

Chapter 1

An Astrological Overview: The Horoscope in Brief

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Legend has it that Sir Isaac Newton, widely considered the greatest genius of all time, may have explored astrology. Newton had a complex, curious mind. In addition to inventing calculus and discovering the universal law of gravity, he was interested in alchemy (the quest to turn ordinary metals into gold), the Bible, and astrology. When his friend Edmund Halley (after whom the comet is named) made a disparaging remark about it, Newton, a conservative Capricorn, shot right back, “Sir, I have studied the subject. You have not.” Or so the story goes.

Like every other astrologer, I like to think that story might be true. After all, astrology has faded in and out of fashion, but it has never lacked followers. Catherine de Medici had Nostradamus as her astrologer, Queen Elizabeth I consulted John Dee, and other astrologers advised Napoleon, George Washington, J. P. Morgan, and Ronald Reagan. Yet in all that time, no one has provided a satisfying explanation as to why astrology works. Over the centuries, proponents of the ancient art have suggested that gravity must be the motor of astrology . . . or electromagnetism . . . or the metaphysical “law of correspondences.” Carl G. Jung summarized that view when he wrote, “We are born at a given moment, in a given place, and like vintage years of wine, we have the qualities of the year and of the season in which we are born.”

I don't know why astrology works, any more than Sir Isaac did. But I can assure you that it does work. The pattern that the planets made at the moment of your birth — that is, your birth chart or horoscope — describes your tendencies, abilities, challenges, and potential. It doesn't predict your fate, though it does make some fates more easily achievable than others. The exact shape of your destiny, I believe, is up to you.

In this chapter, I delve into the astronomy behind astrology, the signs of the zodiac, and the components of the birth chart.

Looking at the Starry Sky

Picture, if you will, our solar system. In the middle is the Sun. Spinning around it are the planets and asteroids, whose orbits surround the Sun roughly the way the grooves on a record album encircle the label in the center.

That idea, drilled into us in childhood, would have astonished ancient stargazers. They never doubted that the Sun, Moon, and planets revolved around the Earth. And although we know better, thinking so didn't make them stupid. The Sun really does look as if it revolves around the Earth. It seems to rise in the east and set in the west. And it always stays within the confines of a ribbon of space that encircles the Earth like a giant hoop. That strip of sky is called the *ecliptic*.



Following are the three most important facts about the ecliptic:

- ✓ The ecliptic represents the apparent path of the Sun around the Earth — apparent because, in fact, the Sun doesn't spin around the Earth at all. It just looks that way.
- ✓ Like a circle, the ecliptic is divided into 360 degrees — and each degree is, in turn, divided into 60 minutes. The first 30 degrees of the ecliptic are Aries, the next 30 degrees are Taurus, and so on.
- ✓ The stars that are scattered like dust along the entire length of the ecliptic form the constellations of the zodiac.

Here comes the confusing part: The signs of the zodiac and the constellations that share their names aren't the same. The signs are divisions of the ecliptic, each exactly one-twelfth of the total length — 30 degrees. The constellations have nothing to do with the signs. I explain this sorry state of affairs in the sidebar “The signs, the constellations, and the precession of the equinoxes.”

The signs, the constellations, and the precession of the equinoxes

Thousands of years ago, when the Babylonians were establishing the principles of astrology, the constellations and the signs of the zodiac were in alignment. On the *vernal equinox* (the first day of spring), the Sun was “in” the constellation Aries: That is, if you could see the Sun and the stars simultaneously, you’d see the Sun surrounded by the stars of the Ram. In those happy days, the signs and the constellations coincided.

Alas, this is no longer the case. On the vernal equinox today, the Sun shows up amidst the (dim) stars of Pisces the Fish — a very different kettle indeed.

The reason for this shift is that the Earth wobbles on its axis, which traces a circle in space like the spindle of a spinning top. As the axis shifts, the constellations seem to slip backwards. The amount of slippage over a human lifetime is minuscule, but over generations it adds up. As a result, every equinox takes place a little earlier in the zodiac than the one before. This process is called the *precession of the equinoxes*. It explains why the vernal equinox,

which used to occur in the constellation Aries, now takes place in Pisces.

When the equinox moves back even further, to the constellation of the Water Bearer, the Age of Aquarius will officially begin. Astrologers differ about when that will be. Some are convinced that it’s happening now. Others believe that it’s decades — or centuries — away. Eventually, the cycle will begin again. Around the year 23800, the vernal equinox will return to Aries, and astrologers will be able to skip this entire explanation. Meanwhile, constellations of the zodiac and the signs of the zodiac aren’t the same.

Skeptics who attack astrology — and for some reason, these wary souls can be amazingly hostile — often point to the changing position of the constellations and the precession of the equinoxes as proof that astrology is bogus. The truth is that astrologers are well aware of this phenomenon. They consider the constellations as signposts and little more. What matters is the division of the ecliptic. The stars, glorious though they are, have nothing to do with your sign.

Identifying the Signs of the Zodiac

The sign that the Sun occupied at the moment of your birth is the most basic astrological fact about you. It defines your ego, motivations, needs, and approach to life. But the Sun isn’t the only planet that affects you. (For astrological purposes, both luminaries — the Sun and the Moon — are called planets. Do yourself a favor and don’t use this terminology when talking to astronomers.) Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Chiron, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, not to mention the Moon, represent distinct types of energy that express themselves in the style of the sign they’re in.



Nevertheless, astrologically speaking, your Sun sign is the most essential fact about you. To determine your sign, use Table 1-1. Keep in mind that the dates vary from year to year. After all, although a circle has 360 degrees, and each sign has precisely 30 degrees, it's an inconvenient fact that a year has 365 days — not counting leap years. As a result, the signs don't divide into the days as neatly as you would want. If you were born on the first or final day of a sign, you may want to check your birth sign by using the tables in the Appendix, venturing onto the Internet, or consulting an astrologer.

Table 1-1		
The Sun Signs		
Sign	Dates	Symbol
Aries the Ram	March 20–April 18	♈
Taurus the Bull	April 19–May 20	♉
Gemini the Twins	May 21–June 20	♊
Cancer the Crab	June 21–July 22	♋
Leo the Lion	July 23–August 22	♌
Virgo the Virgin	August 23–September 22	♍
Libra the Scales	September 23–October 22	♎
Scorpio the Scorpion	October 23–November 21	♏
Sagittarius the Archer	November 22–December 21	♐
Capricorn the Goat	December 22–January 19	♑
Aquarius the Water Bearer	January 20–February 18	♒
Pisces the Fish	February 19–March 19	♓

Understanding the Signs

Like any truly satisfying system, astrology classifies and interprets its basic building blocks in a number of ways. Just for starters, each sign is defined by a *polarity* (positive or negative reaction pattern), a *quality* or *modality* (form of expression), and an *element* (describing basic temperament).

Polarity: Dividing the zodiac by two

You can figure out the polarity of each sign by dividing the zodiac in half. Beginning with Aries, six *positive* or *masculine* signs alternate with six *negative* or *feminine* signs. The sexist language, I regret to say, is traditional. Many astrologers use the terms yin and yang instead. Call them what you will, the meanings are as follows:

- ✓ **Positive** (yang) signs are more extroverted, objective, and assertive.
- ✓ **Negative** (yin) signs are more introverted, subjective, and receptive.

The zodiac can also be divided into pairs of opposing signs. The opposite signs are: Aries and Libra; Taurus and Scorpio; Gemini and Sagittarius; Cancer and Capricorn; Leo and Aquarius; and Virgo and Pisces.

Modality: Dividing the zodiac by three

The three modalities describe different forms of expression, as follows:

- ✓ **Cardinal signs** are enterprising. They initiate change and make things happen. The cardinal signs are Aries, Cancer, Libra, and Capricorn.
- ✓ **Fixed signs** consolidate and preserve change. They're focused and determined. The fixed signs are Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius.
- ✓ **Mutable signs** are flexible and versatile. They adapt and adjust. The mutable signs are Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius, and Pisces.

Within the cycle of the zodiac, the three modalities occur in sequence. Cardinal energy initiates change, fixed energy digs its heels in and maintains the status quo, and mutable energy adapts to shifting circumstances.

Elements: Dividing the zodiac by four

Describing the temperament of each sign of the zodiac by assigning it to one of the four ancient elements is probably the most famous method of classification. The four elements are fire, earth, air, and water:

- ✓ **Fire** brings vitality, excitement, and intensity. The fire signs are Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius.
- ✓ **Earth** gives stability, common sense, and the ability to get things done. The earth signs are Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn.

- ✓ **Air** enlivens the intellect and enhances sociability. The air signs are Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius.
- ✓ **Water** strengthens the emotions and the intuition. The water signs are Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces.

Putting the zodiac back together

Once you know the order of the signs, it's easy to assign them to their correct polarity, modality, and element because those classifications always occur in sequence. (You can clearly see that sequence in Table 1-2.) Those classifications convey a great deal of information. If all you know is the polarity, modality, and element of each sign, you know a lot.

<i>Sign</i>	<i>Polarity</i>	<i>Modality</i>	<i>Element</i>
Aries	Positive	Cardinal	Fire
Taurus	Negative	Fixed	Earth
Gemini	Positive	Mutable	Air
Cancer	Negative	Cardinal	Water
Leo	Positive	Fixed	Fire
Virgo	Negative	Mutable	Earth
Libra	Positive	Cardinal	Air
Scorpio	Negative	Fixed	Water
Sagittarius	Positive	Mutable	Fire
Capricorn	Negative	Cardinal	Earth
Aquarius	Positive	Fixed	Air
Pisces	Negative	Mutable	Water

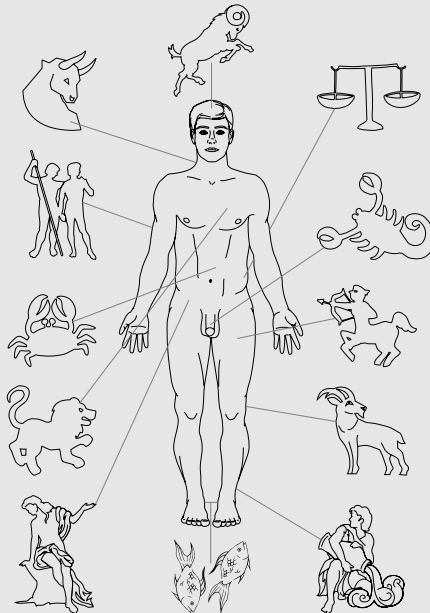
For example, take Cancer the Crab. It's the sign of negative cardinal water. This tells you that Crabs tend to be internal and receptive (negative), with a heavy dose of initiative (cardinal), and strong emotional awareness (water).

The Zodiac Man

The zodiac arcs across the cosmos, huge and impossibly remote. Its symbolic equivalent, small and incredibly close, is the human body. Two thousand years ago, a Roman astrologer named Manilius correlated each sign of the zodiac to a part of the body in a sequence that starts at the head with Aries and runs down to the feet, which belong to Pisces. Medieval art, both European and Islamic, includes many fine renderings of the so-called Zodiac Man, which also appears in ancient medical texts. Indeed,

medicine as it was once practiced relied on astrology not only for its understanding of disease but also for its cure.

I have my doubts about medical astrology (though I have to say, I have seen cases in which it's weirdly, even disturbingly, accurate). However, I love this diagram because it reminds me that the spectrum of experience represented by the signs of the zodiac is universal and lives in everyone.



Or consider Leo, which lives next door to Cancer but boasts a very different personality (as is always the case with adjacent signs). Leo is the sign of positive fixed fire. This means that its natives tend to be outgoing (positive), determined (fixed), and full of flash (fire).



The polarity, modality, and element provide a rudimentary sense of what each sign is about. For a detailed description of the signs, turn to Part II.

Considering the Sun, the Moon, and the Planets

The Sun, the Moon, and the planets play individual parts in your horoscope. Their meanings are as follows:

- ✓ **The Sun** represents your essential self, will, individuality, vitality, and desire for power. More than any other planet, it represents who you are. It also symbolizes men in general.
- ✓ **The Moon** represents your emotions, subconscious, instincts, habits, and memory. It also represents women in general.
- ✓ **Mercury** symbolizes your style of communication, your reasoning ability, and the way you think.
- ✓ **Venus** represents those parts of your life that are concerned with love, attraction, beauty, possessions, and the arts.
- ✓ **Mars** is the planet of desire and aggression. It represents your physical energy, combativeness, enterprise, and courage.
- ✓ **Jupiter** is the planet of expansion and good fortune. It represents growth, prosperity, abundance, wisdom, generosity, and the higher mind. Jupiter's position in a horoscope tells you where you're lucky.
- ✓ **Saturn** represents limitation, restriction, caution, organization, endurance, and discipline. It tells you where you have to face your fears — and also where you're ambitious.
- ✓ **Chiron**, a dwarf planet discovered in 1977, represents past hurt and future healing. Astrologers, not all of whom use Chiron, often associate it with holistic medicine.
- ✓ **Uranus** represents originality, independence, rebelliousness, inventiveness, insight, and everything unexpected.
- ✓ **Neptune** represents spirituality, dreams, psychic ability, intuition, disintegration, compassion, self-sacrifice, deception, and illusion.
- ✓ **Pluto** represents elimination, destruction, regeneration, renewal, and transformation.



One way to simplify all this is to assign a single word — or, as astrologers prefer to say, keyword — to each planet. These keywords, which summarize each planet’s meaning, appear in Table 1-3.

<i>Planet</i>	<i>Keyword</i>	<i>Symbol</i>
Sun	Self	☉
Moon	Emotion	☾
Mercury	Communication	☿
Venus	Love	♀
Mars	Action	♂
Jupiter	Expansion	♃
Saturn	Restriction	♄
Chiron	Healing	♄♁
Uranus	Revolution	♅
Neptune	Imagination	♆
Pluto	Transformation	♇

Who Rules? Discovering the Rulers of the Signs

In an ideal world, each planet would work well in each sign. But in fact, some placements are better than others. The sign in which a planet seems to function most effectively is the sign that it is said to rule. Two thousand years ago, when astrologers only had to worry about the Sun, the Moon, and five planets, they assigned the rulerships this way:

- ✓ The Sun ruled Leo.
- ✓ The Moon ruled Cancer.

- ✓ Mercury ruled Gemini and Virgo.
- ✓ Venus ruled Taurus and Libra.
- ✓ Mars ruled Aries and Scorpio.
- ✓ Jupiter ruled Pisces and Sagittarius.
- ✓ Saturn ruled Aquarius and Capricorn.

After Uranus was discovered in 1781, followed by Neptune in 1846 and Pluto in 1930, astrologers modified the system. Today, the most commonly accepted planetary rulers are as follows:

- ✓ The Sun rules Leo.
- ✓ The Moon rules Cancer.
- ✓ Mercury rules Gemini and Virgo.
- ✓ Venus rules Taurus and Libra.
- ✓ Mars rules Aries.
- ✓ Jupiter rules Sagittarius.
- ✓ Saturn rules Capricorn.
- ✓ Uranus rules Aquarius.
- ✓ Neptune rules Pisces.
- ✓ Pluto rules Scorpio.

In recent years, astronomers have discovered legions of asteroids, moons, and other celestial bodies in our solar system. One of them is *Chiron*, which was discovered in 1977. Some astrologers believe that Chiron is the ruler of Virgo. Others associate it with Sagittarius. Many don't bother with it at all, and it has yet to be assigned the rulership of a sign.

Assessing the Ascendant and the Houses

The planets aren't the only essential components of your chart. The *Ascendant* or *rising sign* — the sign that was climbing over the eastern horizon at the moment of your birth — is equally important. It refers to your mask or persona — the face that you show the world. It also marks the start of the 12 houses.

The Ascendant

Have you ever had a friend who was Miss Congeniality — until you got to know her? Did you ever encounter anyone who seemed standoffish and cold at first but warmed up later on? Do you know anyone whose devil-may-care, lighthearted attitude masks a calculating, manipulative mind? And have you ever wondered how you strike other people, especially when they don't know you well? Your horoscope provides the answer. While your Sun sign may not be apparent to people, they definitely notice your Ascendant. It's your image, your facade, your surface personality. Whether it clashes or harmonizes with your Sun sign, it describes the way people see you and the impression that you make. Indeed, some astrologers consider the ruler of the Ascendant — that is, the planet that rules the rising sign — to be the overall ruler of your chart.

No matter what your Sun sign might be, any one of the 12 signs might have been on the eastern horizon when you were born. If you were born around dawn, when the Sun was peeking over the horizon, you already know your rising sign: It's the same as your Sun sign. If you were born at any other time of day, your rising sign and Sun sign differ.

For those people whose Sun signs and rising signs are identical, the surface and the substance are the same. For everyone else, what you see isn't necessarily what you get.



Consider Whoopi Goldberg: She has Aquarius rising, so she appears progressive, sociable, and eccentric — a personality with a lively mind and a detached, observant approach to life. In fact, her Sun is in Scorpio, so beneath her brilliant Aquarian surface, she's intensely emotional, passionate, and secretive — not detached at all.

To determine your rising sign, you need to know the time of your birth. When you have that, turn to Chapter 3, which gives you a rough estimate of your rising sign. Then go to Chapter 11 for an interpretation.

Besides shaping your personality, the Ascendant serves another function: It opens the door to the houses. For more about that subject, read on.

Taking the house tour

It makes no difference whether you're a fun-loving Leo or a workaholic Capricorn, you still have to deal with relationships, money, health, career, and so on. Those areas come under the authority of the *houses*, which divide the sky into 12 parts, beginning with the Ascendant, which marks the start of the first house. The meanings of the houses are summarized in Table 1-4.

<i>House</i>	<i>Areas of Concern</i>
First house	Your appearance and surface personality
Second house	Money, possessions, values
Third house	Communication, short journeys, brothers and sisters
Fourth house	Home, roots, one parent, circumstances at the end of life
Fifth house	Romance, children, creativity
Sixth house	Work and health
Seventh house	Marriage and other partnerships
Eighth house	Sex, death, regeneration, other people's money
Ninth house	Higher education, long journeys, religion, philosophy
Tenth house	Career, status, reputation, the other parent
Eleventh house	Friends and aspirations
Twelfth house	Enemies, seclusion, secrets

Just as every birth chart includes all the planets, every horoscope has all 12 houses. The sign on the *cusps*, or beginning of the house, describes your approach to it. For instance, if the sign of the bull is on the cusp of your house of work, your attitude toward your job is Taurean, making you dependable, productive, and a bit of a plodder, regardless of whether that house is crammed full of planets or empty.



The word *cusps* is used in two ways in astrology. When people say they were born “on the cusp,” they mean that their birthday falls at the end of one sign and the beginning of another. They usually think that they have qualities belonging to both signs. (I discuss this issue in Chapter 3.) When astrologers refer to the cusp of a house, they mean the house's starting point.