

# The Ultimate Guide to **CARDSTOCK**



Quick Reference Guide  
by Lisa Papez

# **The Ultimate Guide to Cardstock**

compiled by Lisa Papez

FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

Copyright © 2021 Lisa Papez

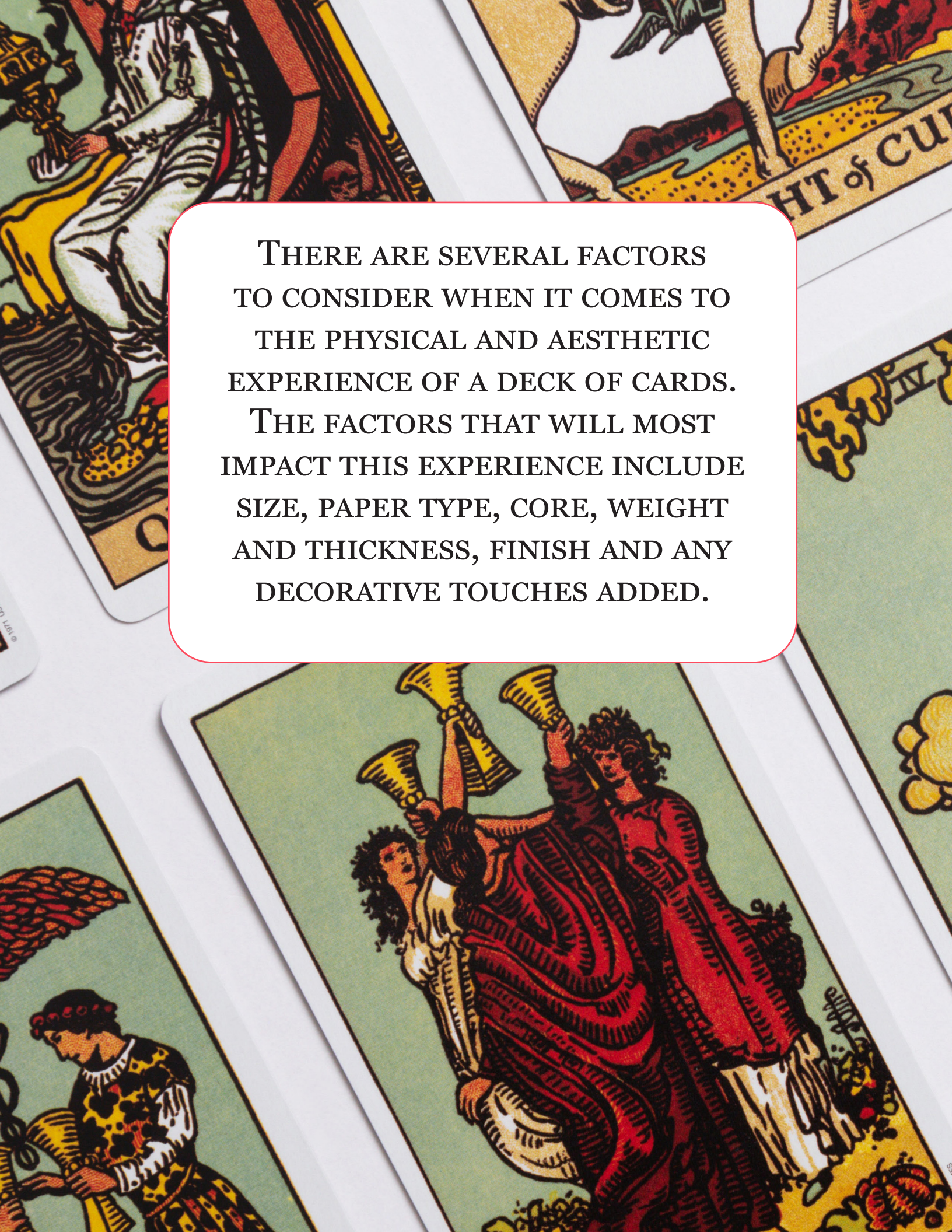
<https://www.lisapapez.com/>

## **Notice of Rights**

All rights reserved. No part of this document or any accompanying material may be reproduced or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

## **Notice of Liability**

The information in this document is distributed on an “as is” basis without warranty. While every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this document, neither the author nor the publisher shall have any liability to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by the information contained in this document.



THERE ARE SEVERAL FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN IT COMES TO THE PHYSICAL AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF A DECK OF CARDS. THE FACTORS THAT WILL MOST IMPACT THIS EXPERIENCE INCLUDE SIZE, PAPER TYPE, CORE, WEIGHT AND THICKNESS, FINISH AND ANY DECORATIVE TOUCHES ADDED.

## Size

Size often comes down to personal preference, but if you intend to shuffle your deck of cards, you want a size that's easy to handle. If the cards have gorgeous art on them, you may also want the cards big enough to appreciate the details in the artwork. In general, the more detailed the artwork, the bigger you'll want the card so you can see it - but that needs to be balanced out with what's comfortable to handle. The most common card size for Tarot cards is 2.75" wide by 4.75" tall. If your cards are not especially thick, this is generally a reasonable size to both see the artwork clearly and be able to shuffle the cards.

**The sizes I've encountered for Tarot, Oracle and other decks within my personal collection include:**

**JUMBO** 3.5" x 5.5"  
**UNIQUE/OVAL** 3.08" x 5.5"  
**ORACLE** 3.5" x 5"  
**TAROT** 2.75" x 4.75"  
**POKER** 2.5" x 3.5"  
**TRUMP** 2.45" x 3.95"  
**POCKET** 2.25" x 3.85"  
**BRIDGE** 2.25" x 3.5"

## Paper

**THE MOST COMMON  
PAPER TYPES USED FOR  
CARD DECKS ARE:**

- **CARDSTOCK**
- **ART PAPER**

Both can feel shockingly similar to handle, but it is important to note that there are key differences between the two. Cardstock (also called coverstock) typically contains a core and is designed to be shuffled, played with and used. Art paper runs thicker and is typically designed first for display. If the desire is for thickness/heaviness in cards, you may only have art paper as an option. I've noticed that in my own collection, every 400gsm card deck I own is art paper.

It can be very difficult to tell the difference between a deck that is made from art paper versus one made from coverstock/cardstock, depending on the finish. However, since cardstock is designed for heavy use and durability, if you are purchasing a deck (or making a deck) that you intend to be used as a primary working deck or that you think will see a lot of use, this difference could matter to you.

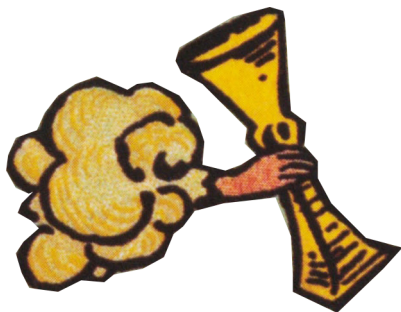
## Core

**Art paper is coreless, but cardstock typically contains a core. You'll find these cores referred to by their color:**

**GREY CORE**  
**WHITE CORE / IVORY CORE**  
**BLUE CORE**  
**BLACK CORE**

It is my understanding that the quality/durability of the core goes up as you move from grey to white to blue and finally black, with black being the top quality core currently available. The core seems to affect the durability and sometimes the flexibility or rigidity of the paper.

It's also worth noting that black core, specifically, is designed to prevent any possibility that someone would be able to see through a card back to what is on the face of a card, which is why you'll often find that black core is considered the standard for casino quality playing cards.



## Weight

GSM (Grams per Square Meter) has become the most common way to differentiate various paper weights. It's important to remember that this is a weight measurement, not a thickness measurement. While it's true that, when it comes to cardstock, a 300gsm card will feel thinner than a 350gsm card, provided they are made from a similar quality cardstock, there are other factors that can affect the thickness of the card - such as the type of finish chosen (which we'll talk about shortly). Additionally, how flexible a card is can have more to do with the size and what type (if any) of core it has than the thickness or weight. If shufflability is important, then all of these factors should be considered.

Within my own collection, I have decks with the following weights:

**300 | 305 | 310 | 320**  
**330 | 340 | 350 | 395 | 400**

And, among these, 330 and 350 are the most common weights. It's my personal opinion that 330-350gsm represents a nice balance between paper weight, flexibility and ease of handling. My lighter/thinner decks (300-320gsm) are often even more flexible but they sometimes feel less durable or 'cheaper', whereas my heavier/thicker decks (395/400) are often lovely to hold and feel very substantial in the hand, but are much stiffer or more difficult to shuffle.

# Finish

One of the most important factors to consider, when it comes to finish, is how you want the cards to move against one another, and how much protection you want them to have. There are three 'styles' of finish, I would argue, that include:

**COATING** typically applied as a liquid and cured. Liquid coatings currently and most commonly offered are either Aqueous (water based, and the most eco-friendly), UV Cured, or Varnish. Coatings can typically be smooth/semi-gloss, matte, glossy or soft touch (velvet or 'rose petal'). Coatings do protect the cardstock, but add less weight/thickness to the card.

**LAMINATION** applied as a film sheet, lamination adds an additional layer of physical protection to the card, and also adds some durability and thickness as well. Lamination can typically be matte, glossy or soft touch (velvet or 'rose petal').

**EMBOSSSED AND COATED** a 'linen' finish is embossed to create a slight waffle texture and then coated, the embossing creates air pockets that allow the cards to 'slide/glide' extremely easily and the coating adds the desired finish (most commonly semi-gloss or gloss, but can also be matte) and some additional protection. This style of finish provides a superior shuffle and is favored for playing cards, but can be extra 'slippery'.

## ADDITIONAL AESTHETICS

There are a few other things that can affect the overall aesthetic experience of a deck. These include:

**GILDING** Gilding is an edge treatment. Typically, the edges of cards are smooth but unfinished. Adding gilding adds a layer of bling to the finished deck. Gilding can be shiny and metallic, antiqued/matte metallic, holographic, sparkly, or matte.

**FOIL STAMPING** Foil stamping is a way of embellishing the actual artwork on the face or back of the cards. Cards can be hot foil stamped (where metallic foil is applied to a physical counterplate that stamps the foil onto the cards with heat and pressure) or cold foil stamped (where uv adhesive is applied to the artwork of the card and then foil is applied over the substrate where desired).

**GLOSS ACCENTS** Gloss accents can also be applied to the card by applying a gloss coating only to certain parts of the cards. This adds shine and, when paired with a matte finish can really provide some interesting contrast to the artwork.

**BORDERS OR BORDERLESS** Some people LOVE their artwork to have borders, while others prefer the artwork on their cards be fully borderless, sometimes also called "full bleed" so that the image/artwork itself is as big as possible.

# Tips for Card Nerds

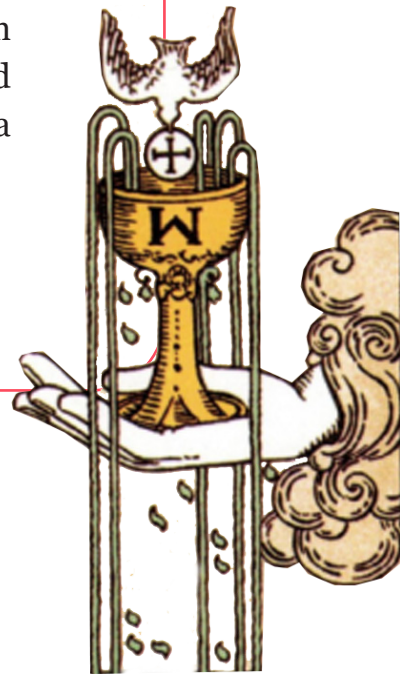
(Like Me)

**I have to say that my biggest takeaway from this deep dive into cardstock is that it's paper is complex, and cardstock isn't nearly as simple as thick vs thin.**

I think sometimes we find ourselves caught up in one particular factor and thinking that's the be-all and end-all of quality. Some of the highest quality cardstock is fairly thin and some of the lowest can be very thick to the touch. Cards that are meant to be used and abused are often going to feel different than cards meant to be handled gently, if at all. As consumers, the things we care about influences what deck creators and publishers choose. They want to give us what we want - so being clear about what really matters to us, is important!

It's easy to say we want 'thicker cards' but is that true? Or do we simply want durable cards? It's helpful to be clear and as someone who reviews decks, I don't think I have always been very clear. Learning more about cardstock has really helped me understand the factors that are actually more important to me. It's easy to say "330gsm is better than 300" but that's not always objectively true. If that 300gsm cardstock has a black core, linen finish and a high quality coating, it would likely hold up better to heavy use (and be easier to handle) than a 350gsm coreless art paper with a heavy matte soft touch lamination - at least in my opinion.

But again... it all depends on  
personal preference!!



# Tips for Creators

**If you're thinking about creating a deck, think about the factors above and what you envision the aesthetic and physical/tactile experience of your deck to be so that you can make the choices that bring your vision to life the way you wish. And, consider your budget.**

The most affordable deck will, by nature, be less durable or fancy than the most expensive. Conversely, the most expensive may be visually stunning and physically durable, but lack usability (for example if the cards are too large or thick to shuffle easily). It's important to focus on what you want the finished product to look and feel like, but also to consider the usability for those that will be handling it regularly.

Most importantly, it's almost impossible to really wrap your head around what all these different factors look and feel like without getting your hands on examples - so if you're thinking of making a deck of cards, **GET SAMPLES!!** Get as many samples as you can. Touch and feel **ALL** the types of paper and finishes that you are considering using so that you can touch, feel, shuffle and slide the cards to make sure that you are making the right decisions to get the result **YOU** want.

Most importantly, don't be afraid to reach out to other creators in your niche, whether it's game creation, tarot or oracle deck creation, or trading cards. While it's true that some creators may not want to share all the details and specs of their creations, others will be happy to share their knowledge. Don't be afraid to ask questions!





# Glossary of Terms

*I have compiled this glossary based on my own personal understanding of the research I've done into these terms, and have done my best to ensure accuracy but please check this information against your own resources before relying on it for your own creative projects!*

**AQUEOUS COATING** Aqueous coating is a clear, fast-drying water-based coating that is used to protect printed pieces. Can be matte or glossy and deters dirt and fingerprints. Aqueous coating improves durability and provides more scuff resistance than varnish coatings. Due to its water base, aqueous coating is more environmentally friendly than varnish or UV coatings.

**ART PAPER** Art paper can be rigid, like cardstock, but lacks a core

**BLACK CORE** A type of cardstock that has a black core

**BLUE CORE** A type of cardstock that has a blue core

**BORDERLESS** A term referring to artwork that goes all the way to the edges of the cards (see also full bleed)

**BUTTER FINISH** A type of card finish that feels slightly more luxurious than a standard smooth/semi-gloss/satin finish (see also Premium Smooth)

**CARD WEIGHT** A measurement of the physical weight of a card

**CARDSTOCK** Sometimes also called coverstock, Cardstock is a type of rigid paper that contains a core

**COATING** A type of finish that involves the application of a liquid product that is then cured in order to produce a desired effect (matte/gloss/etc) while also offering some protection to the paper as well as some boost in durability

**CORE** The center layer of cardstock. If you were to tear cardstock in half and inspect the 'layers', the core would be at the center

**CORELESS** A type of paper that does not include a core

**FINISH** Finish refers to the final stage of paper processing, typically involving either a liquid coating or lamination process to protect the paper

**FOIL STAMPING** Can be 'hot' or 'cold' and refers to the process of applying foil to cards

**FULL BLEED** A term referring to artwork that goes all the way to the edges of the cards (see also borderless)

**GREY CORE** A type of cardstock that has a grey core

**GSM** GSM (Grams per Square Meter) is a measurement of card weight and refers to the actual physical weight in grams of square meter of the paper in question

**IVORY CORE** A type of cardstock that has a white core (see also White Core)

**LAMINATION** A type of finish that involves the application of thin film sheets to produce a desired effect (Matte/Gloss/etc) while also adding durability/thickness

**LINEN FINISH** Linen finish is a finishing process where a waffle-like pattern is physically embossed onto the cards creating a textured surface area on the cards. Often finished with a semi-gloss or glossy coating but can be matte

**MATTE** A type of card finish that has little to no reflection

**MATTE GILDING (FLAT)** Edge treatment that is NOT shiny or reflective

**MATTE GILDING (SHIMMER)** Edge Treatment that is matte with a slight sparkle for a slightly antiqued appearance, can still appear 'metallic' but is not at all reflective, rather has a slight shimmer or sparkle if anything, can be in classic metal colours or other hues

**METALLIC GILDING** Shiny, reflective edge treatment for cards. Often feels smooth, sometimes 'sharp', can be in classic metal colours like gold, silver, copper, or in other hues like red, purple, etc

**POINT** Point is an actual thickness measurement of paper in ‘thou’ (to the thousandth decimal) for example 16 point paper is equal to 16 thou or .016” in thickness

**POUND** Pound is a measurement of card weight and refers to the actual physical weight in pounds of 500 ‘parent sheets’ (or 1 ream) of the paper in question. It’s important to note that parent sheet sizes/ream sizes can vary based on paper type

**PREMIUM SMOOTH** A type of card finish that feels slightly more luxurious than a standard smooth/semi-gloss/satin finish (see also Butter Finish)

**ROSE PETAL** The colloquial/slang term within the tarot community for a type of card finish that feels ‘rubberized’, ‘velvety’, etc (see also Silk Matte, Soft Touch, Skin Feel)

**SATIN** A type of card finish that has a sheen but not a ‘reflection’. It is neither fully glossy, not fully matte finish (see also Semi-Gloss, Smooth)

**SEMI-GLOSS** A type of card finish that has a sheen but not a ‘reflection’. It is neither fully glossy, not fully matte finish (see also Satin, Smooth)

**SKIN FEEL** Another term used to refer to the card finish that feels ‘rubberized’, ‘velvety’, etc (see also Rose Petal, Soft Touch)

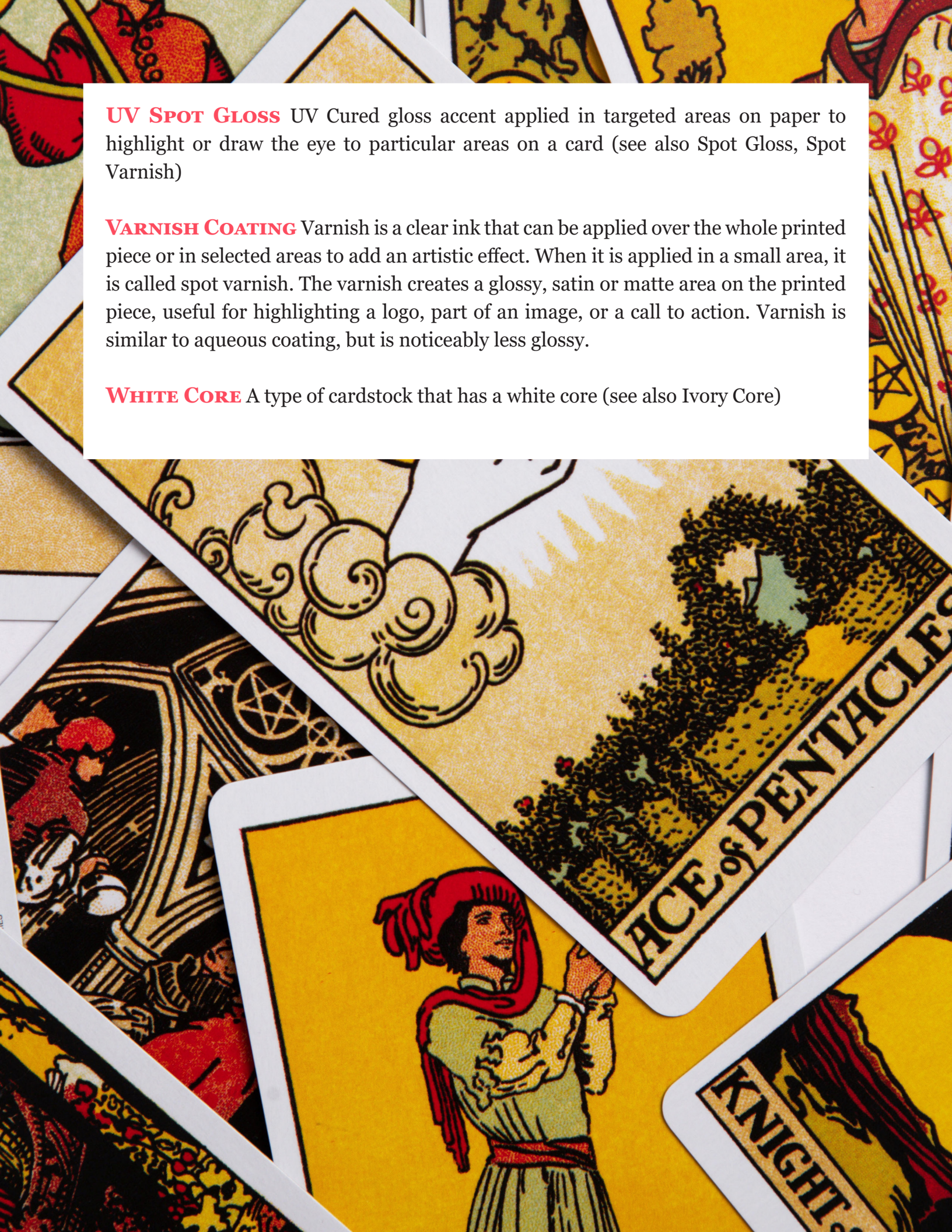
**SMOOTH** A type of card finish that has a sheen but not a ‘reflection’. It is neither fully glossy, not fully matte finish (see also Satin, Semi-Gloss)

**SOFT TOUCH** The most common term used to refer to the card finish that feels ‘rubberized’, ‘velvety’, etc (see also Silk Matte, Rose Petal, Skin Feel)

**SPOT GLOSS** Gloss accent applied in targeted areas on paper to highlight or draw the eye to particular areas on a card (see also UV Spot Gloss, Spot Varnish)

**SPOT VARNISH** Glossy varnish accent applied in targeted areas on paper to highlight or draw the eye to particular areas on a card (see also Spot Gloss, UV Spot Gloss)

**UV COATING** UV coating uses ultraviolet light to quickly dry the coating, hardening it to the desired finish. UV Coating is so hard it may crack when folded, so is not a good choice for anything intended to be folded, scored, foil stamped or embossed.

The background of the page is a collage of several tarot cards. The most prominent card is the Knight of Pentacles, which depicts a knight in a green tunic and a red hood, standing on a yellow background. To its right is the Ace of Pentacles, showing a landscape with a tree and a path. Other cards are partially visible, including one with a red and white design and another with a yellow and red design.

**UV SPOT GLOSS** UV Cured gloss accent applied in targeted areas on paper to highlight or draw the eye to particular areas on a card (see also Spot Gloss, Spot Varnish)

**VARNISH COATING** Varnish is a clear ink that can be applied over the whole printed piece or in selected areas to add an artistic effect. When it is applied in a small area, it is called spot varnish. The varnish creates a glossy, satin or matte area on the printed piece, useful for highlighting a logo, part of an image, or a call to action. Varnish is similar to aqueous coating, but is noticeably less glossy.

**WHITE CORE** A type of cardstock that has a white core (see also Ivory Core)

---

# Thank you!

---

To everyone who contributed information, samples, and so freely shared with me so that I could make this video, thank you!! :) Some of you are listed below, but there were many more who helped as well, and I am so grateful to you all! I have also listed below several resources that were helpful to me in compiling this information.

I'd like to offer special thanks to Gabe and Jill at Shuffled Ink for their patience and assistance in not only getting me samples but for being incredibly communicative, proactive and helpful to me as I moved through the arduous research stage of this project!

## **DANI (DANI MYSTIC)**

Mystic Masters Tarot and Pear Tree Court Oracle

## **IS**

Falling Star Tarot & More

## **NINA (SHUFFLE TAROT)**

Rune Spirals Deck

## **THOMAS (HERMIT'S MIRROR)**

Lifeline Tarot

## **KARLA REFOXO**

Tulku Oracle

## **ROXI SIM HERMSEN**

Sidewayz Tarot & More

## **KIMBERLY TSAN (FABLES DEN)**

Creator of the Sparkly Lenormand & More

## **WILLIAM RADER**

Artisan Tarot's Conver Reproduction & More

## **CEDAR MCCLOUD**

Numinous Tarot, Threadbound Oracle & More

## **MELISSA SALVAGGIO**

When My Soul Whispered Tarot

## **JAMIE SAWYER**

Sawyers Path Tarot & More

## **ZAARA**

Playful Heart Tarot

## **KARA SIMMONS**

Praire Majesty Oracle

## **STEPHANIE BURROUGHS**

Oak, Ash & Thorn & More

## **LISA LEVART**

Goddess On Earth Oracle

## **JENNIFER STEIDLEY**

Tarot Disassembled

## **KAYTI WELSH-STEWART**

78 Tarot

## **SHUFFLED INK**

Tarot and Game Card Printer

## **PRINT NINJA**

Tarot and Game Card Printer

## **MAKE PLAYING CARDS**

Tarot and Game Card Print on Demand Printer

## **CLUB CARD**

Business Cards & More Printer

## **CATPRINT**

Business Cards & More Printer

## **PRINTING FROG**

Business Cards & More Printer

*(Click names to find out more!)*

## **RESOURCES FOR ASPIRING TAROT DECK CREATORS:**

<https://fablesden.com/new-blog/useful-resources-for-deck-creators>

<https://jamiesawyer336.com/blogs/news/deck-creation>

<https://www.arnellart.com/makenpub.htm>

## **OTHER SOURCES:**

<https://lekac.com/production/gsm-vs-pt-unit-system-what-you-need-to-know>

<https://refinepackaging.com/blog/gsm-vs-pt-unit-system/>

<https://www.deprintedbox.com/blog/paper-grammagegsm-pt-and-thickness-comparison-table/>

<https://support.jukeboxprint.com/hc/en-us/articles/202847466-Paper-Weights-PT-LB-GSM>

<https://www.oki.com/us/printing/support/understanding-paper-weight/index.html#>

<https://lekac.com/production/gsm-vs-pt-unit-system-what-you-need-to-know>

<https://www.cardstock-warehouse.com/pages/cardstock-paper-basis-weight-chart>

<https://www.printingforless.com/How-to-Choose-the-Best-Paper-Stock-For-Printing.html>

<https://www.gatekeepergaming.com/article-11-demystifying-game-components/>

<https://pakfactory.com/blog/soft-touch-coating-vs-soft-touch-lamination/>

<https://pakfactory.com/blog/what-is-varnish-packaging-print/>

<https://pakfactory.com/blog/soft-touch-coating-vs-soft-touch-lamination/>

<https://pakfactory.com/blog/what-is-uv-ultraviolet-coating/>

<https://www.oliverinc.com/blog/hot-foil-stamping-vs.-cold-foil>

<https://www.jacksonsart.com/blog/2021/02/18/how-paper-weight-is-measured/>

<https://action-press.co.uk/blog/paper-thickness-and-weight-explained/>

<https://www.postnet.com/blog/wide-world-paper/>

<https://bellissimacreation.wordpress.com/>