

The “Plan B” Alternative Action Spread

	Plan A - The Chosen Path (Deal Face Up)		Plan B - The Hidden Paths (Deal Face Down)		The Truth of the Matter (Calculated Quint Cards)
Where It Stands	Card #1 Prep	Choose a Plan B card only if the Plan A card is unfortunate, reversed or ill-dignified. Select only one.	Alternate Card #1	Alternate Card #1	Quint #1 (If Needed)
Gearing Up	Card #2 Startup		Alternate Card #2	Alternate Card #2	Quint #2 (If Needed)
Hitting Stride	Card #3 On Course		Alternate Card #3	Alternate Card #3	Quint #3 (If Needed)
Max Speed	Card #4 Closing In		Alternate Card #4	Alternate Card #4	Quint #4 (If Needed)
Gearing Down	Card #5 Wrap-up		Alternate Card #5	Alternate Card #5	Quint #5 (If Needed)
Where It Lands	Card #6 Outcome		Alternate Card #6	Alternate Card #6	Quint #6 (If Needed)

The Quintessence Cards show larger forces that may be put in motion by the querent's choices. Use only one Plan B card.

When querents bring a planning question to the table, they typically have at least a rough idea of what they want to do, although it may be founded more on hope and conjecture than clear-eyed foresight. Most are aware they need a fall-back position, or “Plan B,” to which they can resort if things don’t go as intended. These alternatives are usually even less well-thought-out than the primary course of action.

This spread is designed to offer additional guidance in the event the initial reading shows the desired path to be flawed. It has three main features. The first six cards are placed face-up after the shuffle and cut; they show the prospects for success of each phase of the querent's original idea. If all of the cards are of a generally agreeable nature and not afflicted in any way, the reading stops after they are read. If, however, a card in any position is less than favorable, two more cards are laid face-down next to the Plan A position to serve as Plan B alternatives. One of these cards is then randomly chosen by the querent as the best option for redirecting that aspect of the project. This is repeated as many times as needed, up to twelve. Once each alternative path is examined, a quintessence card is calculated for the Plan A/Plan B pairs as described below.

I’m fond of designing “hidden” (face-down) cards into a spread that are brought into play only under certain conditions. This is my answer to “clarifier” cards, which I see as an avoidance tactic that dodges having to think too hard about the original pull. Here I provide two “option” cards for each step of the Plan A trajectory. The idea is that only one of the cards will be turned face-up (my “Lady or the Tiger” scenario) to reveal how the querent can most effectively recover from any deficiency in the original proposal.

If a Plan A position is weakened by a card that is unfortunate by nature, reversed, or elementally ill-dignified by its neighbors, one of the two option cards can be tapped for further advice. Not all Plan A steps will necessarily require an alternative viewpoint; it should be reserved for those situations where the outlook is truly clouded and not just treated as idle-curiosity data or “oh, by the way” padding for the main reading. Where Plan A looks like smooth sailing, these cards aren’t used at all. In such cases, the spread will take longer to set up than to read.

I’ve also included a “quintessence” step that is to be used only if a Plan B card is brought into the picture. The “quint” is a calculated roll-up of the numerical values of the Plan A and Plan B cards that is intended to show larger forces that may be put into motion by the querent’s decisions. It can be derived in a number of ways, using both addition and subtraction; personally, I believe the quintessence should always involve every card on the table, excluding none. That means I assign the numbers 11 through 14 to the unnumbered court cards, which goes against the advice of some tarot writers. Also, if any card is reversed, I subtract its value during the calculation, which is the only way to arrive at the Fool as zero and not have to rethink it as 22. (It can also yield a reversed quint card, which I see as a bonus.) Finally, I use numerological reduction to bring the sum down to below 22. This will always produce a trump card, which is traditionally viewed as a major external influence entering the matter. As used here, it would be invoked by the querent’s activation of Plan B.

Here’s a brief example: Card #1, the preparatory phase of Plan A, is the 7 of Pentacles, showing that the initial health of the project's funding is not particularly robust; Alternate Card #1 is the 8 of Swords, indicating that there are no good options; the “quint” card is the Devil: enter Shylock, the unscrupulous money-lender.