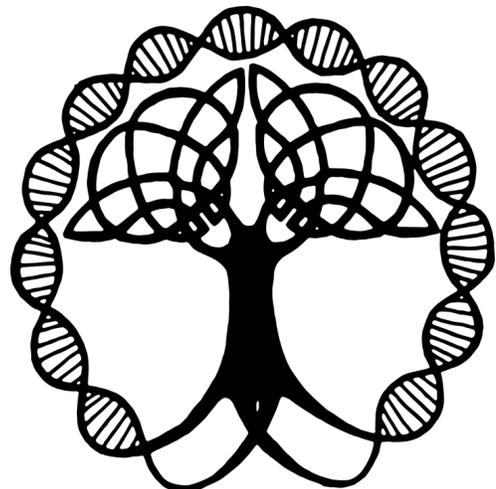
The Tarot consists of 78 cards, which are divided into the Major Arcana (Cards 0-21) and Minor Arcana (the “suite” cards - Swords, Chalices/Cups, Wands, and Pentacles). The Major Arcana can best be understood as universal symbols that relate to the evolution of the self (think of it as a story, with the querent standing in as the hero). The Minor Arcana can be understood in a few different ways; the interpretation I like best is that the suite cards of the Minor Arcana represent the tangible actions of the querent that influence the present situation.

There are dozens of books and websites dedicated to the study of the Tarot, but in my experience, the best method for learning how to read the cards is to get yourself a deck, develop a bond with your cards, and start practicing - the more you practice, the better your intuition will get. The “little white book” can be a helpful reference, but if you get a different interpretation from a particular card than the standard, by all means, run with it and see where it takes you! I also find that the Tarot is very useful for working through creative blocks.

Oracle cards are a more modern invention; there are literally hundreds of different oracle decks available in all different styles, related to all manner of different traditions (two of my favorites are *The Faery Forest Oracle* and the *Celtic Tree Oracle*, which is based off the ogham system - more on that below). Some of them are heavily influenced by the Tarot, others not so much. If a particular deck sparks your interest, don’t be shy to pick it up and get to know it!

## Ogham

The ancient Celtic peoples of the British Isles created this system, which corresponds to the symbolism of specific trees native to Ireland and Great Britain. It is often referred to as the Celtic tree alphabet, and is sometimes erroneously called the Celtic tree “calendar” (this was an idea popularized by Robert Graves, who proposed in his book *The White Goddess* that each ogham corresponded to a different month and formed a sort of Celtic “zodiac;” historians and anthropologists



now agree that the Celts didn't have a concept of "months" like we do today). Trees were regarded among the most sacred of beings to the ancient Celts; as such, the ogham is deeply intertwined with Celtic cosmology, and is a favored divinatory method among Celtic reconstructionists and modern Druids. Typically, each letter is carved into a piece of wood from its corresponding tree, and lots are drawn.

For further information about the ogham, check out:

**Ogam: How to Read, Create & Shape Your Destiny Through the Celtic Oracle** by Paul Rhys Mountfort

**Celtic Tree Mysteries: Secrets of the Ogham** by Steve Blamires



### **Runes**

Runes are the letters in the runic alphabet used by ancient Germanic societies before the adoption of the Latin alphabet. Each rune has a specific meaning attached to it, and ancient Norse literature is packed with references to runes being used for magic and divinatory purposes, usually by the process of asking a question and casting lots. They remain a popular choice of Divination among contemporary Pagans, especially those who practice Heathenry or Asatru.

Recommended resources for further learning:

**Wyrddworking** by Alaric Albertsson

**AEgishjalmur** by Michael Kelly

### **Tasseomancy (reading Tea Leaves)**

The art of reading the patterns of loose tea leaves after the querent has drunk from a cup (no bags or tea balls). Popularized by the Harry Potter series. While the tea plant is native to China, it is interesting to note that the art of tasseomancy developed independently among various tea-drinking cultures.



Some resources for those interested in learning how to read tea leaves include:

**Little Giant Encyclopedia: Tea Leaf Reading** by Jackie Sach

**Simply Tea Leaf Reading** by Jacqueline Towers

**Tea Leaf Reading: formerly Secrets of Tea Leaf Reading** by William H. Hewitt



## Scrying

This is what people think of when they imagine the classic picture of a Witch gazing into a crystal ball to see the future. Scrying is the art of looking into a particular medium, while in a meditative state, to detect messages. Some people actually see visions with their eyes, while others will “see” mental pictures or messages. Popular tools for scrying include mirrors, bowls, crystals (including the famous crystal ball), water, or fire. If using physical objects, it is wise to

reserve them for scrying/divinatory activities only to avoid mixing mundane and magical energies.

## Pendulums

One of the simplest methods of Divination and highly recommended for beginners! Essentially, any weighted object that can be attached to a string, cord, or chain can be used as a pendulum. It works by tapping into universal energy that exists all around us, every day, and allows us to interpret energy patterns based on its movement. There are many guides online and in books on how to get started with pendulums if this method interests you.



## Lotería

Some Witches and curánderxs of Mexican heritage use Lotería cards in a similar fashion as the Tarot.

## Bibliomancy

This is a relatively simple form of divination which involves opening a book or other physical document and allowing it to fall onto a random page. The querent then examines the words and illustrations, if any, for clues and insight. A favored method by bookworms!

## Augury

Arguably the oldest method of divination, augury is simply observing the natural world around you for visible omens, such as changes in weather patterns, the blooming of certain plants, the behavior of animals or the flight patterns of birds. (In ancient times, it also included reading the entrails of sacrificial animals, but this has obviously fallen out of favor today :) In order for your interpretations to be accurate, it is necessary to develop an intimate familiarity with the flora, fauna, climate and geography of the area in which you live - an omen won't do you any good if you don't know how to recognize it!