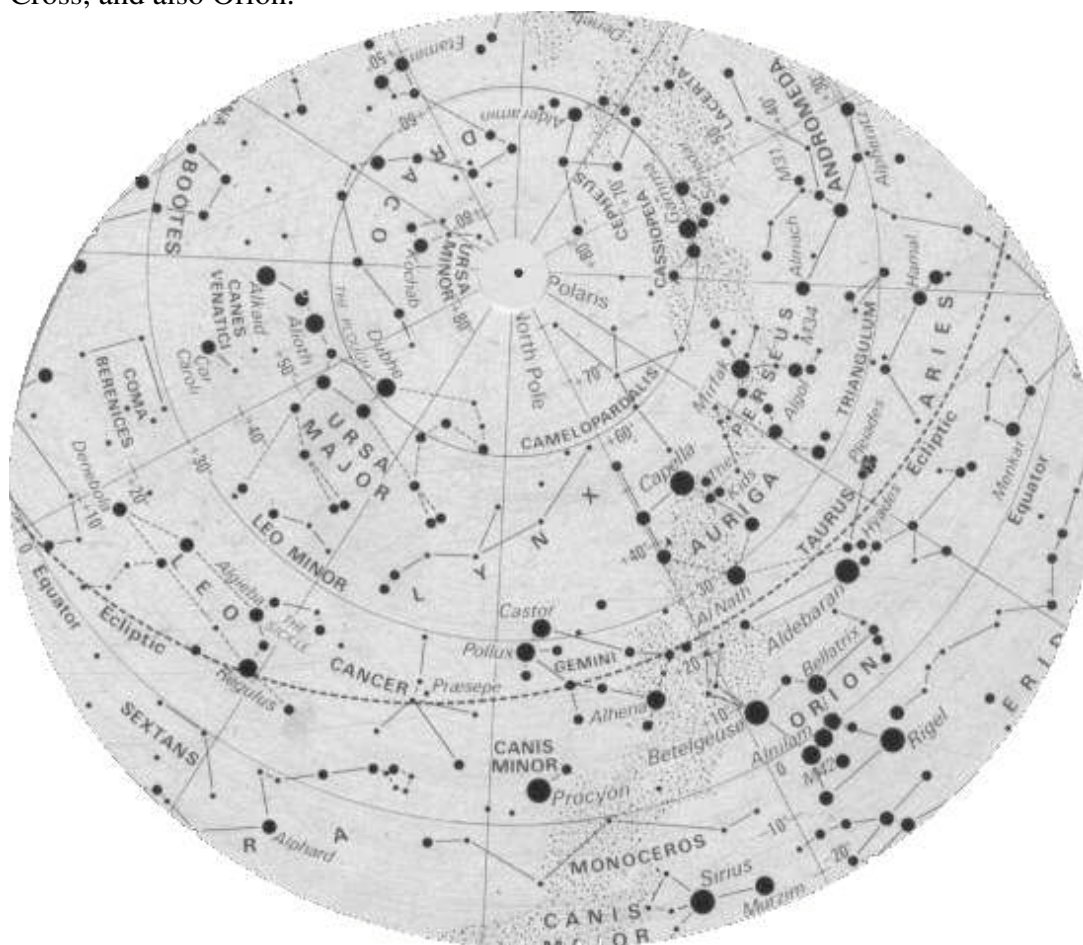


## **An Astrology Primer**

When doing a chart interpretation, I'm trying to strike a balance between using plain English and trying to explain what's going on astrologically. Just giving an interpretation without referring to planets and signs can be a bit unsatisfactory, leaving you thinking "but why did he say that?". I think it's useful to give a brief explanation of my comments by relating it to the astrology, and – I hope – to help bring the planets in your chart alive. In order to do this, I have had to resort to a little bit of jargon, with talk of T-squares and sextiles and houses. Without getting bogged down in detail, let's have a brief look at what this all means.

## Constellations and the Zodiac

As the sun appears to move through the sky, it traces a path – rising in the east (roughly), round to the south (if you live in the northern hemisphere), setting in the west (roughly). This path of the sun through the sky is called the **ecliptic**. At night, when you look at the stars, there are of course **constellations** all around – most people in the northern hemisphere will recognise The Plough (or Big Dipper in the US), and probably Orion. In the southern hemisphere, most people will recognise the Southern Cross, and also Orion.



This diagram (which shows just a small segment of the night sky) shows some familiar constellations: Orion, towards the bottom of the picture with the famous “Orion’s Belt” of three stars; the Plough (labelled “Ursa Major” towards the top left, and the sickle of Leo towards the left of the diagram. There is a dashed line labelled “Ecliptic”, and you’ll notice that Leo lies roughly on this line. So do Cancer, Gemini, Taurus and Aries. In fact, all twelve of the **zodiac** constellations lie on or around the ecliptic – and these are the constellations that play the most important part in astrology.

The ancients divided the ecliptic into 12 segments, and identified a key constellation within each segment – for instance, near Orion is a reddish star called Aldebaran, and a few other stars around it. If you imagine that Aldebaran is an “eye”, two of the stars above it look like they could be horns, so it’s possible to “join the dots” and make out a pattern of a bull – that’s the constellation Taurus. Every 30 degree segment of sky has a particular zodiac pattern in it (astrologers work in strict 30 degree segments – some constellations actually sprawl more than this, and others less than this; some even overlap a bit). These 30 degree segments are called **signs**.

When someone says that they have “Moon in Taurus”, this should mean that at the moment when they were born, if you looked out of the window and saw the Moon, you’d see that it was roughly in the area of the constellation of Taurus. If someone says that they have “Sun in Taurus”, it should mean that if you could somehow blot out the brightness of the sun (like during a total eclipse), you would see that the Sun is roughly in that constellation. This is done for all the planets (Mars, Jupiter and so on). All the planets do lie roughly on the ecliptic – so you never see Mars or the Moon very much higher than the zodiac constellations, nor very much lower.

This idea is then extended, to say “at the moment you were born, what sign of the zodiac was coming up over the eastern horizon?” The answer to that question is your “rising sign” or **Ascendant**. It’s also why birth *times* are important in astrology. If you only know your date of birth, you can look at the position of the planets, Sun and Moon at midday, and most of them (maybe not the Moon, as it moves fast) will be correct. However, you can only calculate your Ascendant if you know your time of birth, since during a 24-hour day each sign of the zodiac will “rise” once.

That’s the theory. However, there’s a slight problem. If you looked out of your window on a clear night in early October 2000, you would have seen a bright “star” near Aldebaran, in the constellation of Taurus; that’s actually Jupiter (a **planet**, not a star). So, if someone was born on, say, 6 October 2000, they must have Jupiter in Taurus, right? Nice theory, but in fact an astrologer would look up that date in an “ephemeris” (a book of positions), or use a computer program, which would tell them that anyone born on that date has Jupiter at 11 degrees of Gemini (in other words, nearly half-way through Gemini). This is because the Earth “wobbles” on its axis once roughly every 26,000 years, so the positions of the constellations shift gradually over the millennia (this behaviour is known as “precession”). If the Earth hadn’t wobbled, Jupiter would not only look as though it’s in Taurus, but the astrological calculations would agree too. However, both astrologers and astronomers use this weird convention where they have an arbitrary starting point (analogous to the Greenwich Meridian Line) called the “Zero point of Aries”, which was at the beginning of Aries around 4000 years ago, but is now almost in Aquarius (hence the song “The Dawning of the Age of Aquarius”). So, in our time it’s not feasible to look up at the sky when someone’s born and say “yes, Jupiter is in Taurus, Cancer is rising...” - we have to use an ephemeris, a computer program or perform some tricky celestial mechanics to find out! (To be fair, the ancient astrologers didn’t simply look at the sky, either, because that technique doesn’t work if it’s daylight, and anyway, not all of the planets are visible at the same time).

## The chart, and what it means

It's often said that your Ascendant is your "public face", the way you first come across to people, and what you're basically about. Your Sun sign is the way you express yourself creatively and your Moon sign the way you initially respond to situations, and how you nurture. That's a very, very simplistic guideline of course. Each sign has characteristics – Aries is bold and daring, Cancer is home loving and so on. So someone with a Sun in Aries and a Cancer Moon might be adventurous, but be very serious about building a home life and caring for family.

When you have the positions of all the planets (the term "planet" in astrology includes the Sun and the Moon, too), you can plot them on a **chart wheel** – a circle divided into 12 segments, each segment labelled with a sign of the zodiac. You can then immediately see which planet is in which sign. You can also divide the wheel into twelve parts in a different way, starting with the position of the Ascendant. These subdivisions are called **houses** – using the simplest system, if your Ascendant is 10 degrees of Gemini, then your first house will be that part of the zodiac from 10 degrees Gemini through to 10 degrees Cancer, the second house 10 Cancer to 10 Leo and so on. There are other "house systems" which don't use equal divisions, and on your chart you'll see I've used a house system called "Placidus". Each "house" corresponds to a certain area of life; for instance, the 3rd house is to do with communication and local travel. So if your chart has Mars in Aries in the third house, you may communicate in a very forthright manner.

Finally, looking at the positions of planets in your chart, the angles between them are significant. If two planets are very close to each other, they are in **conjunction** and their energies work together. If they are almost opposite each other, they are in **opposition**, and their energies will raise issues with the person dealing with them. Planets at right angles (**square**) present challenges, and planets at 120 degrees apart (**trine**) or 60 degrees (**sextile**) have energies that flow freely and are "easy" in the person's life and so don't present a big issue in the person's life. These angles – actually called **aspects** in astrology – only apply over a small range (called an **orb**) - a bit like focusing a camera – so an angle of 88 degrees or 92 degrees is still considered "square", but an angle of 80 degrees is not.

Each of the signs of the zodiac can be grouped into one of four **elements** - Fire, Earth, Air and Water. The zodiac signs, in order, are: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces. Aries is Fire, Taurus is Earth, Gemini is Air and Cancer is Water. Then the cycle repeats, so Leo is Fire again, Virgo is Earth and so on for the twelve signs. These signs correspond to different personality types – Aries, Leo and Sagittarius have "fiery" personalities, for example.

Also, the zodiac can be divided into three **qualities** – Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable. The Cardinal signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn, because these signs usher in each new season (Aries for Spring, and so on). The Mutable signs are Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces, because these signs occur at a time when the season is “mutating” into the next one (Pisces is about to usher in Spring). The Fixed signs are the ones in the middle – Taurus (middle of Spring, corresponding to the ancient festival of Beltane), Leo (middle of Summer, festival of Lughnasad), Scorpio (middle of Autumn, festival of Samhain) and Aquarius (middle of Winter, festival of Imbolc). Again, these correspond to personality types – Cardinal signs like to initiate, they need to create what they want, motivate action and trigger the next phase. Fixed signs hold on to the status quo and preserve what is valued, they are focused and determined. Mutable signs reflect the processes of adaptation and dispersal; they move beyond what exists, adjust plans, and redesign. Their attitude is flexible and exploratory.

Each zodiac sign thus has a unique combination of element (Fire, Earth, Air, Water) and Cardinal / Fixed / Mutable - for example, Leo is Fixed Fire, and so has a fixed outlook and a “fiery” (extrovert and sunny) personality; Pisces is Mutable Water, and so is adaptable and has a “watery” (emotional and sensitive) personality.

## Predicting the future

Astrology is not fatalistic – the stars do not foretell your future in such detail that you have no control over your life. Your chart is a map, pointing out areas that may be difficult, and areas that you will find easy. Your destiny, however, is up to you. If you want to climb a mountain, a map is very useful – but even if you take the difficult path you can still reach the summit (and conversely, you can take an easy route and still break your leg). If you have a difficult opposition in your birth chart (this is often called your **natal** chart), it doesn't mean that you will suffer for the rest of your life – instead, the chart is pointing out an area that you need to work on. The most difficult combinations in a chart represent lessons to learn, and a challenging aspect is just that; a challenge for you to overcome by achieving balance between apparently conflicting parts of your personality.

Your birth chart is a profile of you as an individual, a map of what you find easy and what you find difficult. However, life is not fixed; we all have ups and downs in life, and these are indicated in astrology not just by your birth chart, but by **transits** and **progressions**.

A transit is simply a snapshot of where the planets are right now – as a planet moves around the Sun, it will pass through each sign of the zodiac. At certain times, the transiting planet will make an aspect to one of your natal planets, and for the duration of this transit it will feel as though that planet is part of your chart.

Generally, when looking for future trends, astrologers ignore the “inner planets” of Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus and Mars. The Moon, for example, whizzes through all twelve signs in a month, so you have a Moon transiting every single one of your natal planets every month. Similarly, the Sun transits every natal planet during the course of a year. These transits do have an effect, but their effect only lasts for a few days at most.













When it comes to the outer planets, though, a transit can make its impact felt for many months. To take an extreme example, Pluto can take up to thirty years to pass through a sign as it's a very slowly moving planet. This means that a Pluto transit can easily last two or three years, and Pluto transits by their very nature tend to be traumatic.

Transits can cause interesting configurations in your chart for a while; for example, if you have two planets square to each other, then at some point in your life an outer planet will occupy a third position temporarily turning the configuration into a much more challenging T-square; during this time, you will notice the effect of the two natal planets much more strongly than usual. Similarly, two planets in trine to each other will become part of a Grand Trine for a while, and everything will run smoothly in the area of life that these planets represent for the duration. These outer transits can be used to make general predictions over the next few years about easy and difficult times ahead.

Progressions are a little more complicated, and based on the rather curious concept of “a year for a day”, so when looking at your fortieth year we look at the positions that the planets were in forty *days* after your birth. The outer planets have hardly moved at all, so whereas transits are used for outer planets, progressions are used for inner planets. It’s my belief that the effects of progressions are less strong than those of transits, and I only use them as a secondary backup to the information I get from transits of outer planets.

## Quick Reference Guide

### The Signs

	<b>Aries</b> <i>The Ram</i>	Bold and assertive, rushing in where others fear to tread. <i>Ruling planet: Mars</i>
	<b>Taurus</b> <i>The Bull</i>	Steady and loyal, values the good things in life – food, music and living well. <i>Ruling planet: Venus</i>
	<b>Gemini</b> <i>The Twins</i>	Chatty and intelligent, usually on their mobiles organising their social life. <i>Ruling planet: Mercury</i>
	<b>Cancer</b> <i>The Crab</i>	Caring and home-loving, hard exterior but gentle and understanding. <i>Ruling planet: Moon</i>
	<b>Leo</b> <i>The Lion</i>	Boisterous and generous, a bit self-centred but great fun at parties. <i>Ruling planet: Sun</i>
	<b>Virgo</b> <i>The Virgin</i>	Precise and analytical, can be picky but brilliant planners. <i>Ruling planet: Mercury</i>
	<b>Libra</b> <i>The Scales</i>	Helpful and fair, hates arguments and loves relationships. <i>Ruling planet: Venus</i>
	<b>Scorpio</b> <i>The Scorpion</i>	Secretive and deep, values loyalty, oozes sexuality and can be jealous. <i>Ruling planet: Pluto / Mars</i>
	<b>Sagittarius</b> <i>The Archer</i>	Outgoing and expansive, loves travelling, not always good at keeping appointments. <i>Ruling planet: Jupiter</i>
	<b>Capricorn</b> <i>The Goat</i>	Hard working and cautious, good with money, can be wary in new relationships. <i>Ruling planet: Saturn</i>
	<b>Aquarius</b> <i>The Water Carrier</i>	Rebellious and independent, sometimes seems distant but usually involved in good causes, often eccentric. <i>Ruling planet: Uranus / Saturn</i>
	<b>Pisces</b> <i>The Fish</i>	Sensitive and gentle, often rather mystical or psychic and easily hurt. <i>Ruling planet: Neptune / Jupiter</i>

## The Planets

☉	<b>Sun</b>	Self and personality, how you express yourself
☾	<b>Moon</b>	Emotional response, feelings, influence of mother
☿	<b>Mercury</b>	Intelligence, communication
♀	<b>Venus</b>	Values, love, pleasant things in life
♂	<b>Mars</b>	Action, aggression, drive, motivation
♃	<b>Jupiter</b>	Philosophy, ideals, growth, excess
♄	<b>Saturn</b>	Lessons, restriction, structure, influence of father
♅	<b>Uranus</b>	Sudden change, rebelliousness, new ways of thinking
♆	<b>Neptune</b>	Mysticism, dissolving boundaries, dreams
♇	<b>Pluto</b>	Transformation, slow profound growth, depth
♁	<b>Chiron</b>	Areas of wounding and healing
♁	<b>Juno</b>	Relationships
♁	<b>Ceres</b>	Nurturing and caring

## The Houses

<b>1</b>	How people perceive you, what's upfront
<b>2</b>	Values, money and possessions
<b>3</b>	Communication, education, short-distance travel, siblings
<b>4</b>	Home, roots, mother
<b>5</b>	Friends, creativity, love affairs, children
<b>6</b>	Health, service to others, open enemies
<b>7</b>	Relationships and partnerships
<b>8</b>	Sex, death, inheritances
<b>9</b>	Philosophy, higher education, long-distance travel
<b>10</b>	Public image, career, father
<b>11</b>	Community, acquaintances, group consciousness
<b>12</b>	Hidden things, hidden enemies, hospitals, prisons

## Aspects and Configurations

<b>Conjunction</b>	<b>0°</b>	The energies of the two planets work together – if the planets are incompatible, they will clash.
<b>Sextile</b>	<b>60°</b>	The energies of the two planets flow well with a little bit of effort to make it happen.
<b>Square</b>	<b>90°</b>	The energies of the two planets clash – this is particularly challenging if they’re incompatible in the first place. This aspect represents obstacles.
<b>Trine</b>	<b>120°</b>	The energies of the two planets flow harmoniously; even if the planets are incompatible it brings out the best. This aspect is comfortable, sometimes lazy.
<b>Opposition</b>	<b>180°</b>	The energies of the two planets either oppose each other creating conflict, or can complement each other.
<b>T-Square</b>		Two planets in opposition, and another planet squaring both. The “apex” planet represents the problem area that triggers the conflict between the opposing planets.
<b>Grand Cross</b>		Four planets all square to each other. Very challenging as difficult to get any sort of balance between all four planets.
<b>Grand Trine</b>		Three planets all in trine to each other. Very easy flow of energies, and often an area you are very comfortable with, and may not even notice as it’s so easy.