

## Do Computerized Tarot Readings Really Work?



**Christine Payne Towler**

At least once a month, I am e-mailed this question by one or more of the folks who get computer-based readings at tarot.com where I wrote the divinatory text. They wonder what creates the amazing effect from an impersonal machine without a soul. How can this electronic tool deal out anonymous Tarot readings that cut to the quick of peoples' very specific issues?

"Erodetis" wrote:

My question is... how one can do a reading on another via the computer? My confusion comes from my belief that a reading requires the individuals energy to be present on the cards and for the reader to be able to have actual physical contact. If you could take a moment and explain this to me it would be much appreciated.

"Sleeman" asked:

My skeptical question is how did a computerized reading do that? Was the 'answers' drawn from the question I asked? I mean, did the server take the words from my question and manipulated the reading to suit what I was looking for? I am excited that it gave me those answers.... It has been what I have been looking for.... But how did it know?

**So what's the deal, Christine? What in the world is going on with a computer delivering Tarot readings over the internet? How could the readings be so close to the mark?**

Here's my secret, which is the thing that gave me the confidence to embark upon the HUGE writing job of helping create a self-serve Tarot vending machine in the first place: I have a firm certainty that the cards each have a discreet, separate, and completely

logical core meaning that does not blend into any other card, and that isn't going to change no matter what the spread or the question.

Hidden inside this belief are a number of working assumptions that have been verified separately over the course of my long private practice. Without these prior verifications, I would not have had the courage to undertake the writing for Tarot.com, since there was no way to test it all out until a) my entire text was completed and b) all the programmer's problems were solved. (It was a total leap of faith for all involved!)

My own "Tarot superstitions" were fully in place when I was first approached to do that writing, and it took a lot of convincing to get me onboard. Even as late as the mid-1990's, I had the same skepticism and opinions about the need for presence and physical contact with the cards as anyone!

Here's what my studies and usage of the cards have taught me over the years:

**1) The "raw ingredients" of the Tarot (numbers, titles, images, suit symbols) were already endowed with their meanings before they were assembled on the faces of the cards.** It is possible to dig up and learn what those meanings were at the time Tarot appeared, even if we weren't left a "users manual" by the original inventors (in the mid-1400's). I have made it my hobby to study the contexts where those root values were first forged, and so I have a fairly good grasp of the essential values they bring to the Tarot deck.

**2) Tarot is a grid.** Due to its structure (22 Trumps plus 16 Royals and 40 Pips divided into 4 suits), it can be plotted on a graph such that no two cards occupy the same spot in the matrix. Hence, each card has a discreet identity built up from it's combination of numbers, titles, images and suit symbols, and that identity is easily reassembled at will, as long as the basic units are not mutated out of all recognition by people who are more creative than they are educated. (Actually, this is true even with the most "modern and experimental" decks if the authors don't get lazy in their suit cards. The only problem is, once that much creativity has had its way with the Tarot, the re-envisioned set of cards often no longer conforms to the basic canon of meanings inherent in the old-fashioned decks, which means we can't use it over at Tarot.com. That's the reason you don't see

some of the more modern packs there -- they have literally mutated "off the map" of Tarot tradition.

**3) The core ingredients of Tarot (numbers, titles, images, suit symbols) are mirroring something accurate about The Real.** Not that we can ever prove this, mind you! But somehow, there's an actual connection between "ultimate reality" and the symbolism of the Tarot. Somehow those subjects and symbols were chosen quite scientifically, with great wisdom, because they just work so darned well it's spooky! The connection is strong enough that a person who has trained themselves to be responsive to the matrix can get useful information from a spread created purposefully. The connection is also strong enough that even a computer program vending text written by a person who is trained in Tarot's symbolism can give useful information, even to non-Tarot readers!

Of course, each Tarot user has to prove this to his or her satisfaction, or else they are constantly swept up in the performance-anxiety inducing fear that ~the user~ is supposed to be the source of all the wisdom, accuracy, and insight that emerges from the cards. I know there are Tarot readers who labor (and often suffer) under this mistaken belief, but more experienced practitioners have seen enough and done enough readings to realize that that the cards are pulling information from sources beyond what the user consciously knows. Honest readers feel free to admit that "I didn't even know anything about that till I heard myself saying it to my client yesterday."

There's something so rock-solid and practical about the references the cards can make (even by computer, without human intervention other than the writer), that it's time to retire that "other" huge Tarot superstition -- that an "interpreter" is required before Tarot cards make any sense in a given situation. I'm here to tell you, Tarot.com proves otherwise. An interpreter may have written those texts, but the fact that they apply so accurately to so many different unrelated people's huge spectrum of questions is strictly because Tarot is a mirror of The Real. It is innate in the system, for whatever reason.

**4) Synchronicity is the law of the land. Everything is connected, everything is related, even if we don't know exactly how this happens.** This I had to learn the hard way, and it cost me a pretty penny in lost opportunities. By this I mean that I had clients begging me to do readings over the phone for years before I would allow it. This started

happening because in modern times people move around a lot. Eventually even my most loyal students would move away, or I would. I traveled around the state of Oregon for years, but finally I just got tired of not living at home for half the month. When I ultimately started doing telephone readings it was only with my students. Then I relaxed my boundary, and would read for people at a distance IF they had a deck of their own to shuffle, cut, and deal from their own hands. Then, eventually, my boundary slipped again, when friends-of-distant-friends began asking if I would work for them too. I would nervously pick a deck for them, do the shuffling ritual and lay the cards out, all the time waiting for the moment when the clients would say "Wait! That's not right!" But curiously, they never did!

It turns out it doesn't matter at all who has the cards, or even if nobody uses traditional cards at all (like at Tarot.com, where the "cards" are virtual). What matters is that the person with the question should be very focused when they create their question, and that the person with the cards (or the computer) be open to the focus of the questioner. For example, if I'm going to be the shuffler/dealer for a client, it doesn't matter at all, and it doesn't change the outcome at all, whether I know what their question is, or anything about the person. It doesn't matter if they have touched the cards. It doesn't even matter if the questioner and the reader are in the same moment of time. *All that matters is that the questioner be focused at the moment the question is formed, and that the reader (or computer) be open and neutral at the moment that the cards are shuffled.*

In truth, you can probably see that it's easier for a computer to be "open and neutral" than it is for a human! Self-serve, automated Tarot readings are possibly even more objective and unbiased than any reader can be (though in the case of a gifted reader, that very bias is valuable, comprising a goodly portion of the reason why a person would choose to pay hundreds of dollars for a private session rather than a few dollars for an automated one).

**5) Clients know more about their cards than they give themselves credit for. It is not just the reader who is the intuitive when looking at a reading!** I can't tell you how many times over the years my clients have interpreted their cards for me, right off the top of their heads as I'm laying them out. This happens even with people who have never worked with cards before. Clients are not "blank slates" into whom a reader can

pour just anything and they will believe it. Especially now, when so many decks have illustrations on every card, the client can easily "read into" the cards quite a bit of their own not-quite-conscious information.

In the case of most of the decks available at Tarot.com, there are tons of cues there for users to grab onto, far beyond just the text I have written. Judging from how few Tarot.com customers write in complaining that they don't understand their readings (compared to the number of people who use the service over and over without complaints), it seems to me that the program is working just the way we designed it -- to emulate the thought process that naturally happen when a user is evaluating "what does this card mean in this position?"

**Christine Payne Towler** is the founder of [Tarot University](#), established to promote the understanding and study of Tarot as a useful astro-alpha-numeric document with relevance in the twenty-first century.

*With over 30 years study and experience with Tarot, she can claim scholarship in historical Tarot. She has written and lectured extensively on the history of Tarot, with an emphasis on historical accuracy. Her essays, videos and lecture recordings of the past twenty years are currently being transcribed and published online throughout 2005 via [The Tarot ArkLetters](#), a publication of Tarot University for students of Tarot.*

*Christine designed the layouts and wrote the interpretive text for the automated online [Tarot reading program](#) at the popular Tarot.com website. This offers an online tarot alternative for people who need strong wisdom-tools for personal insight. A CD ROM of the original interactive tarot computer program, "[Tarot Magic](#)", is also available.*

*Tarot University online tele-classes with Christine take place take place periodically. Students and interested folks can access study materials, practice tools, and the schedule on site. The recommended Tarot Online Forum List can be accessed through [the Tarot University News weblog](#)*

*Payne-Towler currently offers esoteric counseling, [personal reading and interpretation](#) for new clients on a limited basis. If her schedule is full (often the case), she highly recommends using her text at the online Tarot-reading program at [www.tarot.com](http://www.tarot.com) .*