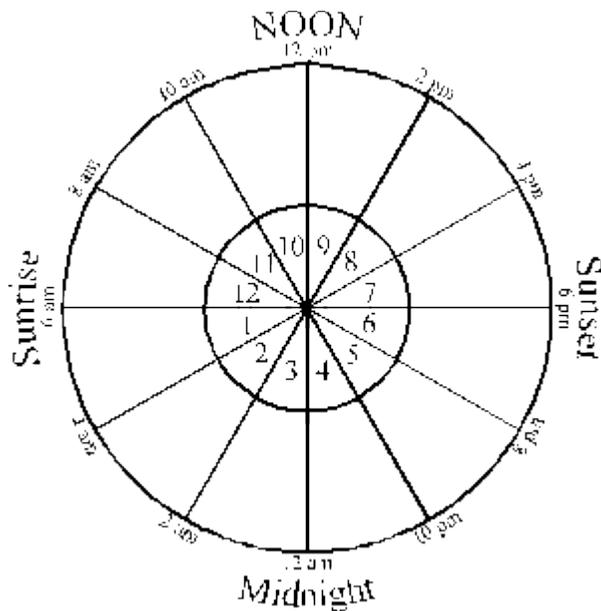


A Mini-Course in Astrology

If you want to know more about astrology, here is a brief outline of how horoscopes work, concise meanings of each part of the horoscope and, scattered throughout, tips on how to put these parts together.

Deciphering Your Horoscope Wheel

The horoscope wheel is a complete, accurately calculated chart such as a professional astrologer would draw up. This wheel is actually a diagram showing how the planets and signs were arranged around you at the moment of your birth.



Think of yourself, just being born, as being at the center. The two horizontal spokes are the horizon of the place where you were born. Above this line are the planets that were up in the sky. Below it are the planets that were hidden below the horizon. The sky is shown as if you were facing south. As the Earth turns on its axis each day, the Sun would rise to your left in the east, culminate or reach its highest point around noon, set to your right, and anticulminate or reach its lowest point about midnight before rising the next day.

Were you born during the day or at night? If you look at your own horoscope wheel, you should see your Sun (☉) either above or below the horizon, reflecting the time of day when you were born. The diagram above shows approximately where the Sun would be at various times during a 24-hour period. The planets, too, make this entire trip clockwise around the horoscope wheel each day, but each rises and sets at a different time.

The twelve spokes of the horoscope wheel are the borders, or cusps, of the twelve *houses*. You can think of the house cusps as partitions that are attached to the Earth and radiate out into space. Each day as the Earth turns on its axis, each of the house cusps sweeps through every degree of the zodiac. Inside the houses are the *planets*, shown with the degree, sign and minute of their zodiacal position.

The Planets

The planets are the main actors in the drama. To astrologers, planets are bodies that appear from Earth to *move* through the zodiac. For this reason, they include the Sun and Moon as well as the other bodies (like Jupiter, Venus and Mars) that orbit the Sun. The Moon appears to go once around the zodiac in a month; the Sun, Venus and Mercury take about a year; Mars takes about 2 years; Jupiter about 12; Saturn about 30; Uranus about 84; Neptune about 164; and Pluto about 245 years.

What the Planets Symbolize

Astrology recognizes that people really cannot be adequately described in simplistic terms like good or bad, energetic or lazy, loving or cold. Perhaps the richest of all languages for describing human complexity, astrology sees people as a composite of at least ten different internal characters. Like the inhabitants of a royal court, each character has an official function (king, queen, jester, minstrel, gardener, cook, etc.) that is the same for everyone. The personality of each functionary and its relationship to all the other characters, however, is unique for each individual. Therefore, though the number of actors is the same, the drama can vary hugely from person to person.

These ten characters are, of course, the *planets*. The *sign* each planet is in determines its personality. For example, is the king (the Sun) in a naturally regal sign (Leo), in a sign that is shy and retiring (Pisces), or in one that is all business (Capricorn)? The *house* a planet is associated with shows the area of life where the planet will tend to express itself. For the king, will it be mainly through pomp and celebrations (5th house), secret diplomacy (12th house), or repairing the roads and making the trains run on time (6th house)? And finally, his relations with the others in the realm are shown by the *aspects* he makes with them. Does he work smoothly with his ministers and generals (trines and sextiles), is he in open conflict with them (oppositions and squares), or is he in poor communication with them or even being secretly undermined (quincunxes and semisextiles)?

We will get to all these factors further on. Right now, the first step in understanding this complex drama is understanding each courtier's basic role. The basic functions of the planets are as follows.

☉ **The Sun** Just as its target-shaped symbol or glyph suggests, the Sun represents your center: the center from which all your energies radiate, the center from which you view the universe, and also the physical center that is your body. Its position by sign, house and aspect shows how and where you radiate your energies into the world. The Sun is the basic life-initiating or father principle. You could think of the Sun as the king.

☾ **The Moon** Whether you see this symbol as a crescent Moon, bowl, or radar dish, the idea is the same. The Moon receives, contains, and gives form to the abstract energy represented by the Sun. If the Sun is the basic you, the Moon is what gives you your particular personality – your genetic heritage, earliest training, and habit patterns. The

symbol can also be seen as a cradle or enfolding arms; the Moon is the basic life-sustaining, nurturing or mother principle. Most obviously, the Moon is the queen, but she is also the land and the people.

☿ **Mercury** This glyph suggests the messenger of the gods with his winged helmet. Fittingly, this planet represents how you think, communicate and move about. Mercury appears from Earth to shuttle back and forth near the Sun – like the nerve impulses in your body or the transportation systems of our society. It is a link, a bridge, a translator, putting abstract energies into symbols so they can be manipulated within your mind or communicated to others. Mercury has many guises, including the scribe, the ambassador, the merchant, the bell cord that goes from banquet hall to pantry, and the air itself, which carries the sound waves of speech. Mercury is also the nimble juggler, and the child who skips through the hallways and plays pranks.

♀ **Venus** This glyph is traditionally the mirror of the goddess, but it is even more like a flower, whose function is to attract pollination so the plant can bear fruit. Venus symbolizes your powers of attraction, of bringing people, objects or ideas together to create harmonious wholes. It shows how you project and appreciate beauty, how and what you love, what gives you pleasure, the areas of your creativity, your tact and social skills. Venus could be the royal mistress, the hostess, or the artisan who makes the castle beautiful.

♂ **Mars** The shield and spear of the war-god Mars are also like the Sun glyph with an arrow showing energy emerging from it. Whereas the Sun is your basic energy center, Mars, centerless but with an arrow, shows how you apply this energy to get things done. And, if the Sun is your basic self or ego, Mars is how you assert yourself and defend your ego. It is anger and aggression, but it is also the energy that enables you to fight for survival. Mars is the "muscle" of society as well as your body: the workers, the soldiers, the knights who defend the helpless, and the police who enforce Saturn's law.

♃ **Jupiter** The glyphs for Jupiter and Saturn are almost the reverse of each other, just as the planets in many ways symbolize opposite energies. Jupiter is like arms raised and flung out to take in all the goodness of the world. It signifies that part of you that wants to reach out, overcome limitations, and take in everything to make it your own. (Appropriately, Jupiter is the largest planet in the solar system.) It gives expansiveness, optimism, generosity, magnanimity and a love of freedom and new experiences, but it can also bring acquisitiveness, wastefulness, insensitivity to others' needs, and lack of attention to detail. Jupiter can be the chancellor who helps the king rule, a minister of far-reaching vision who sees the big picture and lays plans for the future prosperity and well-being of the state. He can also be the lawgiver who maps out the basic code that holds society together; or the archbishop, who calls on a higher power and unites the realm under the banner of faith.

♄ **Saturn** To make a bad pun, the glyph for "Sat-on" looks like a seat-or maybe a candle-snuffer. When carried to excess, Saturn can keep life down or even snuff it out,

but when applied in moderation it is the necessary force that defines limits and keeps Jupiterian expansion from getting out of hand. It signifies obstacles and frustration, but also discipline and order. Saturn could be the minister of finance or the royal housekeeper who keeps a tight hand on the purse-strings, the conservative advisor who champions traditional values and stems the tide of change, the severe judge who puts a stop to crime (and sometimes people's lives as well), or the wise old counselor who guards against excess.

Saturn is the furthest planet in the solar system to be seen by the naked eye. Beyond lie planets not ordinarily visible; these enable you to transcend the everyday reality of Saturn and explore worlds outside ordinary common sense.

♃ **Uranus** The glyph for Uranus was made up to suggest the initial of its discoverer, Herschel, but it could also be seen as the head of a baby emerging from the birth canal. It represents the first breakthrough into the universe beyond Saturn, a sudden disruption and cracking-open of Saturn's confining shell. It brings upset, surprise and insecurity but also originality, a love of the new, creativity and freedom. Uranus is the court jester who turns reality on its head, the rebel who shakes up the status quo, or the traveler from a remote kingdom who stands out from all others at court with his outlandish manners and dress.

♆ **Neptune** The trident of the Roman sea-god suggests the oceanic quality of Neptune. Whereas Uranus cracked open the rigid shell of Saturn, Neptune furthers the process by dissolving the shell entirely. Neptune is the urge within you to go beyond all the boundaries and limitations that make you a particular human being and return into the vast and formless ocean of oneness with the universe. When people are insufficiently grounded, Neptune can bring weakness, dishonesty, illusion, addiction and an inability to cope with everyday life. But once their egos are fully developed, Neptune can bring empathy, selfless service to others, and transcendent knowledge and bliss. Neptune is the soothsayer, who brings knowledge from the world of dreams; or the religious hermit, who bypasses the archbishop's church and is in direct contact with God.

♇ **Pluto** Pluto is often represented as "♇," but many astrologers prefer a glyph like Mercury's with the crescent in a different place. Whereas Mercury translated information from one form to another, Pluto transforms – people, situations, whatever it touches. Another way of seeing the Pluto glyph is as a dying plant releasing a seed. The disruption and dissolution begun by Uranus and Neptune is completed by Pluto in death and the rebirth that follows. Pluto shows up in everyday life as change, development, transformation, regeneration. People with a strong Pluto can lead lives with many upheavals and "rebirths" or can be forceful and persuasive in bringing about change in others. Pluto could be the magician, who works in the secret realms to bring about change. He is also the invisible tide of change itself, which brings an end to whatever is outworn, so that life can periodically be renewed.

Additional Points

Some astrologers consider additional bodies such as various asteroids and Chiron, a small comet-like object that orbits between Saturn and Uranus and goes around the zodiac in just under 51 years. Many also use the lunar Nodes, mathematical points that travel *backwards* around the zodiac in about 19 years.

♄ **Chiron** The key-like glyph that astrologers have settled upon since Chiron's discovery in 1977 suggests the opening of a door, possibly one through the wall erected by Saturn, leading to a new realm of innovation and freedom represented by Uranus. Half-horse, half-man, Chiron arose from the savage race of centaurs to teach civilized values and technologies for improving human life. Most memorably, he himself suffered a painful wound that would not heal, yet taught the healing arts to the young Aesculapius. Epitomizing the wounded healer, Chiron is thought by many astrologers to signify the hurt places within us, and the ways they can enable us to heal and improve the lives of others.

♁ **North Node** The glyph suggests the Dragon's Head, the old name for this point. Directly opposite it in the zodiac is the **South Node** or Dragon's Tail (♁), which is often omitted from the chart wheel because it is always 180 degrees from the North Node. The Nodes are the two places in the zodiac where the the Moon's orbital plane connects with the plane of the Earth's orbit around the Sun. Some astrologers read both Nodes as connections, particularly to relatives or groups. Others see the South Node as old skills, relationships and attitudes that you have thoroughly mastered and now must leave behind, and the North Node as new areas that you need to advance toward for your continuing evolution.

Which Planets Are Most Important in Your Chart?

In general, the Sun and Moon – the "luminaries" or "lights" – are the solar-system bodies to which astrologers would pay the most attention. While the other planets supply the details, these great lights in the sky symbolize the two fundamental poles of your being, the basic yang/yin, radiating-outward/enfolding-inward sides of your nature.

Contemplating the aspects, signs and perhaps also the houses of the Sun and Moon can reveal volumes about the most profound parts of your self.

Next in personal significance are the inner planets, Mercury, Venus and Mars. Following this are the outer, or slow-moving, planets, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto.

Each individual chart also has its own *individual* pattern of planetary strength that distinguishes it from other people's charts. Which planet or planets happen to be speaking the loudest in *your* chart? Here are some things to look for, in order of their importance.

1. Turning back to the chart wheel or aspect listing at the beginning of this report, do you find any planets very near the Ascendant, Midheaven, Descendant or Imum Coeli of your chart? (The way charts are most often cast, these are at the beginning of the First, Tenth, Seventh or Fourth houses.) Having a planet within seven degrees of a conjunction to any of these four points is almost guaranteed to make

that planet one of the most obvious and strong components in your character. The closer a planet is to one of these points, the stronger it is.

2. A close aspect to the Sun or Moon (say, within a 5-degree orb) can also confer great importance on one of the other planets.

3. A planet can also become very important if it is in some other aspect than the conjunction to the Ascendant or Midheaven. Here, you would consider aspects within an orb of about 5 degrees.

Aspects between the Planets

Since each planet travels around the zodiac at its own speed, the angles between the planets constantly change. When the angle between two planets approaches an even division of the circle (such as $1/2$ or 180 degrees, $1/3$ or 120 degrees, $1/4$ or 90 degrees, etc.) astrologers find that the symbolism of those planets becomes linked in your personality. These significant angles are called *aspects*. Aspects come in families, each of which is based on number, and each of which has its own characteristic feeling.

The Strongest Aspect The **conjunction** (0 degrees, symbol σ) is in a family by itself. Whether it is easy or difficult depends almost completely on the two planets involved. It is usually considered along with the "hard" aspects below simply because it is so intense.

The "Hard" Aspects Aspects that arise from dividing the circle by 2 (the **opposition**, 180 degrees, symbol \wp) and 4 (the **square**, 90 degrees, symbol \square) are called "hard" because they tend to precipitate crises and usually call for effort on your part. For the same reasons, they can also be dynamic and productive. This report discusses the conjunction and hard aspects first, because these are the aspects that usually concern people the most, and which bring them to consult their astrologers.

The "Soft" Aspects These arise from dividing the circle by 3 (the **trine**, 120 degrees, symbol Δ) and 6 (the **sextile**, 60 degrees, symbol \ast). Planets linked by trines or sextiles tend to work easily together, aiding and abetting each other. Trines and sextiles show the parts of your nature that tend to run along smoothly and effortlessly.

The Minor Aspects The **semisquare** (45 degrees, symbol \sphericalangle) is $1/8$ of the circle, and the **sesquiquadrate** or **sesquare** (135 degrees, symbol \square) is $3/8$. Coming from a smaller subdivision of the square, the semisquare and sesquare have a similar dynamic and stressful feeling but are not quite as strong.

The **semisextile** (30 degrees, symbol \ast) is $1/12$ of the circle and the **quincunx** (150 degrees, symbol π) is $5/12$. These aspects connect signs that have no relation to each other, being neither of the same element nor of the same mode. They have a problematic quality, like two characters who have to deal with each other, but just don't seem to speak the same language.

The "Orb" of an Aspect

It's rare for the angle between two planets to be *exactly* 60 degrees or 90 degrees, or whatever. How far an aspect can be from exact and still have an effect is called the aspect's allowable *orb*. For example, for a conjunction between the Sun and Moon many astrologers would set an orb of 10 degrees. This means that if the Sun and Moon were 9 degrees, 30 minutes apart, it would be considered a conjunction; but if they were 10 degrees, 5 minutes apart, the aspect would be ignored.

Most astrologers give wider orbs to aspects that involve the Sun or Moon, and narrower orbs to aspects that do not involve these two luminaries. Also, major aspects like squares and trines usually get larger orbs than minor aspects like semisquares and semisextiles.

The Signs of the Zodiac

As the planets orbit the Sun, they appear from Earth to travel through a narrow belt of fixed stars. This we call the *zodiac*. Most astrologers in the West use the *tropical zodiac*, which puts its starting point (0 degrees Aries) at where the Sun is on the first day of spring in the Earth's Northern Hemisphere. The tropical zodiac describes the cycle of the seasons, a cycle of beginning, growth, and preparation for new beginning. Each of the twelve signs represents a stage in that cycle, and gives its own characteristic coloration to the planets and houses that lie within it.

♈ **Aries** The pointed face and horns of the ram – or a young plant springing from seed. As befits the beginning of spring, the idea is one of arising out of nothing into life, from non-being into being. Aries gives a fresh, sharp, young, eager quality, full of starting energy not yet disciplined or refined. It is adventurous, impatient, self-expressive, open, direct, and not always sensitive to others' feelings.

♉ **Taurus** The bull's head and horns – or a pot of earth to contain the Aries seedling. Taurus gives Aries energy a material, earthy base of operations. It is symbolized by the plant taking root, and by the baby discovering the physical world: seeing, tasting, touching. It is much concerned with the body, with comfort and sensual pleasure, with good quality in material things. It is practical, steady, persistent, and tends to do things more slowly than other signs.

♊ **Gemini** The twins – or the Roman numeral two, or a swing. The idea is of shuttling back and forth. It is the young plant putting forth its feathery branches in all directions, and of the baby learning to walk and name things, to move about the world, to communicate and interact with others. This sign has a light, youthful quality. It is sociable without getting deeply involved, interested and curious, talkative, restless and in constant motion.

♋ **Cancer** The crab – or cradling arms. This is the sign of the family unit, a protected space from which one can grow. The plant is now lush and green, pulling water up from deep levels of the soil so it can provide nourishment and shade. Cancer has to do with shelter, food, mother love, nurturing, taking care of. It gives a sensitive, emotional

quality, a tie to one's heritage and the past, a concern with home and security, and a desire to foster, protect and to be attached to someone or something.

♌ **Leo** A lion's tasseled tail – or the proscenium arch of a stage. The plant is now in full flower, at the apex of its development, yet already it is showing signs of dryness. In Leo the child revels in its own energy, in pleasure, in being alive and having a self; and it proudly presents itself to the world. Leo is a star performer, radiating life energy to others and desiring in turn to be admired and appreciated. It runs the risk of egotism and bombast, but on the plus side is self-expressive, open and generous, as well as proud, dignified, fond of ceremony, and persistent.

♍ **Virgo** Coils of energy walled off and contained – or a symbol with its legs tightly crossed! This is a time of toil, when the plant bears fruit that needs picking, and the grain is ready to be gathered and stored for the lean part of the year. The energy realized in Leo is contained and put to work in Virgo. Pleasure is now deferred in order to master life's practical details, develop one's skills, learn to do and make. One learns not just to be an individual as in Leo, but to function as one, to be self-sufficient. Virgo gives a consciousness of duty, practicality, craftsmanship, pride in accomplishment, discrimination and attention to detail.

♎ **Libra** Balance-type scales, a bridge, or the setting Sun. This is a time of pause after the harvest, a point of equilibrium, of Indian summer when there is a final burst of flowering before the cold. Being self-sufficient, one is now ready to reach out for a partner and settle down. If Aries was a sign of a single being springing up vertically into life, Libra, its opposite, is one of reaching out horizontally. Aries went from stillness into motion; Libra seeks balance – in a relationship to another, in judgments and opinions, in manners and esthetic matters. In order to achieve balance, scores must sometimes be settled, so Libra may court contests and confrontations on the way to establishing a relationship of equals. Libra sees the world in terms of relationships; is sociable; is concerned with harmony, beauty, decorum and justice.

♏ **Scorpio** The scorpion with its barbed tail – or a coil accumulating and releasing energy. This is the time when the first frost congeals water, putting a decisive end to that which is green. In the old Celtic calendar it is the point of death, a break in the chain of the year, when the plant kingdom goes dormant and soul separates from body before a new cycle begins. In Scorpio, the energy harnessed for practical uses in Virgo is gathered more intensely and released to effect profound transformations. Having linked with another at a social level in Libra, one is ready for a deeper merging in Scorpio. Taurus had a simple sensuality; for its opposite sign, Scorpio, sex is the ego-death and merging of two individuals. Scorpio has a sustained emotional intensity, an interest in what is below the surface, a probing quality, an air of hidden power.

♐ **Sagittarius** The arrow and bowstring of the archer – or the Scorpio arrow of energy breaking through the surface. Deciduous plants are dormant, and so we celebrate the evergreen to remind ourselves that life continues. As the world of nature retreats, we

enter the conceptual world of philosophy and religion. In Sagittarius the coiled-up energy of Scorpio is released into the air and it soars toward freedom. Sagittarius symbolizes wide-ranging energy, either physical as in travel and sports, or mental as in far-reaching intellectual interests. In both motion and thought, it covers much more ground than Gemini, its opposite sign. Whereas Libra and Scorpio perfected personal relationships, Sagittarius now attempts to comprehend relationship to society and the world as a whole. Sagittarius is fast-moving, energetic, idealistic, philosophical, and dislikes details.

♑ **Capricorn** The face and curling horn of the goat – or the winding path to a mountain peak. Capricorn marks the turning point when the year reaches its darkest day, and the daylight begins to increase once more. Cold and dry, it symbolizes a maximum of separateness and solidity. Capricorn slows down the energy released in Sagittarius so it can be *used* in the world to make *things*. It puts Sagittarian insights to work, implementing the details. Its eye fixed on the peak, it plods onward and upward, aspiring toward the pinnacle of personal achievement. It is firmly embedded in the social structure, conscious of everyone's place on the ladder. It still sees itself as an individual in society; only in the next sign will a true group consciousness be attained. Capricorn is conscious of authority, practical, serious, and wants to achieve something concrete and significant in the eyes of the world.

♒ **Aquarius** Streams of water from the waterbearer's jug – or a row of seats in a theater. Aquarius marks the time of year when the life processes that ended in Scorpio have new, barely perceptible beginnings. Looking closely, you will see buds forming. Humans, however, are still indoors and focused on their social world. If Leo is the star performer, concerned with personal identity, Aquarius, the sign opposite, is the audience, the collective participant in the drama of life. Instead of the one-to-one relationships of Libra, Aquarius signifies one-among-many relationships. Capricorn carried the idea of personal achievement to the utmost; Aquarius begins the theme of being part of a group. Aquarius identifies with friends and organizations, wants to perfect society, wants freedom for groups of people, is detached and fair-minded though fixed in opinions, does not cling to the past, is idealistic and wants the good of all.

♓ **Pisces** Two fishes bound together – or an image reflected in water so you cannot tell the image from the reflection. The remains of last year's plants have reached their final dissolution, and the moisture gathers to provide a medium for new growth in Aries. In Pisces everything is dissolved in the same ocean, image and reflection are the same, and you cannot tell the player from the audience. Whereas Aries began the zodiac with the first assertion of individuality, and Aquarius transmuted this into group identity, Pisces ends the cycle with the individual's letting go of the structure that peaked in Capricorn. The most fluid of the water signs, Pisces functions by loosening up and simply allowing flow, change and living processes to take place. The Pisces dissolving of structures and blurring of boundaries can come out in ordinary life as dreaminess and vagueness, but also as selflessness, sensitivity, and a deep sense of unity and empathy with others.

Which Signs Are Most Important in Your Chart?

Obviously, the more planets you have in a sign, the more significance that sign is likely to have for you personally. Otherwise, the most important signs in your chart tend to be those of the so-called "personal points": the Sun, Moon, Ascendant and Midheaven. Next in importance will be the signs of the faster-moving planets like Mercury, Venus, and Mars. But Jupiter stays in a sign for about a year, Saturn for about two and a half years, Uranus for about seven, Neptune for about fourteen and Pluto for an average of twenty years, so that the signs of these planets usually have more to do with the generation you were born in than with your personal characteristics.

The Elements and Modes

In the above descriptions of the signs, you may sense that there is more to the signs than just seasonal symbolism, and you are right. The twelve signs also derive their meaning from each being a unique combination of one of the four *elements* and one of the three qualities, or *modes*.

Fire, Earth, Air and Water

The four elements are also called the triplicities because there are three signs formed from each element, and these signs are related by a trine aspect. Elements get their characteristics from being a unique combination of hot (high-energy and active), cold (low-energy and passive), wet (blending or making connections between things) and dry (separating things into distinct parts).

The Fire signs (Aries, Leo and Sagittarius) are hot and dry, meaning that they are high-energy and have a hard-edge, high-definition approach to life. Among the signs, they tend to be the most active and decisive. Fire signs are concerned with process and action, and with making one's personal mark on the world. A strongly placed Sun or Mars can make people seem more fiery; a strong Moon or Neptune, less so.

The Earth signs (Taurus, Virgo and Capricorn) are cold and dry, meaning that they also see things as distinct entities, but are lower in energy so that they do things more slowly. Earth signs are deeply concerned with tangible reality, with things. A strong Saturn can make people seem more earthy; a strong Mercury or Uranus, less so.

The Air signs (Gemini, Libra and Aquarius) are hot and wet, meaning that they are high-energy, active, outgoing and eager to make connections. Known for their sociability and impulse to talk, the air signs are associated with social and intellectual relationships. A strong Mercury or Uranus can make people seem more airy; a strong Saturn, Moon or Neptune, less so.

The Water signs (Cancer, Scorpio and Pisces) are cold and wet, meaning that they also like to make connections, but are more inward, passive and still. These are the signs most concerned with emotional relationships. A strong Moon or Neptune can make people seem more watery; a strong Sun, Mars or Saturn, less so.

Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable

The three modes or qualities are also called the quadruplicities because there are four signs in each mode, and signs in the same mode are related by a square or opposition aspect. The modes mark the three stages of each season.

The Cardinal signs (Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn) begin a new season and symbolize starting energy. If you have many planets in Cardinal signs, you may be specially gifted at initiating new projects. A strong Sun, Mars or Uranus could make you seem more Cardinal; a strong Moon, Venus or Neptune, less so.

The Fixed signs (Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius) are points of equilibrium in the middle of a season. With many planets in Fixed signs, you would tend to keep whatever has been started going, polishing it and bringing it to perfection. Fixed people are noted for stability, constancy, and, on occasion, stubbornness, qualities that can also be imparted by a strong Saturn. A strong Mercury or Moon can make you seem less Fixed.

The Mutable signs (Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius and Pisces) symbolize times of transition to the next season and are noted for their adaptability. If you have many planets in Mutable signs, you tend to change, adapt and transform what has already been started and sustained. A prominent Mercury or Moon can make you seem more Mutable; a strong Saturn, less so.

To get the overall feel of your horoscope, astrologers often note which signs your planets are in and tally up the elements and modes that are occupied. The system works best if the scoring is weighted, with the Sun and Moon receiving the most points and the slow-moving planets receiving the fewest.

The Houses

The signs measured the motion caused by the planets' going around in their orbits. But there is another important motion in astrology, the motion of the Earth's daily spinning on its axis. This is measured by the twelve houses of the horoscope. Because they move so fast (all around the zodiac in 24 hours, averaging one degree in every four minutes of time), the house cusps can be completely different for two people born on the same day. While the sign positions and aspects of the planets show your basic structure, the way the planets fall in the houses show the particular ways in which the planets are apt to work in your life.

The Structure of the Houses

The houses are based on the four most important points in a planet's daily cycle: when it rises, culminates, sets and anti-culminates. These points are known as the Ascendant (or rising degree); the Midheaven or M.C. (for Medium Coeli, "middle heaven" in Latin); the Descendant; and the I.C. (for Imum Coeli, "lowest heaven"). There are dozens of mathematical systems for defining the twelve houses, but most of these systems use these

four points as the basic framework and differ only in the way that they subdivide the intervening space. These four points are grouped into two basic axes, as follows.

The Midheaven-I.C. Axis You can think of the Midheaven-I.C. axis in your chart as you, standing up. Your feet and roots (I.C. and fourth house) are planted at the farthest possible point below the horizon, symbolizing your past, genetic heritage, and earliest training -- your foundation and all that you have to build on. The Midheaven and tenth house are the farthest possible point a planet can travel above the horizon, and so are like your head. They symbolize the highest you aspire to grow or build, what you are aiming for, and the most public and visible parts of you, such as your career and reputation. The axis as a whole describes who you perceive yourself to be.

The Ascendant-Descendant Axis The Ascendant-Descendant axis is like your arms reaching out horizontally to the world around you. Not surprisingly, it symbolizes how you relate to other people and your environment. The Ascendant (and, directly opposite it, the Descendant), mark the points where the zodiac intersects the horizon. The line of the horizon is where the inner you (what is hidden from view below the horizon) meets the outer world (what is above the horizon). Therefore it symbolizes the way you put yourself out into the world (the Ascendant and the first house) and the way you draw the world, especially other people, into your innermost being (the Descendant and seventh house).

Like the Sun and Moon, the Ascendant and Midheaven are considered "personal points" whose sign and aspects are given primary significance. Any planet within a few degrees of one of these four chart "angles" leaps to the foreground of your chart. It is as if these are points of emergence, where the energies of a planet are able to come out the strongest.

Which Houses Are Most Important in Your Chart?

Planets move quickly through the houses, with each staying in a house for an average of only two hours each day. Except for the first, fourth, seventh and tenth houses, the borders of houses are not clear-cut, so that houses tend to shade into one another. If you have a planet within five degrees of the end of a house, you may very well find that the next house affects that planet. Similarly, if a house cusp is within five degrees of the end of a sign, you may want to think about how the next sign would affect that house.

The most important houses for you will probably be those that contain your Sun and Moon and those that contain more than a single planet.

House 1: Your Interface with the World

The first house focuses on the basic equipment that you have been given for interacting with the world: your body and your physical constitution, your face, your appearance, your personality, mannerisms and the way you present yourself.

House 2: What You Own and Value

The second house goes a step outward from your own person and has to do with resources that you possess, including money. It shows what you crave and covet, what

you most value, how you go about getting it, how you take care of it, and whether or not you hang on to it. By extension, it can also indicate your sense of values.

House 3: Your Immediate Surroundings

The third house has to do with your immediate surroundings and how you interact with them. It describes brothers and sisters, neighbors and anyone who just happens to be near you on a daily basis. It also describes daily communication and transportation.

House 4: Where You Come From

The fourth house describes your parents and ancestral background and it rules the house or apartment where you live as well as real estate in general. A deeply personal house, the fourth is concerned with security and peace of mind, the safety of loved ones, and how you care for others and yourself.

House 5: Playtime

The fifth house traditionally rules the child in you and the children around you, your own personal creativity and self-expression, plays and amusements of all sorts, gambling and speculation, and courtship, love affairs and romance.

House 6: Taking Care of Business

The sixth house rules taking care of business on an everyday level. This includes your job, paying bills and keeping the house clean. It also includes maintaining your body with medical checkups and a daily regimen of nutrition and exercise. It can, by extension, describe the way you offer service to others.

House 7: Relating One-to-One

Since the first house is you yourself, the seventh house, directly opposite, is the other person in a variety of situations. Besides signifying a marriage partner, it also rules business partners, or those on the other side of a desk, such as consultants, lawyers, therapists or astrologers. It can also rule contracts, lawsuits and open enemies.

House 8: Giving It All Away

Having achieved a relationship of equals in the seventh house, you are ready to give up your separateness in the eighth, merging in sexual union and becoming one on a deep emotional level. If the second house was about grasping and possessing, the eighth is about sharing and letting go. While the second rules your own money, the eighth rules how you deal with other people's money and how you pool resources. On a mundane level the eighth rules taxes, but on a fundamental level it can rule giving up anything you value, including your ego and even your body. In relaxing your grasp on what you find most dear, you may find that you are really not as dependent on it as you thought. In relinquishing, you achieve a new level of freedom, and feel lighter, renewed and more alive. Related to all this, the eighth signifies mysteries such as death and resurrection, magic and the occult, and the deep parts of the psyche that are beyond our conscious grasp.

House 9: Expanding Your Awareness

Approaching the highest point in the sky, the ninth rules higher education and long-distance travel. It rules all-embracing concepts (such as your philosophy of life) and institutions (like religion and law) that stand over society and keep it bound together. It can also signify your teachers and mentors, and all else that broadens your outlook.

House 10: Your Public Self

The tenth house shows what you are ultimately aiming at in life, your career, your personal contribution, your reputation and what you become known for. Some astrologers also believe that the fourth house signifies one parent, and the tenth signifies the other. The tenth-house parent is most likely the one who prepares you for the world.

House 11: Your Circle of Acquaintances

The eleventh is your circle of friends and associates whom you actively choose. It shows the way you make and keep friendships, the organizations you join, the networking you do, and the general way you interact with groups.

House 12: The Hidden You

The twelfth is associated with self-sabotage, with hidden enemies, and with hospitals, prison and whatever else makes you feel confined. It also has to do with helping others who are similarly repressed or confined. In addition, some with a strong twelfth-house emphasis become successful as undercover workers or as the power behind the throne.

Beyond Sun Signs

Most people today know what "sign" they are, or have glanced at their horoscope as it appears in newspaper and magazine columns. However, you have most likely realized that you are a much more complex and varied person than your Sun sign, by itself, suggests. As you can see, there is much more to astrology than this. For example, when you are told you are an Aries, Leo, or any other sign, it simply means that you were born at the time of the year when the Sun was in that particular part of the zodiac. While the Sun indicates a person's essence or basic character, in each person's chart there are actually nine other planets and all twelve signs. All of these play a part in making you who you are and all you can be.