

Reversals: Yes or No

You are allowed to read every card upright. If you would rather not, here are three methods, one worked example each, and a firm instruction about sticking with one.



You are not cheating

Reading every card upright is a complete way to read tarot.

It is not the beginner version. It is not the easy setting.

You are not missing half the deck.

If you have been quietly turning cards the right way up and feeling like you got away with something, stop. There is nothing to get away with.

Excellent readers work upright only and have done for decades. Whole traditions do. A great many published decks were designed by people who never used reversals in their own practice. Seventy eight cards is already more than most readers get fluent with in a year, and doubling that number before you can hold the first half is not rigour. It is a way to make yourself slow and unsure at the table.

So the honest answer to the question in the title is: **either**. Both are real. Neither is more advanced. The rest of this piece exists so that whichever way you choose, you choose it on purpose.

Nobody decided this

The feeling that upright-only is a shortcut has a history, and knowing it takes most of the sting out.

A reversal is not a feature anyone designed. It is a consequence of shuffling. Turn a deck over in your hands enough times and some cards end up the other way round, and at some point readers had to decide what to do about that. Different people decided differently. That is the whole origin.

What happened next is what usually happens. Books that included reversals looked more thorough than books that did not, because they had more pages. More pages read as more knowledge. Within a couple of generations the optional thing had become the standard thing, and anyone doing without it was doing the abridged version.

There was never a moment where this was settled. No council, no source, no lineage that outranks the others. Just a habit that hardened because it looked complete.

WORTH NOTICING

The readers most likely to insist reversals are mandatory are rarely the ones who have been doing it longest. They are usually about eighteen months in. That is the point where a person most needs the practice to be difficult.

What upright only actually costs you

Not nothing. But much less than you have been led to think, and the cost is recoverable by other means you are already learning.

You lose one dial

Reversals give you a second setting on each card. That is a real thing to give up, and it is fair to say so plainly. What is not fair is the claim that without it a reading has no shade in it.

You get the shade back somewhere else

Position does this work already, and does it better. The same card in *what is helping* and in *what is blocking* reads two different ways without anybody turning anything round. So does a neighbour. So does the question that was asked. A reader who is fluent with position has more shades available than a reader who only knows up and down.

You lose an easy source of drama

This is a gain and it is worth being blunt about it. Reversals make a spread look more dramatic and more complicated than it is, and beginners lean on that when a reading feels thin. Upright only takes the crutch away, and what grows in its place is the ability to sit with a plain spread and say something true about it.

THE SUMMARY

Upright only costs you one dial and hands you back clarity, speed, and no hiding place. That is a defensible trade, and plenty of good readers made it on purpose.

What reversals genuinely add

This piece is not an argument for one side. If it only made the case against, it would be doing the same thing to you in the opposite direction. Here is what the practice actually gains.

A spread stops being all one temperature

Seven cards all facing the same way can start to read as one continuous statement. A card sitting the other way round breaks the run and forces you to look at that position on its own. Many readers use reversals mostly for this, as punctuation rather than as content.

It gives you a place to put the word "nearly"

A lot of real life is a thing that is almost happening, or happening quietly, or happening less than it used to. Readers who work with reversals often say this is what they are for. Not opposites. Degrees.

It slows you down at exactly the right moment

A reversed card in a spread makes you stop on that position instead of sliding past it. Anything that produces a pause in a reading is doing you a favour, and this is a reliable one.

THE FAIR VERSION OF THE ARGUMENT

Reversals do not add information to the deck. They add a place for you to put nuance you already noticed. That is a smaller claim than the one usually made for them, and it happens to be true, which is why the readers who use them well never sound defensive about it.

Which one are you

Four questions. Answer them honestly tonight and the decision makes itself, which is better than drifting into a habit and then defending it for a decade.

ASK YOURSELF

WHAT THE ANSWER POINTS TO

Can I currently say something useful about most cards upright, without looking anything up?

If no, upright only, for now. Come back to this page in six months.

When a reading feels thin, do I want more input, or do I want to sit longer with what is there?

Wanting more input is the reason to be careful. That is the appetite reversals feed and it is not the one to feed.

Do I read mostly for myself, in a journal, over time?

Reversals suit this. You have room to work slowly and a record to check yourself against.

Do I read mostly for other people, out loud, in real time?

Upright only suits this. Fewer decisions per card means a steadier voice, and a steady voice is most of the job.

THE PERMISSION, ONE MORE TIME

If you close this piece here and never turn a card upside down again, you have not skipped anything. If you carry on to the methods, carry on because you want the extra dial, not because you are worried somebody will find out you were not using it.

Three methods, and only three

There are more in circulation. These three cover the ground, and a beginner running three well is in a far better position than one running seven badly.

Opposite

THE CARD, INVERTED

Blocked or internalised

THE SAME THING, NOT OUT IN THE WORLD

Intensity

THE SAME THING, AT A DIFFERENT VOLUME

Each gets a page of mechanic, a worked example, and a page on where it goes wrong. The worked examples use The Fool and The Magician, and they operate on **your own sentence about the card**, not on a definition. That is not a limitation. It is the point. A method has to work on what you actually see, because that is all you will have at the table.

THE RULE THAT MATTERS MOST

Do not mix them inside one reading. Choosing a method per card, based on which produces the nicer answer, is not reading. It is negotiating with a deck of cards, and you will win every time.

Opposite

The simplest and the most commonly taught. A reversed card is read as the inverse of what it says upright.

The mechanic in full: take your sentence for the card. Invert it. Read the position with the inverted sentence instead. That is the entire method, and its simplicity is genuinely its strength. There is no judgement call, which means there is no place for you to lean on the scale.

HOW TO DO IT WITHOUT A BOOK

Write your one line for the card first, before you invert anything. Say it out loud if you are alone. You cannot invert a sentence you have not said, and beginners who skip this step end up inverting a vague feeling, which produces a vaguer one.

What it is good for

Yes and no questions, where an inversion is a clean and honest answer. Spreads with a this-or-that shape. And any reading where you want the reversal to add information rather than atmosphere.

What it demands of you

Nerve. Opposite will sometimes hand you an answer that is flatly unwelcome, with no soft edge on it. If you find yourself reaching for a different method the moment that happens, you have learned something important about why the next two exist.

Opposite, in practice



WORKED EXAMPLE · THE FOOL, REVERSED, OPPOSITE METHOD

Step one. Your sentence. On night three you drew this card and wrote down what you saw, exactly as the first page of this kit asked you to: *"He is stepping off the edge and he is not looking down."* That sentence is yours. It came from the picture, not from a book, and it is the input to everything that follows.

Step two. Invert it. Not the card. The sentence. *"He is looking down, and he has stopped walking."* Notice you did not need to know anything you did not already know. You performed an operation on your own line.

Step three. Put the inverted sentence in the position. If it landed in a slot whose job is *what is yours to move*, then the slot is now saying something about a person who has stopped and is looking at the drop. Read that. Say that.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED

The method never told you what the card means. It gave you a rule for turning your own reading of it into a second reading of it. That is what a reversal method is. Everything else on the subject is somebody selling you a longer list.

Do the same with any card you have written a line for. If you have not written a line for it yet, the method has nothing to work on, which is your answer about whether you are ready for reversals on that card.

The trouble with opposite

Many sentences have no opposite

Invert "*he is stepping off the edge*" and you get something workable. Invert a sentence about a scene with six things happening in it and you get nonsense, or you get one small detail inverted while the rest stays put, which is a decision you made and then treated as the method's output.

It turns a spread into a set of switches

Run opposite across a seven card layout with three reversals in it and you are no longer reading a picture. You are flipping switches. The spread stops flowing and becomes a checklist, and the chaining you were taught in The Three-Card Workhorse quietly stops working.

The unwelcome answer problem

This is the one that actually breaks practices. Opposite will occasionally produce something blunt about a person or a hope, and a reader with no plan for that moment will either say it badly or quietly switch methods. Decide in advance which you will do, and if the honest answer is that you will switch, use one of the next two methods from the start and be at peace about it.

DO NOT DO THIS

Reading a reversal as the opposite of the card in one position and as a softer version of it in the next is the most common failure in this entire piece. It always feels like sensitivity. It is always the reading being steered.

Blocked or internalised

The method most working readers land on, because it matches how situations actually behave. Nothing becomes its opposite. It becomes stuck, or it moves inward.

The mechanic: keep your sentence for the card exactly as it is. Do not change a word of it. Then ask two questions of the position, in this order.

THE TWO QUESTIONS

Blocked. Is this thing trying to happen and something is in the way? If so, the reading is about the obstruction, and the next move is to find out what it is.

Internalised. Is this thing happening on the inside, where nobody can see it yet? If so, the reading is about something real that has not surfaced.

You pick one of the two, per card, and you say which one you picked out loud. That last part is not optional. Announcing the choice is what keeps this method honest, because it is the one with the most room in it.

Why readers settle here

Because it is nearly always the true description of a stalled situation. Things in a life do not usually invert. They jam, or they go underground for a while. A method shaped like that will fit real events more often than one shaped like a switch.

Blocked or internalised, in practice



WORKED EXAMPLE · THE MAGICIAN, REVERSED, BLOCKED OR INTERNALISED

Step one. Your sentence, untouched. What you wrote when you drew it: *"Everything he needs is laid out on the table in front of him, and one hand is pointing up."*

Step two. Ask the blocked question. Is this trying to happen with something in the way? That would read as: everything is on the table and none of it has been picked up. The equipment is there. Something is stopping the reach. If you take this branch, the whole rest of the reading is about finding what is stopping it, and the neighbouring positions are where you look.

Step three. Or ask the internalised question. Is this happening inwardly? That would read as: it is all happening, but privately, where nobody has seen it yet. Real, and not yet visible to anyone else.

Step four. Choose, out loud. "I'm reading this one as blocked rather than as inward, because the card next to it is about other people and this looks like it is about the outside world." Then hold that choice for the whole spread.

THE HABIT WORTH BUILDING

Say the branch you took and the reason, every time, even when you are alone with a journal.

Written down, it lets you check yourself in a month. Spoken to somebody else, it lets them tell you when you have got it wrong, which is worth more than being right.

The trouble with blocked or internalised

The branch is a door you can walk through twice

Two readings are available for every reversed card, and you choose. That means the method can be made to say almost anything if you want it to, and the wanting does not announce itself. It feels like discernment. This is why the choice gets spoken aloud with a reason attached. A reason you have to say out loud is a reason you have to be able to defend.

Everything starts sounding like a delay

Run this method for a month and notice how many of your readings end with something being nearly ready, or almost surfacing, or briefly obstructed. It is a comfortable place for a reading to end. Nobody is upset, nothing is decided, and the reading has said very little. Comfort is the failure mode here.

Internalised can drift into flattery

"It is all happening inside you and it has not shown yet" is a lovely thing to hear and it is unfalsifiable. Used often, it turns a reading into reassurance. If you find yourself taking the inward branch nearly every time, take the blocked branch for the next ten readings on purpose and see what changes.

THE TEST FOR THIS METHOD

Go back through a month of your journal and count the branches. Roughly even is a reader making a judgement each time. Nine to one in either direction is not a judgement. It is a habit that has been running the readings without asking you.

Intensity

The quietest of the three and the easiest to run consistently. A reversal is not a different statement. It is the same statement at a different volume.

The mechanic: keep your sentence. Then apply a single fixed adjustment to it, and use the same adjustment every time. Most readers turn the volume down.

UPRIGHT	REVERSED, VOLUME DOWN
The thing, at full strength	The thing, quieter. Present but not driving.
The thing, out in the open	The thing, in the background of the situation.
The thing, as the headline	The thing, as a footnote worth noticing.

A minority of readers run it the other way and read reversals as the volume turned up, on the argument that a card sitting against the run of the spread is demanding attention. Both are defensible. What is not defensible is doing one on Tuesday and the other on Thursday.

WHY THIS IS THE BEGINNER'S BEST BET

It has no branch and no inversion, so there is almost nowhere for you to put your thumb. If you want reversals and you are early, this is the one with the least room to fool yourself in.

Intensity, in practice



WORKED EXAMPLE · THE FOOL, REVERSED, INTENSITY METHOD

Step one. Your sentence. The same one you have been using: *"He is stepping off the edge and he is not looking down."*

Step two. Turn it down. Not inverted, not blocked. Quieter. *"There is a step off an edge somewhere in this, and it is not the loudest thing in the picture."* Same content. Less weight.

Step three. Read the position with the volume already set. If the slot's job is *what is actually holding it*, the reading is that this element is genuinely present in the situation, and it is not the main event. That is a real and specific thing to say, and it is often exactly what a spread is doing.

WHAT THIS METHOD IS ACTUALLY FOR

Weighting. A seven card spread where every card shouts equally is unreadable. Intensity gives you a way to let some positions speak at conversational volume, and it turns out that a spread with a few quiet cards in it is much easier to say one sentence about.

Try it on a three card layout you have already read upright. Same cards, same positions, one of them turned down. Notice whether the reading gets clearer or just softer. That difference is the whole skill.

The trouble with intensity

It can make a spread say nothing

Turn down four cards out of seven and you have a reading with almost no weight anywhere in it. The method has a floor and you can hit it. When a spread comes up heavily reversed, the honest response is that this looks like a quiet situation, said in plain words, rather than a mumbled version of the reading you would have given anyway.

Quiet is not the same as unimportant, and it will be heard that way

Say a card is in the background and most people hear that it does not matter. Finish the sentence every time. In the background of *what*, and worth watching *because*. A turned down card that gets no follow-up may as well not have been dealt.

It is the easiest of the three to use as an escape hatch

A card lands that you would rather not talk about, and turning the volume down is a very convenient way to walk past it. Nobody in the room will challenge you. Watch for the pattern where the cards you turn down are consistently the uncomfortable ones. That is not a method any more.

THE TEST FOR THIS METHOD

Read the quiet card out loud anyway, every time, before you decide it is a footnote. If it still sounds like a footnote after you have said it, it is one. If saying it made you uncomfortable, it was not a footnote and you were about to skip it.

Pick one

Not the best one. There is no best one. Pick the one that fits how you read, and pick it tonight rather than gradually.

CHOOSE	IF THIS IS YOU
Opposite	You read for clear decisions and yes-or-no questions. You would rather have a blunt answer than a comfortable one, and you have somewhere to put it when it arrives.
Blocked or internalised	You read for yourself, over time, in a journal you go back to. You want a method that describes stalled situations accurately, and you are willing to write down which branch you took every time.
Intensity	You are early, or you read out loud for other people, or your spreads have been coming out shouty and undifferentiated. This is also the right first choice if you cannot decide.

IF YOU STILL CANNOT CHOOSE

Take intensity. It has the fewest decisions in it, it is the hardest to bend, and nothing you learn while running it will need unlearning if you move to another one later.

Write your choice on the inside cover of your journal, with today's date next to it. This sounds like a small ceremony. It is actually the enforcement mechanism for the next page.

Ninety days, no swapping

**Whichever method you chose, use only that one
for the next ninety days.**

Not per card. Not per reading. Not when it is not working.

Ninety days.

This is the firmest instruction in the piece, and it is the one most likely to be ignored, so here is exactly why it is here.

A reversal method is not a fact to be verified. It is a language you are learning to speak. Ninety days is roughly how long it takes before you stop translating and start hearing, and every swap resets the clock. A reader who has changed method four times in a year has not tried four methods. They have failed to start one, four times.

There is a second reason and it is the more important one. If you allow yourself to change method mid practice, you will change it when the answer is unwelcome. Not consciously. It will feel like the method not fitting the reading. Locking the choice for ninety days is not discipline for its own sake. It is the only thing standing between you and a deck of cards that agrees with you.

WHAT COUNTS AS SWAPPING

Using a different method for one card because the first one gave you something you did not like. Reading a card upright because it came up reversed at a bad moment. Deciding a particular card "doesn't really reverse." All three are the same move, and it is this move the ninety days exists to stop.

Getting them in, and getting them out

Two mechanical things nobody explains, and both of them matter more than any of the theory.

How reversals get into a deck

A brand new deck is usually all one way up, and ordinary shuffling barely changes that. If you want reversals you have to introduce them deliberately. Split the deck into two piles, turn one pile end for end, and riffle them together. Do it once and you have a light scattering. Do it a few times over a few weeks and the deck settles into a natural mix that you never have to think about again.

How to get them out

Turn the whole deck face up and walk through it, righting anything that is upside down. It takes about four minutes and it is a genuinely pleasant thing to do on a quiet evening. Readers who have decided against reversals often do this once and never need to again.

THE MIDDLE PATH THAT IS ALLOWED

Keeping one deck mixed and one deck upright is a real practice, not a fudge, as long as the choice is made when you pick the deck up rather than when you dislike a card. Decide before you shuffle. That is the whole rule.

One thing to watch for. A card that keeps arriving reversed is usually a card with a bent corner, not a message. Check the physical deck before you build a story on it.

What to say about it

You will be asked, usually by another reader and usually with an edge on it. Two sentences are enough, and neither of them is an apology.

IF YOU READ UPRIGHT ONLY

"I read everything upright. Position does that work for me, and I would rather be fluent with seventy eight cards than shaky with more."

IF YOU USE REVERSALS

"I do, and I read them as intensity rather than opposites. I picked one method and I have stayed with it, which I think matters more than which one it is."

Notice that both answers give a reason and neither one defends. You are not in an argument. You made a choice on purpose and you can say what it was, which is more than most of the people asking will be able to do.

AND IF THEY PUSH

"That's a fair way to do it too." Then change the subject. There is no version of this disagreement that improves anybody's reading, and the willingness to leave it alone is itself a sign of somebody who has been doing this a while.

Reversals, on one page

FIRST

Reading every card upright is a complete way to read tarot. You are not cheating and you are not doing the beginner version. Either answer is a real answer.

THE THREE METHODS

Opposite	Invert your sentence. Clean, blunt, no room to lean.
Blocked or internalised	Same sentence, jammed or gone inward. Say which branch, and why.
Intensity	Same sentence, volume down. Fewest decisions. Start here.

THE RULES

- 1 Write your own line for the card first. The method operates on that, not on a book.
- 2 One method per reading. Never one method per card.
- 3 Decide before you shuffle, never after you see the card.

WHERE EACH ONE GOES WRONG

- Opposite turns a spread into switches, and some sentences have no opposite.
- Blocked or internalised makes everything sound like a delay. Count your branches.
- Intensity is the easiest way to walk past a card you would rather not say.

THE INSTRUCTION

Pick one. Write it inside the cover of your journal with the date. Ninety days before you are allowed to change your mind.

And if you decided against reversals altogether, that is a finished decision.
Write that inside the cover too, with the date, and read on.