

Western astrology

(Dr. Anil Kumar Porwal)

Western astrology is the system of astrology most popular in Western countries. Western astrology is historically based on Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos (2nd century CE), which in turn was a continuation of Hellenistic and ultimately Babylonian traditions.

Western astrology is largely horoscopic, that is, it is a form of divination based on the construction of a horoscope for an exact moment, such as a person's birth, in which various cosmic bodies are said to have an influence. Astrology in western popular culture is often reduced to sun sign astrology, which considers only the individual's date of birth (i.e. the "position of the Sun" at that date).

The zodiac

The zodiac is the belt or band of constellations through which the Sun, Moon, and planets move on their journey across the sky. Astrologers noted these constellations and so attached a particular significance to them. Over time they developed the system of twelve signs of the zodiac, based on twelve of the constellations through which the sun passes throughout the year, those constellations that are "Enlightened by the mind". Most western astrologers use the tropical zodiac beginning with the sign of Aries at the Northern hemisphere Vernal Equinox always on or around March 21 of each year. The Western Zodiac is drawn based on the Earth's relationship to fixed, designated positions in the sky, and the Earth's seasons. The Sidereal Zodiac is drawn based on the Earth's position in relation to the constellations, and follows their movements in the sky.

Due to a phenomenon called precession of the equinoxes (where the Earth's axis slowly rotates like a spinning top in a 25,700-year cycle), there is a slow shift in the correspondence between Earth's seasons (and calendar) and the constellations of the zodiac. Thus, the tropical zodiac corresponds with the position of the earth in relation to fixed positions in the sky (Western Astrology), while the sidereal zodiac is drawn based on the position in relation to the constellations (sidereal zodiac).

The twelve signs

In modern Western astrology the signs of the zodiac are believed to represent twelve basic personality types or characteristic modes of expression. The twelve signs are divided into four elements fire, earth, air and water. Fire and

air signs are considered masculine, while water and earth signs are considered feminine. The twelve signs are also divided into three qualities, Cardinal, fixed and mutable.

Sign			Approximate dates of Sun signs		Element	Quality
			Start	End		
	Aries	The Ram	March 21	April 20	Fire	Cardinal
	Taurus	The Bull	April 21	May 20	Earth	Fixed
	Gemini	The Twins	May 21	June 20	Air	Mutable
	Cancer	The Crab	June 21	July 21	Water	Cardinal
	Leo	The Lion	July 22	August 21	Fire	Fixed
	Virgo	The Virgin	August 22	September 21	Earth	Mutable
	Libra	The Scales	September 22	October 21	Air	Cardinal
	Scorpio	The Scorpion	October 22	November 21	Water	Fixed
	Sagittarius	The Archer	November 22	December 21	Fire	Mutable
	Capricorn	The Mountain Sea-Goat	December 22	January 20	Earth	Cardinal
	Aquarius	The Water Bearer	January 21	February 19	Air	Fixed
	Pisces	The Fish	February 20	March 20	Water	Mutable

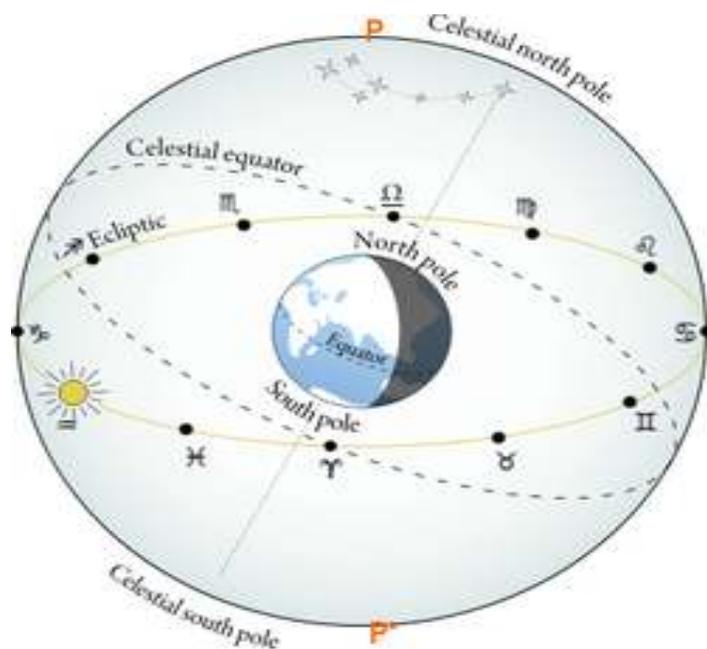
- Note: these are only approximations and the exact date on which the sign of the sun changes varies from year to year.

Zodiac sign for an individual depends on the placement of planets and the ascendant in that sign. If a person has nothing placed in a particular sign, that sign will play no active role in their personality. On the other hand, a person with, for example, both the sun and moon in Cancer, will strongly display the characteristics of that sign in their makeup.

In Western astrology, astrological signs are the twelve 30° sectors of the ecliptic, starting at the vernal equinox (one of the intersections of the ecliptic with the celestial equator), also known as the First Point of Aries. The order of the astrological signs is Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces.

The concept of the zodiac originated in Babylonian astrology, and was later influenced by Hellenistic culture. According to astrology, celestial phenomena relate to human activity on the principle of "as above, so below", so that the signs are held to represent characteristic modes of expression.

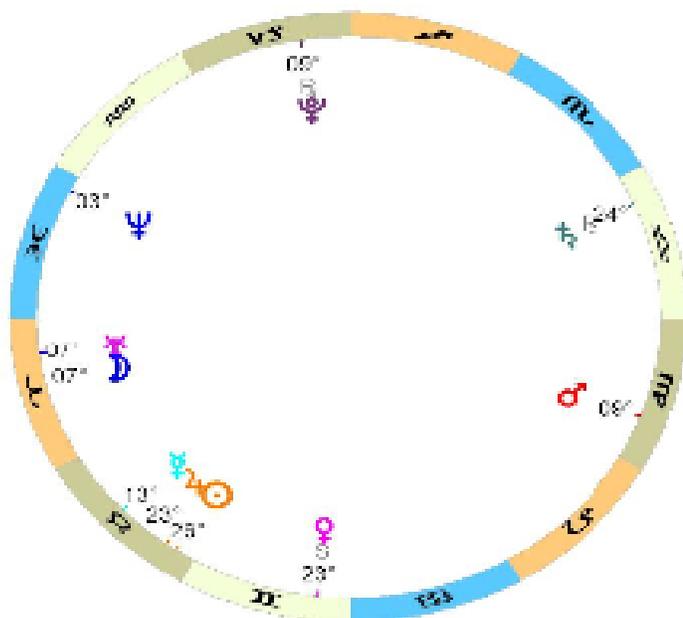
The twelve sector division of the ecliptic constitutes astrology's primary frame of reference when considering the positions of celestial bodies, from a geocentric point of view, so that we may find, for instance, the Sun in 23° Aries (23° longitude), the Moon in 7° Scorpio (217° longitude), or Jupiter in 29° Pisces (359° longitude). Beyond the celestial bodies, other astrological points that are dependent on geographical location and time (namely, the Ascendant, the Midheaven, the Vertex and the houses' cusps) are also referenced within this ecliptic coordinate system.



Various approaches to measuring and dividing the sky are currently used by differing systems of astrology, although the tradition of the Zodiac's names and symbols remain consistent. Western astrology measures from Equinox and Solstice points (points relating to equal, longest and shortest days of the tropical

year), while Jyotisha or Vedic astrology measures along the equatorial plane (sidereal year). Precession results in Western astrology's zodiacal divisions not corresponding in the current era to the constellations that carry similar names, while Jyotisha measurements still correspond with the background constellations.

In Western and Indian astrology, the emphasis is on space, and the movement of the Sun, Moon and planets in the sky through each of the zodiac signs. In Chinese astrology, by contrast, the emphasis is on time, with the zodiac operating on cycles of years, months, and hours of the day. A common feature of all three traditions however, is the significance of the Ascendant — the zodiac sign that is rising (due to the rotation of the earth) on the eastern horizon at the moment of a person's birth.



Western zodiac signs

Zodiac history and symbolism

The twelve ecliptic signs, each dot marks the start of a sign and they are separated by 30°. The intersection of the celestial equator and the ecliptic define the equinoctial points: First Point of Aries (♈) and First Point of Libra (♎). The great circle containing the celestial poles and the ecliptic poles (P and P'), intersect the ecliptic at 0° Cancer (♋) and 0° Capricorn (♑). In this illustration, the Sun is schematically positioned at the start of Aquarius (♒).

While Western astrology is essentially a product of Greco-Roman culture, some of its more basic concepts originated in Babylonia. Isolated references to celestial "signs" in Sumerian sources are insufficient to speak of a Sumerian zodiac. Specifically, the division of the ecliptic in twelve equal sectors is a Babylonian conceptual construction.

By the 4th century BC, Babylonians' astronomy and their system of celestial omens were influencing the Greek culture and, by the late 2nd century BC, Egyptian astrology was also mixing in. This resulted, unlike the Mesopotamian tradition, in a strong focus on the birth chart of the individual and in the creation of horoscopic astrology, employing the use of the Ascendant (the rising degree of the ecliptic, at the time of birth), and of the twelve houses. Association of the astrological signs with Empedocles' four classical elements was another important development in the characterization of the twelve signs.

The body of astrological knowledge by the 2nd century AD is described in Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, a work that was responsible for astrology's successful spread across Europe and the Middle East, and remained a reference for almost seventeen centuries as later traditions made few substantial changes to its core teachings.

The following table enumerates the twelve divisions of celestial longitude, with the Latin names (still widely used) and the English translation (gloss). The longitude intervals, being a mathematical division, are closed for the first endpoint (a) and open for the second (b) — for instance, 30° of longitude is the first point of Taurus, not part of Aries. Association of calendar dates with astrological signs only makes sense when referring to Sun sign astrology.

Sign	Aries	Taurus	Gemini	Cancer	Leo	Virgo
Celestial longitude	0° to 30°	30° to 60°	60° to 90°	90° to 120°	120° to 150°	150° to 180°
Symbol	♈	♉	♊	♋	♌	♍
Gloss	The Ram	The Bull	The Twins	The Crab	The Lion	The Maiden
Sign	Libra	Scorpio	Sagittarius	Capricorn	Aquarius	Pisces
Celestial longitude	180° to 210°	210° to 240°	240° to 270°	270° to 300°	300° to 330°	330° to 360°
Symbol	♎	♏	♐	♑	♒	♓
Gloss	The Scales	The Scorpion	The Archer	The Mountain Sea-goat	The Water-bearer	The Fish

Polarity and the four elements

A simple diagram displaying the planets' sign positions on May 16th, 2012. The signs are colored according to the associated element. Each planet is represented by a glyph next to its longitude within the sign. Additional symbols may be added to represent apparent retrograde motion (R), or apparent stationary moment (shift from retrograde to direct, or vice versa: S).

Empedocles, a fifth-century BC Greek philosopher, identified Fire, Earth, Air, and Water as elements. He explained the nature of the universe as an interaction of two opposing principles called love and strife manipulating the four elements, and stated that these four elements were all equal, of the same age, that each rules its own province, and each possesses its own individual character. Different mixtures of these elements produced the different natures of things. Empedocles said that those who were born with near equal proportions of the four elements are more intelligent and have the most exact perceptions.

Each sign is associated with one of the classical elements, and these can also be grouped according to polarity: Fire and Air signs are considered positive or extrovert, masculine signs; while Water and Earth signs are considered negative or introvert, feminine signs. The four astrological elements are also considered as a direct equivalent to Hippocrates' personality types (sanguine = air; choleric = fire; melancholic = water; phlegmatic = earth). A modern approach looks at elements as "the energy substance of experience" and the next table tries to summarize their description through keywords.

Polarity	Element	Symbol	Keywords	Signs
Positive (self- expressive)	Fire	△	Enthusiasm; drive to express self; faith	Aries; Leo; Sagittarius
	Air	△	Communication; socialization; conceptualization	Gemini; Libra; Aquarius
Negative (self- containing)	Earth	▽	Practicality; caution; material world	Taurus; Virgo; Capricorn
	Water	▽	Emotion; empathy; sensitivity	Cancer; Scorpio; Pisces

Classification according to element has gained such importance, that some astrologers start their interpretation of a natal chart, by studying the balance of elements shown by the position of planets and angles (especially the Sun, the Moon and the Ascendant).

The three modalities

Each of the four elements manifests in three modalities: Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable. As each modality comprehends four signs, these are also known as Quadruplicities. They are occasionally referred to as crosses because each modality forms a cross when drawn across the zodiac. Christian astrology relates the three qualities to the three aspects of God in the trinity.

Modality	Symbol	Keywords	Signs
Cardinal		Action; dynamic; initiative; great force	Aries; Cancer; Libra; Capricorn
Fixed		Resistance to change; great willpower; inflexible	Taurus; Leo; Scorpio; Aquarius
Mutable		Adaptability; flexible; resourceful	Gemini; Virgo; Sagittarius; Pisces

The combination of element and modality provides a basic sign characterization. For instance, Capricorn is a cardinal earth sign, meaning that it is associated with action (cardinal modality) in the material world (earth element). That can translate into ambition or practical application to the concrete, everyday necessities of life. The next table displays the twelve combinations of elements and modalities.

Nature	Fire	Earth	Air	Water
Cardinal	Aries	Capricorn	Libra	Cancer
Fixed	Leo	Taurus	Aquarius	Scorpio
Mutable	Sagittarius	Virgo	Gemini	Pisces

Sun-sign astrology

Newspapers often print astrology columns which purport to provide guidance on what might occur in a day in relation to the sign of the zodiac that included the sun when the person was born. Astrologers refer to this as the "sun sign", but it is often commonly called the "star sign". These predictions are vague or general; so much so that even practising astrologers consider them of little to no value. Experiments have shown that when people are shown a newspaper horoscope for their own sign along with a newspaper horoscope for a different sign, they judge them to be equally accurate on the average. Other tests have been performed on complete, personalized horoscopes cast by professional astrologers, and have shown similarly disappointing results, contrary to the claims of professional astrologers.

Meanings of the symbols-Astrological planets

The glyphs of the planets are usually (but not always) broken down into four common elements: A circle denoting spirit, a crescent denoting the mind, a cross denoting practical/physical matter and an arrow denoting action or direction.

Name	Symbol	Symbol represents	Meaning of symbol
Sun		Solar symbol (circled dot)	Divine spirit (circle) surrounding seed of potential
Moon		A crescent	Mind or evolving human spirit through receptivity (crescent)
Mercury		Mercury's winged helmet and caduceus	Mind (crescent) poised over divine spirit (circle) and matter (cross)
Venus		Hand mirror or necklace (see Venus symbol)	Divine spirit (circle) over matter (cross)
Earth		Earth; a Solar symbol (sun cross)	Planet Earth — the cardinal directions.
		Earth; a Solar symbol (alternate symbol)	cf. Globus cruciger
Mars		Mars's shield and spear.	Drive (arrow) over divine spirit (circle)

Ceres	♀	Scythe (handle down), emblematic of Ceres as goddess of the Harvest.	A stylized sickle, a crescent of receptivity resting on a cross of matter.
Jupiter	♃	Jupiter's thunderbolt or eagle	Mind (crescent) rising above the horizon of matter (cross)
Saturn	♄	Saturn's sickle	Matter (cross) taking precedence over mind or human spirit (crescent)
Uranus	♅	H in symbol taken from discoverer's last name, Herschel	The circle of spirit and a dominant cross of matter, in form of an antenna that uses matter as a way to insight.
	♁	Derived from a combination of the Mars and Sun symbols	Astronomical glyph often used astrologically. Drive over a divine spirit (circle) surrounding seed of potential
Neptune	♆	Neptune's trident	Mind or receptivity (crescent) transcending matter (cross)
Pluto	♇	Pluto's Cap of invisibility (the circle) and a bident (the arc under the circle), also a typical attribute of Pluto.	Mind (crescent) transcending matter (cross) to reach for divine spirit (circle)
	♇	PL monogram for Pluto and Percival Lowell	Astronomical symbol occasionally used astrologically.

Signs of the zodiac

Name	Meaning	Symbol	Symbol Represents
Aries	Ram	♈	Face and horns of ram
Taurus	Bull	♉	Face and horns of bull
Gemini	Twins	♊	Companion
Cancer	Crab	♋	Crab's claws
Leo	Lion	♌	A script form of the Greek letter "lambda", which is the first letter of the Greek word leon, which means "lion"

Virgo	Virgin		Derived from the Greek letters ΠΑΡ, which are the first three letters of the Greek word parthenos, which means "virgin"
Libra	Scale		Scales
Scorpio	Scorpion		Stinger of a scorpion
Sagittarius	Archer		Arrow of the centaur
Capricorn	Sea-goat or mountain goat		Body and head of a goat with the tail of a fish or face and horns of goat.
			
Aquarius	Waterbearer		Ripples of water.
Pisces	Fish		Two fish tied together yet swimming in opposite directions

Aspects

Name	Symbol	Angle	Explanation
Conjunction		0°	Two or more planets in the same sign A circle with a line implying two objects are in the same place (also, the starting point of an angle)
Semisextile		30°	One sign apart, The intersecting lines from the inner angles of the upper half of a hexagon (see Sextile)
Semi-square		45°	(also known as the "octile" or "semiquartile") The bisecting line of a right angle (see Square)
Sextile		60°	Two signs apart, The intersecting lines from the inner angles of a hexagon
Quintile		72°	(also known as the "quartile")/Three signs apart/Same modality
Square		90°	A regular quadrilateral that represents the right angle
Trine		120°	Four signs apart/Same elemental triplicity, An equilateral triangle.
Sesquiquadrate		135°	(also known as the "sesquiquare," "square-and-

			a-half," and/or "trioctile") The glyph of the Semi-Square under the glyph of the Square, implying the sum of them both
Biquintile		144°	(also known as the "inconjunct")/Five signs apart
Quincunx		150°	The intersecting lines from the inner angles of the lower half of a hexagon (see Sextile) Six signs apart
Opposition		180°	The glyph of the Conjunction plus a circle on top of its line, implying two objects are in front (opposed) of each other.

Lunar phases

Name	Symbol	Explanation
New moon		Denotes the new moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 0°-45°.
Crescent moon		Denotes a waxing crescent moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 45°-90°.
First quarter moon		Denotes a first quarter moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 90°-135°.
Gibbous moon		Denotes a waxing gibbous moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 135°-180°.
Full moon		Denotes a full moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 180°-225°.
Disseminating moon		Denotes a waning gibbous moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 225°-270°.
Last quarter moon		Denotes a last quarter moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 270°-315°.
Balsamic moon		Denotes a waning crescent moon or a soli-lunar arc in the range 315°-360°.

Miscellaneous symbols

Name	Symbol	Symbol represents	Explanation
Ascendant		Angle	The ascendant (also known as the "ascensum coeli") is the rising intersection of the ecliptic with the celestial horizon at a particular moment in time; it is used in the construction of a horoscope/natal chart
Midheaven		Angle	The midheaven (also known as the "medium coeli") is the point where the ecliptic crosses the local meridian; it is used in the construction of a horoscope/natal chart
Ascending Node		Lunar node	Not all astrologers use the lunar nodes; however, their usage is very important in Vedic astrology. They are alternately known as the "Dragon's Head" (Rahu, Caput Draconis, or Anabibazon) and the "Dragon's Tail" (Ketu, Cauda Draconis, or Catabibazon). The two nodes together are most commonly referred to simply as the nodal axis, the lunar nodes, or the Moon's nodes.
Descending Node		Lunar node	
Black Moon Lilith		Lunar apogee	The traditional Black Moon Lilith is the position of the mean lunar apogee as measured from the geocenter; variants of the Black Moon include replacing the mean orbit with a "true" osculating orbit or with an interpolated orbit; charting the empty focus of the Moon's orbit instead of the apogee; and measuring the desired point's barycentric or topocentric position instead of its geocentric position.
Retrograde motion		Apparent retrograde motion	Symbol represents the apparent retrograde motion of a planet in an astrological chart

The planets

In modern Western astrology the planets represent basic drives or impulses in the human psyche. These planets differ from the definition of a planet in astronomy in that the sun, moon, and recently, Pluto and Ceres (considered as dwarf planets in astronomy), are all considered to be planets for the purposes of astrology. Each planet is also said to be the ruler of one or two zodiac signs. The three modern planets have each been assigned rulership of a zodiac sign by astrologers and Ceres has been suggested as the ruler of Taurus or Virgo. Traditionally rulership of the signs was, according to Ptolemy, based on seasonal derivations and astronomical measurement, whereby the luminaries being the brightest planets were given rulership of the brightest months of the year and Saturn the coldest furthest classical planet was given to the coldest months of the year, with the other planets ruling the remaining signs as per astronomical measurement. It is noteworthy that the modern rulerships do not follow the same logic.

Classical planets

The astrological 'planets' are the seven heavenly bodies known to the ancients. The sun and moon, also known as 'the lights', are included as they were thought to act like the astronomical planets. Astrologers call Mercury, Venus and Mars the 'personal planets', as they represent the most immediate drives. The 'lights' symbolise respectively the existential and sensitive fundamentals of the individuality.

The following table summarizes the rulership by the seven classically known planets of each of the twelve astrological signs, together with their effects on world events, people and the earth itself as understood in the Middle Ages.

Traditional planets with their rulership of signs and effects on people and the world

Symbol	Planet	Rules the sign	Effect on world events	Person's nature	Effect in life	Effect in earth
☉	Sun	Leo		Wisdom, generosity,	Good	Gold

				'sunny' disposition	fortune	
☾	Moon	Cancer		Wandering	Travel, lunacy	Silver
☿	Mercury	Gemini and Virgo	Action	Changeability, eagerness, quickness, 'mercurial' temperament	Rapid change	Mercury (quicksilver)
♀	Venus	Libra and Taurus	Fortunate events	Beauty, amorousness	Good luck	Copper
♂	Mars	Aries, classically also Scorpio	War	Strength, endurance, 'martial' temperament	Conflicts, misfortune	Iron
♃	Jupiter	Sagittarius, classically also Pisces	Good times, prosperity	Cheerful, magnanimous, 'jovial' temperament	Good fortune	Tin
♄	Saturn	Capricorn, classically also Aquarius	Disastrous events	Wisdom, stability, persistence, 'saturnine' temperament	Accidents, disease, treachery, bad luck	Lead

The Moon's nodes

Also important in astrology are the moon's nodes. The nodes are where the moon's path crosses the ecliptic. The North, or Ascending Node marks the place where the moon crosses from South to North (or ascends), while the South, or Descending Node marks where the moon crosses from North to South (or descends). While Lunar nodes are not considered by Western astrologers to be as important a factor as each of the planets, they are thought to mark sensitive areas that are worth taking into account.

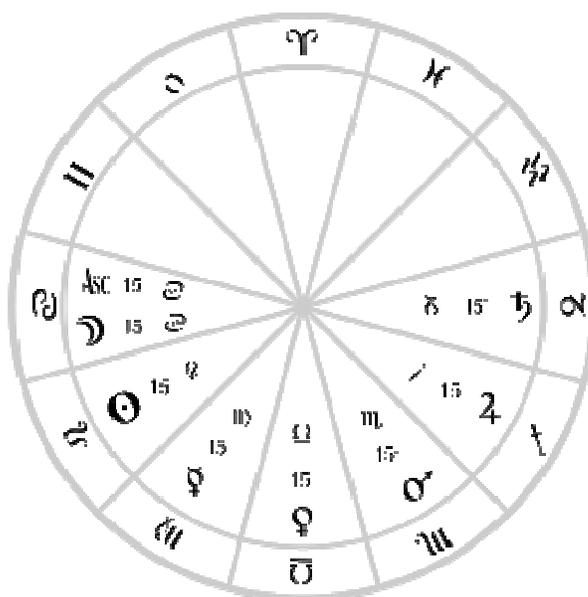
- ♁- North or ascending Node. Also the ruler of Pathways and Choices.
- ♂- South or descending Node. Also the ruler of Karma and the Past.

Essential dignity

In astrology, "essential dignity" is the strength of a planet or point's zodiac position, judged only by its position by sign and degree, what the pre-eminent 17th-century astrologer William Lilly called "the strength, fortitude or debility of the Planets [or] signifiers." In other words, essential dignity seeks to view the strengths of a planet or point as though it were isolated from other factors in the sky of the natal chart. Traditionally, there are five dignities: domicile and detriment, exaltation and fall, triplicity, terms, and face. However, the later two have diminished in usage. A planet's domicile is the zodiac sign over which it has rulership.

The horoscope

Western astrology is based mainly upon the construction of a horoscope, which is a map or chart of the heavens at a particular moment. The moment chosen is the beginning of the existence of the subject of the horoscope, as it is believed that the subject will carry with it the pattern of the heavens from that moment throughout its life. The most common form of horoscope is the natal chart based on the moment of a



person's birth; though in theory a horoscope can be drawn up for the beginning of anything, from a business enterprise to the foundation of a nation state.

Interpretation

In Western horoscopic astrology the interpretation of a horoscope is governed by:

- The position of the planets in the astrological signs of the zodiac,
- The position of the planets in the houses of the horoscope,
- The position of the primary angles of the horoscope, namely the horizon line (called the ascendant/descendant axis), and the prime vertical line (called the zenith/midheaven and nadir/imum coeli axis),
- The angles formed by the planets relative to each other and the primary angles, called aspects
- The position of deduced astronomical entities, such as the Lunar nodes.

Some astrologers also use the position of various mathematical points such as the Arabic parts.

The primary angles

There are four primary angles in the horoscope (though the cusps of the houses are often included as important angles by some astrologers).

- **Asc** - The ascendant or rising sign is the eastern point where the ecliptic and horizon intersect. During the course of a day, because of the Earth's rotation, the entire circle of the ecliptic will pass through the ascendant and will be advanced by about 1°. This provides us with the term rising sign', which is the sign of the zodiac that was rising in the east at the exact time that the horoscope or natal chart is calculated. In creating a horoscope the ascendant is traditionally placed as the left-hand side point of the chart. In most house systems the ascendant lies on the cusp of the 1st house of the horoscope.

The ascendant is generally considered the most important and personalized angle in the horoscope by the vast majority of astrologers. It signifies a person's awakening consciousness, in the same way that the Sun's appearance on the eastern horizon signifies the dawn of a new day. Due to the fact that the ascendant is specific to a particular time and place, it signifies the individual environment and conditioning that a person receives during their upbringing, and also the circumstances of their childhood. For this reason, the ascendant is also

concerned with how a person has learned to present him or herself to the world, especially in public and in impersonal situations.

The opposite point to the ascendant in the west is the descendant, which denotes how a person reacts in their relationships with others. It also shows the kind of person we are likely to be attracted to, and our ability to form romantic attachments. In most house systems the descendant lies on the cusp of the 7th house of the horoscope.

- **MC**- The midheaven or medium coeli is the point on the ecliptic that is furthest above the plane of the horizon. For events occurring where the planes of the ecliptic and the horizon coincide, the limiting position for these points is located 90° from the ascendant. For astrologers, the midheaven traditionally indicates a person's career, status, aim in life, aspirations, public reputation, and life goal. In quadrant house systems the midheaven lies on the cusp of the 10th house of the horoscope.

The opposite point to the midheaven is known as the imum coeli. For astrologers the nadir or IC traditionally indicates the circumstances at the beginning and end of a person's life, their parents and the parental home, and their own domestic life. In quadrant house systems it lies on the cusp of the 4th house of the horoscope.

The houses

The horoscope is divided by astrologers into 12 portions called the houses. The houses of the horoscope are interpreted as being 12 different spheres of life or activity. There are various ways of calculating the houses in the horoscope or birth chart. However, there is no dispute about their meanings, and the 12 houses

Many modern astrologers assume that the houses relate to their corresponding signs, i.e. that the first house has a natural affinity with the first sign, Aries, and so on.

Aspects

The aspects are the angles the planets make to each other in the horoscope, and also to the ascendant, midheaven, descendant and nadir. The aspects are measured by the angular distance along the ecliptic in degrees and minutes of

celestial longitude between two points, as viewed from the earth. They indicate focal points in the horoscope where the energies involved are given extra emphasis. The more exact the angle, the more powerful the aspect, although an allowance of a few degrees each side of the aspect called an orb is allowed for interpretation. The following are the aspects in order of importance

-  - **Conjunction 0° (orb ±8°)**. The conjunction is a major point in the chart, giving strong emphasis to the planets involved. The planets will act together to outside stimulus and act on each other.
-  - **Opposition 180° (orb ±8°)**. The opposition is indicative of tension, conflict and confrontation, due to the polarity between the two elements involved. Stress arises when one is used over the other, causing an imbalance; but the opposition can work well if the two parts of the aspect are made to complement each other in a synthesis.
-  - **Trine 120°(orb ±8°)**. The trine indicates harmony, and ease of expression, with the two elements reinforcing each other. The trine is a source of artistic and creative talent, but can be a 'line of least resistance' to a person of weak character.
-  - **Square 90°(orb ±8°)**. The square indicates frustration, inhibitions, disruption and inner conflict, but can become a source of energy and activation to a person determined to overcome limitations.
-  - **Sextile 60°(orb ±6°)**. The sextile is similar to the trine, but of less significance. It indicates ease of communication between the two elements involved, with compatibility and harmony between them.
-  - **Quincunx 150°(orb ±3°)**. The quincunx indicates difficulty and stress, due to incompatible elements being forced together. It can mean an area of self-neglect in a person's life (especially health), or obligations being forced on a person. The quincunx can vary from minor to quite major in impact.
-  - **Semisextile 30° (orb ±2°)**. Slight in effect. Indicates an area of life where a conscious effort to be positive will have to be made.
-  - **Semisquare 45°(orb ±2°)**. Indicates somewhat difficult circumstance. Similar in effect to semisextile.
-  - **Sesquiquadrate 135°(orb ±2°)**. Indicates somewhat stressful conditions. Similar to semisextile.
-  - **Quintile 72° (orb ±2°)**. Slight in effect. Indicates talent and vaguely fortunate circumstances.
-  - **Biquintile 144° (orb ±2°)**. Slight in effect. Indicates talent and vaguely fortunate circumstances.

- **R- Retrograde:** A planet is retrograde when it appears to move backwards across the sky when seen from the earth, due to one planet moving more quickly relative to the other. Although it is not an aspect, some astrologers believe that it should be included for consideration in the chart. Planets which are retrograde in the natal chart are considered by them to be potential weak points.

Modern modifications to the Ptolemaic system

Modern planets

These are the planets discovered in modern times, which have since been assigned meanings by Western astrologers.

Planets discovered in modern times, with signs and effects

Symbol	Planet	Representing	Rules the sign	Claimed effects on world events	Claimed effects on people
♅	Uranus	Letter 'H' for planet's discoverer, William Herschel	Aquarius	Innovation, technology	Sudden or disruptive change
♆	Neptune	Trident, weapon of sea-god Neptune	Pisces		Confusion, sensitivity
♇ ♃	Pluto	PL for astronomer Percival Lowell who predicted Pluto's discovery	Scorpio		Transformation, fate, death

Sidereal and tropical astrology

There are two camps of thought among western astrologers about the "starting point", 0 degrees Aries, in the zodiac. Sidereal astrology uses a fixed starting point in the background of stars, while tropical astrology, used by the majority of Western astrologers, chooses as a starting point the position of the Sun against the background of stars at the Northern hemisphere vernal equinox (i.e. when the Sun position against the heavens crosses over from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere) each year.

As the Earth spins on its axis, it "wobbles" like a top, causing the vernal equinox to move gradually backwards against the star background, (a phenomenon known as the Precession of the equinoxes) at a rate of about 30 degrees (one Zodiacal sign length) every 2,160 years. Thus the two zodiacs would be aligned only once every 26,000 years. They were aligned about 2,000 years ago when the zodiac was originally established.

This phenomenon gives us the conceptual basis for the Age of Aquarius, whose "dawning" coincides with the movement of the vernal equinox across the cusp from Pisces to Aquarius in the star background.

Dignity and detriment, exaltation and fall

A traditional belief of astrology, known as essential dignity, is the idea that the Sun, Moon and planets are more powerful and effective in some signs than others, because the basic nature of both is held to be in harmony. By contrast, they are held to find some signs to be weak or difficult to operate in because their natures are thought to be in conflict. The most important of these categories are Dignity, Detriment, Exaltation and Fall.

- **Dignity and Detriment**: A planet is strengthened or dignified if it falls within the sign that it rules. In other words, it is said to exercise Rulership of the sign. For example, the Moon in Cancer is considered "strong" (well-dignified). Seventeenth century astrologer William Lilly compared rulership to a king on his throne, with considerable dignity. If a planet is in the sign opposite that which it rules (or is dignified), it is said to be weakened or in Detriment (for example, the Moon in Capricorn).

In traditional astrology, other levels of Dignity are recognised in addition to Rulership. These are known as Exaltation (see below), Triplicity, Terms or bounds, and Face or Decan, which together are known as describing a planet's Essential dignity, the quality or ability to give of one's true nature. Contemporary traditional astrologers like John Frawley or J Lee Lehman explain further on the concept of Essential Dignity.

- Exaltation and Fall :** In addition, a planet is also strengthened when it is in its sign of Exaltation. In traditional horary astrology, Exaltation denotes a level of dignity somewhat exaggerated compared to rulership. Exaltation was considered to give the planet (or what it signified in a horary chart) dignity, with the metaphor of an honoured guest – who is the centre of attention but the extent of their ability to act is limited. Examples of planets in their Exaltation are: Saturn (Libra), Sun (Aries), Venus (Pisces), Moon (Taurus), Mercury (Virgo, although some disagree to this classification), Mars (Capricorn), Jupiter (Cancer). A planet in the opposite sign of its Exaltation is said to be in its Fall, and thus weakened, perhaps seemingly more so than Detriment. The Planet in fall is passively rejected or ignored by the sign that it's in. It can be likened to a mayor of a rival city trying to make suggestions to the hosting mayor for how he should run his city: The host mayor finds it difficult to trust him and cannot see how his input could have relevancy to his city. The people of the city feel the same as their ruler. The result is impasse and failure on behalf of both mayors and the city. There is no agreement as to the signs in which the three extra-Saturnian planets may be considered to be exalted.

The following table summarizes the positions described above:

Planet (Symbol)	Dignity	Detriment	Exaltation	Fall
Sun (☉)	Leo	Aquarius	Aries	Libra
Moon (☾)	Cancer	Capricorn	Taurus	Scorpio
Mercury (☿)	Gemini and Virgo	Sagittarius and Pisces	Aquarius	Leo
Venus (♀)	Libra and Taurus	Aries and Scorpio	Pisces	Virgo
Mars (♂)	Aries and Scorpio	Libra and Taurus	Capricorn	Cancer
Jupiter (♃)	Sagittarius and Pisces	Gemini and Virgo	Cancer	Capricorn

Saturn (♄)	Capricorn and Aquarius	Cancer and Leo	Libra	Aries
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In addition to essential dignity, the traditional astrologer considers Accidental dignity of planets. This is placement by house in the chart under examination. Accidental dignity is the planet's "ability to act." So we might have, for example, Moon in Cancer, dignified by rulership, is placed in the 12th house it would have little scope to express its good nature. The 12th is a cadent house as are the 3rd, 6th and 9th and planets in these houses are considered weak or afflicted. On the other hand, Moon in the 1st, 4th, 7th or 10th would be more able to act as these are Angular houses. Planets in Succedent houses of the chart (2nd, 5th, 8th, 11th) are generally considered to be of medium ability to act. Besides Accidental Dignity, there are a range of Accidental Debilities, such as retrogradation, Under the Sun's Beams, Combust, and so forth.